

Friday, March 30, 2007

The Junos Are Here!

8:52 AM, March 30, 2007

The Juno Award is Canada's answer to a Grammy. A few years ago they decided to move the Grammy ceremony around Canada and this year they are in beautiful, vibrant Saskatoon! The stars have started to arrive, and will eventually include great acts like Nelly Furtado, Nickelback, Billy Tallent, Sloan, Hedley, George Canyon and the Canadian Idol success stories.

Along with about 1300 others, I am a volunteer and last night spent four hours manning an information kiosk in one of the host hotels, with my new pal Georgette. No star sightings yet - but we did try lip synching to the Juno nominee CD and - 10-4 big buddy bonus -we get to play with a walkie-talkie. Over.

So it's going to be a wild weekend in Saskatoon. After my shifts end on Sunday, we're attending the live telecast, then out for dinner to new ultra chic restaurant The Ivy with good pals Paul and Jan.

Things are lining up nicely for tour dates in Texas. I have never been to Texas - so I am pumped to get there for my first visit.

I sometimes feel Russell Quant is destined for the screen - TV or otherwise. Although my understanding was that these deals come along very seldom, last week I was contacted again (about the fifth time) by a producer/production company about the availability of the rights to the series. Currently the series is under option with a great group in Toronto who seem quite keen on Russell - so who knows?

I'm almost complete with my first level edits of Sundowner Ubuntu. Then off it goes to copyedit genius Gillian at Insomniac.

Spring has sprung - I just wanna be outside.

Saturday, March 24, 2007

Editing Phase 1

7:59 AM, March 24, 2007

March 24, 2007 - I've been working most recently on the first edit notes, from my editor Catherine, for the fifth Russell Quant novel, Sundowner Ubuntu.

I had the chance to re-read the book for the first time in months while I was away on vacation, in preparation for this start of the editing process. That, I find, is always a good idea. As much as you think you remember your work inside out, no matter how long ago you actually wrote it, as they say, love is in the details and details can easily escape you when you're working on several other things at the same time. So, it was useful to become very familiar with the Sundowner Ubuntu story once again before I tackled this first round of edits.

Although all the intricacies and exceeding detail about certain plotlines or a character's motivation don't necessarily show up on the pages of a book (in favour of a tight story and keeping the action moving), they still need to be well-thought out and make sense. As author and creator, I need to be able to explain everything. To some, this stuff might seem small, minutia that shouldn't matter. But it does. This is what makes the book and the adventure and the mystery and the people in them real.

For example, a couple of the items we dealt with this week were:

- under what circumstances would a drug addled teenager still be involved in sports?
- is Uber a name?
- what is an appropriate name for a magazine that deals with safaris?
- how pricey are camera lenses?
- where do scorpions live?

All in a day's work.

Overall this first level of editing, called substantive editing, is going very well. Only one re-write of any significance; to change the sequence of a scene to help ratchet up the tension and have Russell more 'present' in the circumstance. I find re-writes, even if it is just a line or paragraph to be, at first, daunting - because I usually am attached to the way I originally wrote it - then exciting - to see how I can make this thing better, really sing. I always end up with something I love.

Speaking of love, I love to read and try to do it as much as I can. I heartily suggest Still Life by my fellow Canadian (and a lovely person too) Louise Penny - see her at

www.louisepenny.com. I'm currently reading an Ellen Hart www.ellenhart.com mystery, Merchant of Venus. Someday I'll catch up to the most recent of her wonderful Jane Lawless series.

The US release of Stain of the Berry is imminent - beginning of April. I'm excited for that to happen. Still working on details for some US touring for May. Also in May I'll be a presenter at the Lambda Literary Awards in New York City and signing at Book Expo America (in NYC the same weekend). This coming month, April, I'm visiting Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and, most likely (details to be

ironed out - watch the website) doing a launch for Stain of the Berry in Victoria, BC.

