

June 2006

June 2006 - It is my great honour to have been asked to be the Canadian Guest of Honour at the next Bloody Words Mystery Conference to be held in Victoria, BC, June 14-17, 2007. Surely I am far from worthy to fill the shoes of former GoHs, such as this past year's, the wonderous Mary Jane Maffini - but I'll do my best.

June 2006 - And speaking of Bloody Words...I just returned from this year's event held in Toronto and although I could go on forever about how terrific it was, I was most struck by the people: the attendees - writers and readers, agents, book sellers, the organizers. Wow, what a terrific group to spend a weekend with, from the aforementioned Mary Jane, to fellow Saskatchewanian Rob Harasymchuk, mystery greats like Rick Blechta, Michael Blair, Alex Brett, Caro Soles, Neil Plakcy and on and on.

June 2006 - While in Toronto, I also had the opportunity to visit several bookstores and meet with owners/managers/customers - from Another Story and Pages, to Book City in the Annex to This Ain't the Rosedale Library and Glad Day and Sleuth of Baker Street - how could a writer ask for a better way to spend a day? I thank you all for your warm and welcoming reception and continued support. If you are in Toronto and looking for books (and more) I highly recommend these very fine establishments.

June 2006 - Book Expo Canada 2006 in Toronto - big, exciting, fun. From handing out Crime Writers of Canada booth basket stuffers to signing at the Insomniac Press/PGC and CWC booths, and meeting many more terrific people, it was a wonderful whirlwind.

June 2006 - Grumpy me when I found out recently from my publisher that due to changing our US distributors to Consortium and new policies from US chain bookstores regarding timing of bibliographic and production information, my fall releases in Canada (including the upcoming Stain of the Berry, October 2006) will now be spring releases in the US (March 2007). In the long run I suppose this is okay, but I feel bad that Stain of the Berry is now several months away from showing up on bookshelves in the US. In reality, due to short peak touring times, I do much of my US touring in the spring anyway. So, this may work out just fine.

June 2006 - You'd think the fact that I've been writing the thing for months and months would encourage me to believe that there really is going to be a new Russell Quant book, yet the other day I saw the first low res mock up of the tentative cover - and it finally set in. And holy moly was I excited. Seeing the cover of a new book for the first time is a uniquely thrilling occurrence - it sends

chills down my spine and I feel tingles in my head and feel the corners of my lips touch my ears. I fall in love with my covers - that's when I know they are right. Choosing the right cover is so important, it is the face of your baby, it is the first thing anyone sees, it is how you will be represented in bookstores and libraries and online listings and newspaper ads. For me the cover has to have a certain feeling to it that tells me, yup, that's the story in a photo. I don't mean that literally - obviously the two-to-three hundred pages behind the cover is more than a picture, but the cover photo can communicate a certain sensibility, a feeling, a promise to the reader about what is inside.

June 2006 - Catherine and I have had our final marathon phone call on final substantive edits for *Stain of the Berry* and it will now pass to *Insomniac* for the next stage, Copy editing.

June 2006 - When people travel away from home they are a little out of their natural element and the kindness of people during the course of travels means a great deal. I certainly found that over the last couple of weeks as I've been touring with *Tapas on the Ramblas* in the US. In particular, in Washington, there was Richard who presented me with a stack of home-made CDs of Blues and Jazz (to help Russell Quant stop listening to 80's music he said). In Atlanta there was Nowell who sent me a bulging package of written material ahead of my trip so I could make informed dining choices. In Baltimore there were the fine folks of *Lambda Rising* bookstore who were so gracious when, due to traffic, my driver delivered me to my event half an hour late (personally mortifying!) - and the gentleman who waited for me (I've unfortunately forgotten his name) wearing a University of Saskatchewan Cycling Club T-shirt from when he lived and worked in Saskatoon many years ago. To all of you and all the others who attended the readings, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

June 2006 - I recently attended the *Saints & Sinners Writers Conference* in New Orleans. A wonderful experience for two reasons. First off, it was heartening to see that that wonderful city is still there, hobbling perhaps, but still there. The people have such spirit, and as I promised a skycap at the Louis Armstrong Airport, let me tell you all: please visit New Orleans - they're ready and willing and able, and they need you to visit. Second, the conference itself was such a wonderful experience - a truly supportive place for writers to gather and exchange information and have fun together. One of the highlights was a fundraising dinner with special guest Steven Saylor, author of the *Sub Rosa* series of ancient Roman mystery novels. It was a group of perhaps a dozen, held at the French Quarter home of our charming hosts, Ted and Claude. And then there was the *Moonlight Cocktail party* at a Garden District Mansion with go-go dancers and fire twirlers and candy floss makers to entertain us and special guest Michael Cunningham, author of *The Hours*. Most of all, it was the camaraderie of my colleagues that made it a fantastic weekend.

