

Biography Of Anthony Bidulka

I was raised on a farm near the small town of Prud'homme, Saskatchewan, Canada with two siblings—sisters—and many cats and dogs and chickens and cows. Prud'homme is still there but is even smaller now than it was when I graduated high school in 1980 as part of a class of six.

For those of you who don't know Canada, Saskatchewan is in the prairies, roughly in the middle of the country, one of the rectangle provinces with Alberta on one side, Manitoba on the other, Montana and North Dakota below us and the North West Territories above. The population of Saskatchewan is just over a million people, the largest city is Saskatoon at about 215,000, all our rivers empty into Hudson Bay and our principal export industries are agriculture (producing over 54% of the wheat grown in Canada), mining, manufacturing and tourism. Indeed, half the province is prime agricultural land and predominately flat, however the other half is forest and the entire land mass is dotted with more than 100,000 lakes. In the southwest, at a place called Cypress Hills, we have the highest point of land east of the Rockies.

After spending my youth as a tow-headed farm boy who dutifully milked cows, worked the fields and graduated from high school, I moved to Saskatoon to discover my future. The city's name was derived from the Cree name "Mis-sask-quah-toomina", referring to the berry that grows abundantly in the area, commonly known as the saskatoon. The city is commonly ranked as one of the best cities to live in in its category (under 250,000 people) and I think so too. With the South Saskatchewan River running through it, Saskatoon is an uncommonly beautiful city with a thriving business and cultural environment. In addition to being home to the graceful University of Saskatchewan campus and one of the world's most sophisticated centres of agriculture-biotechnology research—Innovation Place—Saskatoon boasts the most annual hours of sunshine of any major city in Canada—all the better to enjoy everything the city has to offer, from art galleries, museums, heritage sites, live theatre, symphony, opera, fine dining and countless festivals and exhibitions and events celebrating our world-class writers, artists, musicians and artisans.

From 1980 to 1983 I attended the University of Saskatchewan (UofS) with the original intent of becoming an Optometrist. Obviously I wasn't seeing my future very clearly (pun intended). During these years I supplemented meagre student loans by taking on a plethora of odd jobs, including one dreadful summer working in a uranium mine in Northern Saskatchewan as a bull cook. According to Webster's dictionary a bull cook is a person who performs various chores in a logging camp. Close enough. I did everything from scouring pots to cleaning bunkhouses (yech) to pushing a broom to making cinnamon buns in the middle of the night. As summer help, I was on a two-week-in-one-week-out rotation. Muscles sore, skin rashed from harsh detergents, eyes bleary from radical swing shifts, and ears ablaze from the swearing (the most common language spoken in the camp)—and that was only the first day—I was ready to go home in short

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order. But I toughed it out, learned a lot about different kinds of people, developed friendships—some lasting to this day—and made some cash. The next summer I took a job as a waiter in a nice, quiet, biker bar.

Having changed my major from optometry to social work to psychology I received a rather varied-discipline Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree (with distinction) in 1983. This gave me the credentials to get yet another job as a waiter. I returned to the UofS the following year and took shockingly few classes which allowed me to become a teacher. My father was a teacher, my brother-in-law was a teacher, I was a smart guy with a BA with no career prospects, it just made sense.

Hated it. For my practicum I was stationed in a very small town, boarded with the local priest, and was assigned a grade three/four split classroom. I will forevermore have great respect for the plight of teachers. It's hard work, long hours and well, although I had the opportunity to teach some wonderful children...some just aren't so wonderful...especially the little guy with the knife or the girl who wouldn't shut up...ever. Again I toughed it out and learned a lot, but this life fit me about as well as my stint as a bull cook and I knew it.

Eventually I ran screaming back to Saskatoon and buried myself in a few years of professional rebellion and introspection—if it's possible to do both at the same time. During this time I worked in retail—shoe stores were my favourite choice (beginning a lifelong love of foot ware)—and restaurants and bars, oftentimes holding down two or three jobs at a time, getting off work at midnight or one o'clock then heading out to the clubs and after hours bars with my friends. Ah, youth.

Although I tried to be fanciful and carefree, I was unable to deny a natural ambition and inbred work ethic and usually rose to positions of leadership and management, get bored and move on to the next. I'll always look back fondly at that time in my life for I truly did enjoy a bit of rebellion, I met some awesome people, had a lot of fun, learned life lessons, had fun, danced a lot, smoked and drank, was broke, had a few marvelously tortuous romances and ultimately, came to know who I was...now it was time to figure out who I wanted to become.

I returned to the University of Saskatchewan a little older, a little wiser and with the idea that it was time to make some serious money, wear a suit, carry a briefcase and have people call me mister. So of course I decided to become an accountant.