And...Spring has Sprung! Finally, we're seeing days with plus temperatures and hot, hot sun. The snow is melting. Last night as we left home for a dinner out at new local restaurant, Simon's, the streets were filled with people walking their dogs and aroma of barbecues pulled from hibernation. Tonight we're hosting a small dinner, Italian themed- think Canelloni and bruschetta and limoncello - which we'll serve in a little alcove in our home we playfully call Cafe Au Lait - actually a wine cellar with a bistro table, tiny but perfect for a small dinner for four. Great time of year.

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Perspective on Perspective

10:11 AM, March 13, 2007

March 13, 2007 - Just returned late last night from a week in the sun in Zihuatanejo, Mexico - a lovely little spot that blends new with old, fine dining with good basics (the most amazing octopus ceviche at Amulettas), and in the five or six times we've now been, the weather has yet to fail us. It works on a lot of levels for me. Me likes.

However, as the days passed by, filled with a routine that grew languorously slow and marvelously repetitive - power walk, food, beach sun, food and margaritas, poolside sun, food and margaritas, balcony loungers sun, then out for dinner and, yes, more food and margaritas - there was a wall I could not break down. You see, I often find suntime getaways the best time to get perspective - on relationships, career, family and friends travel, imagining the impossibilities becoming possibilities, just life in general. I love that stuff. I find being away from the normalcy of one's busy life is the optimum time for this kind of introspection and future planning. It was on a trip not unlike this one, when I first made the proclamation that I would be a writer, about eight years ago. But on this trip, relaxation: 1; fun: 1; perspective: zip.

I was waiting for it. Based on past experience, I knew it to usually start pouring over me during an oceanside stroll, or lying in a hammock, or just watching the sunset over drinks. But not this time. Nope. Nada. Nothing. Wouldn't come. I began to wonder if maybe there was nothing I needed perspective about. Not possible. So why? Was it that I'd brought some work with me (the first edit galleys for the new Russell Quant)? Was it that we were also doing some other stuff that was more business than vacation? Yet still, both these things were things I was enjoying doing. Maybe it was the recent loss of our dogs? Couldda

been. Or perhaps my brain was just tired and I simply needed to empty it and cloud it with lots of tequila.

Then on the flight home- the leg from Calgary to Saskatchewan - we hit some pretty major tailwinds that buffeted the plane like it was made of paper, some of the roughest flying I've had in a very long time, enough to fade the tan right off my face. And I thought, aha! Now I'll get perspective. Suppose this is it? Surely now I'll get some great view about what life is all about.

Nope.

Obviously we landed safely. And it has come to me that perspective is a gift. It is special. It should be valued. And you can't order it up like a plate of fish tacos and a Pacifico beer. So, I am happily back home (great to get away but always great to come home) and happily back to work (I love my work) and happily anticipating the next spate of perspective that good fortune will bring my way, wherever and whenever that may be.

And further, I want to say a warm thank you to everyone who has emailed or send cards and stuff re. our loss of Mocha and Bali.

And, I want to say thanks to a reader who wrote me a poem. A first. Awesome. And I'm so glad you and your mother are enjoying the books together.

Enjoy the perspective.

Friday, March 2, 2007

Missing Footprints

6:27 PM, March 2, 2007

March 2, 2007 - First off I have a say a hearty thank you to organizer Ryan Land and all the attendees at last night's Saskatchewan Teachers of English Language Arts (STELA) pre-conference event who so warmly welcomed me and listened to me read selections from the Russell Quant mysteries and asked terrific questions including one I'd not been asked before at a reading: Why did Russell leave his career as a police constable to become a detective? Good one.

The event was in Regina, Saskatchewan's capital city. The journey home this morning was a bit of a challenge. A light snowfall combined with swirling drifts, warmish temperature and overnight freezing turned two-and-a-half hours of highway into a three-and-a-half hour long skating rink. There were times, on curves, when I actually felt the vehicle sliding across the road out of my control.

Fortunately it is a two-lane highway and I'm a bit of a Chicken Little driver in conditions like that, and drive verrrrrry slow. So, I made it, but my hands are still in the shape of claws and my shoulders are aching.