June 2006 - I recently had the honour to be a presenter at the 2006 Lambda Literary Awards in Washington, DC. It was a terrific affair held at the Human Rights Campaign headquarters building and attended by a glittering array of writers and publishers and others of the literary world. Similar to the Saints & Sinners conference, this again is a very warm and supportive environment for writers. Congrats to all the nominees and winners.

May 2006 - The winner of the Russell Quant mystery contest is....drum rrrrrroooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!....Christopher 'Kit' Egan of Minneapolis, MN!!!!!!

Congratulations, Kit! Kit's name will appear somewhere in the pages of the new Russell Quant mystery, *Stain of the Berry*, which will be released this fall! Kit, thank you for participating in this contest; it will be my great pleasure to include your name in the next book, forever part of the world of Russell Quant.

May 2006 - And then, as I was reviewing my second draft of the fifth Russell Quant book, I found myself thinking: oh my gosh, this is crap! It always happens. I wondered why until a fine writer and colleague of mine quoted this line the other day: "Only mediocre writers are always at their best." We're not sure who to attribute the quote to, but I love it. To me it says that a good writer is always striving to be better. And so, as I am reviewing my newest work, perhaps I subconsciously lifted the bar for what I will find acceptable. And so....I hope....that I am hard on myself because I want to get better and better with each new thing I write. (Or maybe I was just in a bad mood that day! Ha!)

May 2006 - And speaking of generosity of others, this past weekend we hosted a fundraising dinner in our home in support of The Avenue Community Centre in Saskatoon and particularly in support of local gay youth causes. I send out my gratitude to all the wonderful people who attended and volunteered and sponsored and pledged and helped raise a great deal of money for a worthy cause. A delicious, Relais&Chateau-quality meal was served to us by Gerard and his staff from Rembrandts restaurant (if you're ever in Saskatoon, check them out.) Bruce entertained us on piano and Ryan gave a stirring speech. A magical evening. When people ask me what inspires me, stuff like this plays no small part.

May 2006 - The Russell Quant Mystery contest has come to an end and to those of you who were able to take part, I want to send out a hearty thank you from me and from the charities that benefited from your generosity. Your hearts are big.

April 2006 - It's a busy time, celebrating the release of *Flight of Aquavit* in paperback, preparing for *Tapas on the Ramblas* US touring in May, waiting for edit comments and cover concept feedback on *Stain of the Berry*, and having a

blast working on draft two of the fifth Russell Quant. Draft two work can sometimes be scary, as draft one tends to be (for me) just plopping the story down. But I've been pleasantly surprised by how this draft two seems to be in (relatively) good shape already. Maybe I'm learning something - or maybe these characters are so much a part of me that putting them on paper is becoming a much smoother process.

April 2006 - Flight of Aquavit has just come out in paperback! The first printing in the trade format has sold out - hoorah and thank you readers!!! Even though this book first came out in 2004, seeing the new version with its slightly altered (and much glossier) cover was exciting.

April 2006 - I'm in Baltimore, Washington, Atlanta and New Orleans in May (see calendar). If you or anyone you know in those cities might be interested in coming out to a reading, it'd be great to meet you!

April 2006 - I've been asked to read at the Saskatchewan Festival of Words in July - a big wonderful festival held in beautiful Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. I've added a link on the links page if you want to check it out.

April 2006 - Thank you Calgary for making my McNally Robinson appearance last month so enjoyable. I cannot say it enough, your attendance at readings is a true gift. Special thanks to Jesse, Thomas and Sandy for organizing the event.

April 2006 - Submissions for the Russell Quant Mystery contest end May 1, so there's not much time left. A warm thank you to all of you who have kindly made donations this far. AIDS Saskatoon has been a frequent recipient of your generosity and everyone there is grateful for your support.