1991 was a big year for me. I had been hired by the international audit and accounting firm of Ernst & Young, I wrote the grueling four-day Uniform Final Exam (UFE) with the hopes of qualifying for the Chartered Accountant (CA) designation, I began my current day relationship with my partner Herb and I received two more university

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degrees: a Bachelor of Education (BEd) and a Bachelor of Commerce (BComm) (with distinction).

I was successful in my UFE and received my CA designation in 1993 and continued on the path to become the best darn accountant I could be. I focused on corporate audit (with a brief foray into human resources—no need to get complacent after all) and in due time was promoted to an audit manager position. Oh, oh, you know what that means.

For many years Herb and I have had the habit of starting out each year by going someplace hot with plenty cold cocktails, taking stock of the year just passed and planning goals for the year upcoming. A common theme of mine was to lament the lack of time I'd spent writing (which often totaled zero unless you counted reports for work) and set the following goal: spend more time writing.

As a CA, I was working many hours, weekends and evenings, which left little time for creative writing. And if I did have the time, the last thing I wanted to do was sit down in front of a computer. So the goal, frustratingly, went unfulfilled from year to year. But I'm a goal-oriented guy and the idea of it was never far from my mind. Actually, it had always been somewhere in my noggin since I was wee lad old enough to put pen to paper: I always knew—or at least dreamed—that I would someday become a writer.

I'm also someone who feels the need to express myself creatively so if I couldn't write...I'd throw a party! For several years, 1991 to 1998, I reveled in creating these elaborate social events for our friends and family which involved months of intricate planning and coordination. It all began innocently enough with a cake decorating contest for Herb's 30th birthday party which led to The Halloween Road Rally '92, Parody of a Cocktail Party '93, A Night in Monte Carlo '93, Atlantis Olympics '94, Airport 96—The Congo, The Gong Show '97 and The Anniversary Party '98. They were such a blast. Although I never say never, we've put the theme parties to rest, and currently focus our party-giving talents on backyard pool parties in the summer and dinner parties in the winter and our annual Xmas Opener party at the end of November or first days of December which is attended by upwards of 150-200 of some of the best people you've ever met. As an aside, there has been speculation whether it was coincidence that the theme parties ended about the same time as I began to write full time. Did I exchange one form of creative expression for another? Maybe.

It was also during this time, and continuing to this day, that Herb and I indulged ourselves in one of our favourite pastimes: travel. We are what I think of as varied travellers; sometimes we travel for culture, sometimes for work, sometimes for adventure and sometimes for pure sloth. By sheer volume (myself over a dozen times and Herb has long stopped counting), Hawaii would seem to be our spot of choice; and indeed it is a little piece of restful heaven for us. Just thinking of one of those special maitais at the Royal Hawaiian Sunset Bar or watching Lelanni doing the hula at the Halekulani or

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spending lazy late afternoons on the beach watching the sun set at 6:01 gets me itchy to go right now. But we've also spent a lot of time in Mexico, Las Vegas, New Orleans, New York City and, another one of Herb's favourites, France. In addition to travelling a fair bit within Canada (Halifax, Vancouver, Montreal to name a few) and other US spots (Florida, California, and the east coast including Provincetown), we've been fortunate enough to set our feet in Thailand, India, Ukraine, Greece, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Bahamas, Spain, Italy, Jamaica, and most recently South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. I could go on forever about each of these wonderful places. My mother keeps on saying to me, "You've been everywhere" and I keep on saying to myself "I won't have enough time in one life to go everywhere". We're lucky to have had the chance, sometimes through Herb's work and now my own, and sometimes by good fortune, to have seen so much of the world. The Russell Quant stories always include an element of travel as a reflection of this love of mine and perhaps, in a small way, a chance to immortalize in words a part of these life adventures.

I think it was in Ixtapa, Mexico that year, 1999, when the dye was cast. The time for lamenting was done. The goal needed to become reality. I had to write, I had to fulfill that boyhood dream, I had to fill that space, I needed to get happy with life. And no one knew it more than Herb. If it wasn't for his understanding and encouragement and unyielding support, well, I don't know if it would have happened. And boy did it happen fast. Because once the seed was in my head that this could actually be, that I could try being a writer, it was, from then on, a slippery slope. And I slid down it FAST. Within months I gave notice to leave my decade long career as a CA, left my job—briefcase and closet full of suits along with it—on a Friday and on the following Monday I was in my home office pecking out the first words of my first novel.

For those of you who are wondering, that first novel, a thriller entitled, *On The Eighth Day*, is still in a box somewhere (I still think it's pretty good). The first Russell Quant mystery was the second novel I wrote. I'm still amazed by that. I'm amazed that this is now a series and that people I don't know read these books in cities and countries I don't live in. I'm amazed that I can (truthfully) refer to myself as an award-winning published author...but I've stopped answering the phone that way.

One of my favourite sayings is "Life is short, but it can be wide". I try to remember to do whatever I can to make my life wide, wide with people and places and extraordinary experiences. And I am grateful for every second of it so far and every second of it yet to come.