But all was better when I stopped at a store once I'd reached Saskatoon - I was looking for sunblock for our sunshine getaway next week - but found Rainbow Twizzlers! Life cannot be so bad when there are rainbow-coloured Twizzlers.

The overnight snow had one other casualty. It covered up Mocha's tracks in the snow from the last time she went out for a sniff. Her very last. Now I'm sniffing. Miss her.

But life is good. I just saw a neat segment on some TV talk show and heard a snippet that really resounded with me. Don't focus on what has been taken away from you, but on what you've been given. Yup. I like that.

The finalists for the Lambda Literary Awards were announced this week. Great hurrahs for my good friends and colleagues whose great works were amongst the list, including my very own editor of the Russell Quant books, Catherine Lake, who along with Nairne Holtz are finalists for their anthology: No Margins; Paul Willis (organizer of the Saints & Sinners writers conference in New Orleans), Greg Herren (go Scotty!), Ellen Hart (a hero of mine and a terrific broad), Josh Lanyon (Adrien English series), Garry Ryan (whose new book I did a blurb for) and Jeff Mann (who, I believe is my first friend from Appalachia - and I love the way he pronounces that word).

Thanks to my most excellent webmaster, this blog now streams directly to my website. Where, coming up real soon (next few days I'd say), new additions will be some of the first cover concepts for the fifth Russell Quant novel, Sundowner Ubuntu, as well as a short blurb about the book's content. Check it out, www.anthonymbidulka.com.

Kudos to Jeff Reynolds, a Russell Quant reader who just completed his own first novel this past Sunday. Wow. What a great accomplishment. Enjoy it.

My publicist, the famous and glorious Michele Karlsberg, is working on some US tour dates which hopefully I'll be able to formally announce on this site soon. Exciting.

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

An Empty House

12:24 PM, February 28, 2007

February 28, 2007 - Fourteen years ago we came across a little puppy with ratty brown hair, big brown eyes and a wet brown nose at the local SPCA (pound). There was some debate about whether she was available for adoption or not, but as we visited her and enjoyed her penchant for burying her head between our thighs while having her back end vigorously scratched while she squealed with delight, we knew we'd fallen in love and hoped things would go our way and she could be ours. Alas, another adoptee with prior claim showed up and we lost her.

But we were in the market to be first time doggie parents and, swallowing our disappointment, eventually returned to the SPCA to try again. And there she was! The adoptive parents had never showed up and she was getting closer to the inevitable destruction date.

We named her Mocha.

A lot of people said how lucky she was to have been saved by us. But I like to think of it as a wholly reciprocal relationship of wonderfully even-handed give and take. Yes, we saved her from the pound. And, some years later, saved her from a severe spinal cord injury which took surgery and lots of bucks to fix. We gave her food and things to chew and soft pads to sleep on and a sitter to watch after her whenever we went out of town and a special diet when she got too fat and another special diet when she developed a liver problem. We took her to the vet and had her teeth cleaned and kept a close eye on her when she wasn't feeling well. We even got her a friend and companion in Bali, our second dog. We pet her and scratched her belly and provided her with an acreage on which to take long walks and chase gophers and sniff out all sorts of things that dog's like to sniff.

But the list of what she gave us goes on and on. She never once failed to wag her tail when she saw us. She was careful to dole out her love in equal proportions to both of us, never showing favoritism. When we were sick in bed with a cold or flu, she never left our side. She made us laugh with her scooting around the pool like a ball of fire. She patiently stood by the door and awaited a towel when she'd come in soaking wet after a rainstorm or blizzard or anytime in the spring. She made her presence known, but never aggressively or with petulant insistence. When I lay on a couch reading or resting, she had the habit of quietly easing her way on top of me and scrunching into the tiniest little crevice between me and the couch, just to be as near to me as she could possibly get. To strangers she was always polite and kind, but she reserved her fiercest love for us.

When she was just a pup, on what was probably one of the first times we (foolishly) left her alone, she got into a tube of paint, punctured it, dragged it throughout the house, staining the carpet on both floors of the house (all of which

needed to be replaced). Then she proceeded to rip down all of the venetian blinds, likely in an attempt to look out the windows to find us. And that was it - the one and only time she was bad.

Yesterday, Feb. 27, just a week shy of her 14th birthday, was Mocha's last day.

It was particularly difficult because we lost Bali, her younger sister, only two months ago. But we knew the time was coming. In Mocha's inimitable way, she was not ending her days by making a mess or a making a fuss of any kind, she was simply fading away, each day growing smaller, quieter, a little less alert. Bringing up the idea of doing our duty as her parents, as good dog owners, by making the decision to bring her life to an end, was one of the most difficult things I've had to do.

It is an unusual and awesome and fearful power to have, to decide on the end of a life. I once read that this is the one thing a pet most wants from their owner, if possible, that after a nice life together, that you stay by their side and gently give them peace. And that is what Mocha had. In so many ways, it is the end I would want for myself. Before the final dose, the vet gave her a relaxant. And for fifteen minutes, we had our old Mocha back. She was no longer shaking and uneasy, but comfortable and happy. We talked to her and she eventually dosed off, content, in the arms of her guys, ready for a nap without pain. She looked beautiful.

When I went home, I opened a drawer and found a purple dog collar. It belonged to Bali. I'd placed it there two months ago. And now I added Mocha's red one. I stared at the two collars, each frayed and soiled from a dog's life; and I thought, there they are, our two dogs, this is all we have left: two collars in a drawer. But of course I was wrong. I think it is Maya Angelou who loves to say, "We lose beloveds, but we never lose their love or our love for them."

It's an empty house now. A house that for the last fourteen years was defined in part by the fact that two dogs lived here. In the Acknowledgement of my third book, *Tapas on the Ramblas*, I wrote about the two little dogs that share my office where I write. Now there are none. And I am very sad about that. Almost not yet believing it. But I know the decision we made was undeniably the right one for both of them. Now we heal ourselves and face a different life.

Friday, February 23, 2007

Moms in New York

3:55 PM, February 23, 2007

Friday, Feb 23, 2007 - It's never been tried before, folks, but coming this May...we're taking my mother and my mother-in-law to New York City! Are we prepared for that? Is New York prepared for them?

Over the last little while we've gotten into the habit of, every couple of years, taking the mothers on a trip, individually, or as in this case en masse. Believe me, it's time well-spent. Memories are made. Laughs are abundant. And sure, not always the easiest thing in the world to do - but what worthwhile is?

And the stars are aligning to make this a wonderful time together (fingers crossed). After long debate considering best venue, location, duration, physical ailment impediments, personal wishes and on and on...we just inched out a cruise in favour of that grand old dame, New York City, one of my favourite places. And as soon as we made the decision, so many other things immediately fell into place: our wonderful cousins Gord & Mary were free to visit with us on a layover in Toronto, Book Expo week (good time for a writer to be in NYC) begins the same weekend as mother-in-law's X4th birthday so our dates were set, I contacted my friend, the Exec Director of the Lambda Literary Foundation, Charles Flowers (great name) who graciously extended an invitation for me to be a presenter at the Lammy Awards gala ceremony also that weekend (which we'll take the moms to - what an excellent NYC kinda thing to do). So we'll saddle ourselves up with shows, dining, museums, bus tours, helicopter tours, harbour cruises and shows shows shows (anyone from NYC with strong recommendations - email me...I'm hearing raves about the Springtime one...). May in NYC - here we come.

Next week I'm off to Regina - Saskatchewan's capital city, about 2.5 hours from Saskatoon - to appear at a pre-conference event for a provincial teachers of English Language Arts conference. Week after we are off to another of our favourite places, Zihautenejo for a week of dirty bananas, margueritas and Corona in the sun. Today was another blizzard in Saskatoon in a winter with a few too many, so I am quite looking forward to some defrost time. But for right now, off to The Ivy for dinner with our gals, Pat & Lynne. Wine will be drunk.

Sunday, February 18, 2007

A Book Blossoms

11:33 AM, February 18, 2007, updated at 6:33 AM, February 20, 2007

Feb. 18, 2007 - There is a period of time, sometimes a long one, between when you've sent a new book off to an editor after writing the final word, and when you see it again. During that time you move on, you begin writing the next book, you tour and promote the current release, do laundry, walk the dog, that sort of thing.

And, you kind of forget about that new book, knowing it's in good hands. Then it comes back home. It's kinda like unwrapping a Christmas present you bought for yourself a few months earlier. Not exactly a surprise, but very welcome.

And so it was this week, when my editor Catherine informed me that she'd completed her substantive edits and would be packaging up the manuscript and sending it back to me within the next few days (after a rather confusing round of electronic editing with the first Russell Quant novel some years ago, we returned to hard copy editing, at least at this early stage of the process). And not only that, in order to meet deadline for my publisher's next catalogue, Catherine told me we needed to complete back cover copy and decide on a front cover image. Zowie--I almost said, but really, who says that...ever--the fifth Russell Quant novel is back. And its real. And it needs attention.

Decisions on cover material are vitally important I feel. The cover- front and back - is the first, outward face, that your book will present to everyone else who does not know its insides as intimately as you do. The back cover copy has got to be interesting, it's got to grab the reader, it's got to tell the story, it's got to tease and titillate, it's got to have that same Russell-Quant-mystery-flow of previous back cover copy. All in about 200 words. Although the wording hasn't been quite finalized, lemme give you a teaser of what will likely be the first words: A mother's pain. A million dollars. A missing son.

And then the front cover image. It really seems like only a short time ago that we were making decisions about the spooky ferris wheel image for the cover of *Stain of the Berry*. Well the search is on again. As some of the action in the new book takes place in Africa, partially based on my recent trip there, I began with a review of my own photos and found several I'm pretty pumped about. We'll see. The new book is called: *Sundowner Ubuntu: A Russell Quant Mystery*. I'm glad its home.

Sunday, February 4, 2007

Half way home from Seattle

12:35 PM, February 4, 2007, updated at 6:34 AM, February 20, 2007

Feb. 4, 2007 - I'm in the Vancouver Air Canada Maple Leaf Lounge - gosh I love traveller lounges, like a lovely little respite from the real world - with free wine and treats! - but I digress...I am on my way home from Left Coast Crime mystery conference in Seattle. What a terrific time I had. There would have been between 500-600 attendees, writers and readers. I had a wonderful first night stealing away with my colleague, Ottawa-based writer Alex Brett, for a perfect Seattle dinner at a place called Anthony's at Pier 66 - met our requirements: very Seattle, northwest cuisine, on the water, with a view, and great seafood. And to make

things even better, our hotel concierge (who helped me with the reservations) arranged for a complimentary appetizer - Concierge Frederick at Seattle Renaissance is the tops in my books! Alex and I had a blast - we even talked some business.

I moderated a panel about the pros and cons of writing series mystery novels. Although many people came up to me to say how much they enjoyed it, the credit goes to my panelists, Peter May, Pamela Samuels-Young, Jon Talton and Jo Dereske, who are such fine, witty, talkative, interesting people - I liked each of them from the get go and the hefty praise they get for their books is well-deserved. Pamela writes a terrific female African-American John Grisham style series - one of her characters is named Special - and so is Pamela, Jon has a great Arizona based series tht really evokes that world and his wife Susan is a dear too, Jo has these marvelous smiley eyes and a Miss Zukas librariran series that is a real hoot, and Peter is a Scot who lives in France and writes about China! Go figure. Love it. He wore a great kilt to the panel and his China thriller series is really a must for mystery readers. Any of these people I would have happily spent an evening with over dinner getting to know.

I was also a panelist for a panel about the importance of background information in the creation of our characters. Again a wonderful panel of writers, moderated by Lauren Haney, with fellow Canadian Debra Purdy Kong, Karen Swee and Hope McIntyre. Ahhhh - so many good writers, so little time. If any of you are looking for good reads, Google any of these writers and I think you'll be hooked.

Also had a terrific signing at the marvelous Seattle Mystery Bookstore on Cherry Street, including surprise visits from brother/sister inlaw Dan & Judy, friend Jim and his friend (also Jim) - all from Vancouver, and Debi from Kirkland. Also met some other very cool people like Alice - also from Kirkland as it happens.

Great to see Caro and Sandra and Chris and meeting so many others....Loved Seattle, loved LCC, I miss it already.

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

The Rum Chapters & Seattle

7:53 AM, January 24, 2007, updated at 6:34 AM, February 20, 2007

Jan. 24, 2007 - I've been experimenting with working while on vacation.

Yup - crazy huh?

Or maybe not so much. You see there is a method behind my madness. One of the great things about writing as a career, especially with the onset of the electronic age, tiny laptops and the easy access to internet, oftentimes wireless, is that writers can do their job almost anywhere these days. In theory. Many of us have that special place (oftentimes a deep dark hole we've dug out of our basement) where we like to write, and, as with many habits, they are hard to break. But my spouse and I have often talked about how we'll travel more and more the older we get - sort of a bringing of traditional retirement year activities as much as possible into the present - and as I have no desire to ever actually retire from writing (although I never say never), wouldn't it be good to discover if I could do my job wherever we happen to be.

So I've tentatively begun the experimentation. But, believe me, with little pressure.

I started out with just bringing the laptop and a small amount of reference material should the desire to write overcome me. Well, desire overcame, both in France this past fall and just last week when we were having a quick get-outta-winter week in Jamaica. Now, it certainly helped that Ocho Rios, like much of the world of late it seems, is experiencing odd weather patterns and a few of our days there were, albeit certainly much toastier than Saskatchewan, cloudy and rainy. So on two separate occasions I pulled up the hotel room desk to the balcony where I could see and smell and feel the sensation of being in the Caribbean, and started pecking away. Of course, one cannot be in Jamaica without rum in hand and by our good fortune, this place kept a fully stocked bar at our disposal. So, I've decided, should I be lucky enough to have this current novel I'm working on published, I will refer to the chapters I wrote in France as the Chardonnay Chapters and those last week the Rum Chapters.

It will be up to the reader to decide which are which. :)

And if it doesn't get published, my what a good time I had.

FYI - any of you in Seattle or know of someone in the area who might be interested, as part of my appearance at Left Coast Crime Mystery Fan Convention in Seattle, I - along with several other terrific mystery writers - will be doing a signing at Seattle Mystery Bookshop, 117 Cherry Street, Seattle, on Saturday Feb 3, 2007 from 4-6 pm. Drop on by!

Tuesday, January 2, 2007

A Great New Year

6:32 AM, January 2, 2007

I have to say that 2006 was a terrific year, brimful with travel, time with friends and family, a new book, a great tour that I've already talked about on this site. And being a hopeful kind of guy, I'm excited about 2007 and think it's going to be fantastic in so many ways.

Because life is so busy and full, we're quite organized about our calendar and are big planners - it's the only way we can find to ensure we fit everything in and get done all the things we want to get done and meet goals. So on a car trip yesterday to pick up my mom for a dinner/movie, we had our new 2007 calendar out and started setting dates for travel and dinner parties and special events. Already we have a couple of quick winter getaways planned for Jamaica (which is part work) and Ixtapa, along with my work travel to Swift Current, Seattle, Victoria. Stain of the Berry will be released in the US in April and I hope to do some touring in the US late April. Perhaps I'll return to New Orleans in May for the Saints & Sinners writers conference. And the fall will see the release of the fifth-I can hardly believe it - Russell Quant.

Touring in November followed by the parties and get togethers of the Christmas season really gave us a wonderful opportunity to touch base with so many people we know and care about, not only here in Saskatoon, but elsewhere too. Love that, and look forward to more.

I hope 2007 is what you want it to be. Life is short, but it can be WIDE. Make it so.

Anthony