

# The Eighteen Questions

1. Did you choose the writing profession or did it choose you?

I'd have to say the latter. The call to write has been with me since I can remember. It took me many years to answer the call however, as life kept on interfering. But eventually I think I willed it to happen. I decided I had to take the plunge and try, or else one day I'd regret it.

2. What is your background? (education, work, etc.)

If I was being silly, I could officially have my business cards read:

Anthony Bidulka, BA, BEd, BComm, CA

As I collected life's experiences, I convoked from the University of Saskatchewan three times, taught elementary school, waited tables, worked as a bullcook in a uranium mine, managed a shoe store, bartended, and became an accountant, eventually earning my Chartered Accountant designation. It was late in a decade-long career as an audit manager with an international audit and accounting firm, that I drank too many margaritas in a Mexican bar and announced that I was going to quit my job and become a writer. And then I did it.

3. When did you 'know' you were a writer?

As soon as I was old enough to put pencil to paper.

4. How would you describe your style of writing?

It is comfort food writing. Meant to be read on a beach, airplane, or a couch in front of a roaring fire – in all these situations a glass of wine, dog nuzzling your feet, and some tasty appetizers will greatly heighten the experience. The dog on an airplane thing might be a bit tough to pull off though.

5. What is your writing process?

I think it is thanks to a strong work ethic instilled in me by my parents, and the serious careers I've been in at times, that I am an organized, disciplined guy. I am serious about writing, and treat it as a career. I perform as a writer (creative side and business side) Monday to Friday. On a writing day, I am at the computer by 7 or 8 a.m. and keep at it until mid afternoon. By then I'm creatively burned out and get out to do errands and something physical. Usually my brain starts working again later in the day and I think a lot about what I want to write the next day. So when 7 a.m.

comes along again, I'm ready to go, I'm not sitting at my computer thinking about what I want to do.

I am a draft writer and an outline writer. I prepare an outline for the 'whodunit' part of the book, and an outline for the 'character development' part of the book, then I smush them together and begin to write the book. I usually get to draft 5 or 6 before I'm ready to let my editor see it.

#### 6. What was your path to publication?

I started out thinking I'd be a thriller/action writer, and that is the first thing I wrote. While I waited to hear back on that, I wrote my first mystery. The mystery was intended to be more of a lark, a writing exercise really, while I waited to be discovered for my thriller expertise. Writing the mystery was so much fun, and I loved the characters. But honestly I didn't think I'd even send it out.

When the mystery was done, I'd still not gotten a positive reply from any agents or publishers in regards to my thriller. Now what? I decided to package up Amuse Bouche and send it out under a pseudonym.

As part of a writing organization I belong to, I get a monthly newsletter. At about the same time as I decided to toss Amuse Bouche into the fray, I saw a miniscule ad in the newsletter, probably only 2 lines long. It was for a freelance editor, on contract with a publisher, looking for material. Along with the countless others, I submitted a copy of my manuscript to her. Out of all the submissions she received (I'd like to think there were tens of millions), she chose to work on Amuse Bouche.

When we were done, the publisher agreed to publish it and I became the author of a Canadian mystery series featuring a gay detective. The thriller went into a drawer. I was a very fortunate man. And I always tell people, never discount any avenue for possible publication. You never know where success will come from. It can even come from a two line ad in a local newsletter.

#### 7. What is your favorite self-marketing idea?

A few years ago, my third Russell Quant novel, called Tapas on the Ramblas, was being published. This book mostly takes place on a 'cruise replete with the luxury of murder' that sailed from Barcelona to Rome.

Grateful to many people in the industry who'd been kind and helpful to me and my books, I was looking for a way to say thank you in a unique way. I decided to give gifts which would double as promotion for the new book.

I came up with a list of maybe 50 people or organizations I wanted to touch. I prepared packages which included the following:

- a copy of Tapas on the Ramblas
- a selection of tapas (eg. a jar of tapenade and crackers)
- my old auntie's sangria recipe
- all the makings for the sangria
- utensils, plastic cups, napkins
- a personal note

When the recipients opened the box, whether they were in a business office, or a bookstore, or at home, they had the complete makings of a Spanish influenced sangria and tapas picnic for themselves and a few friends.

Not only did I have a blast putting these together, but it was a fulfilling way to say thank you to some special people, and promote my new book at the same time. The response was wonderful.

8. What are the biggest surprises you've encountered as a writer?

The generosity and willingness of people all over the world to take the time to sit at their computers and write to me about reading my books. That is so awesome.

9. How do you inspire yourself? What are your sources of creativity?

I am inspired by people, travel, and everyday experiences. Even a trip to the grocery store can be the source of something or someone interesting that may end up in a book one day. I'm also inspired by other writers. I read a lot and am involved in writers' organizations and attend as many conferences as I can.

10. What is your proudest writer moment?

Gosh, there are a lot of wonderful moments. Holding my first published book in my hands for the first time. Sitting at my computer the first day I became a full-time writer and typing out the words: Chapter One. My mom and other family and friends at my first hometown book launch. Being the first Canadian to win a Lambda Literary Award in the Men's Mystery category.

11. What's the best advice you were given about writing?

Write what you know. Diversify. Never stop writing.

12. What is your most embarrassing writer moment?

I had hired a car to get me from DC to a bookstore appearance in Baltimore. Although the car company assured me they would get me there in time, the traffic was ridiculous and I was almost an hour late. All but the staff, some disgruntled media, and one dedicated reader remained. I was mortified.

13. What business challenges have you faced as a writer?

Marketing is always a challenge. The competition is stiff. But I like a good challenge. It's difficult deciding what the right strategy is – and I've concluded there is no perfect answer to that dilemma, other than to keep on keeping on! Just keep your face out there, don't be afraid to try new and different things. Some will work, some won't. But it's all in the trying and being present.

14. What is your writer life philosophy?

I have an overall philosophy that works for all parts of my life: Life may be short, but it can be WIDE.

15. When you're not writing what do you do for fun?

I love to travel. I love to entertain. I love to read. I also keep myself as involved as I can in community and charitable organizations. Currently I'm involved with the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, The International Association of Crime Writers and I raise money through a fund I helped create, called Ubuntu Purse which supports Camp Fyrefly, a lifeskills camp for GLBTQ youth.

16. Who do you like to read?

I tend to read a lot of mystery. I like thrillers and feel good/escapist stuff too. Some fantasy.

17. What's your advice for new writers?

There is a lot of advice out there for people wanting to write, I can only offer my slant. First, I feel it's important to know what kind of writer you want to be. What is your definition of being a successful writer? Is it to see your short story or poem in print? Is it simply the act of making the time to sit down and put pen to paper? Is it to show what you can do to family and friends? Is it to become published and sell lots of books and make money? Is it to educate? Is it to entertain? Is it a career? A hobby? A love affair that is hot and quick, never meant to last forever? Second, set reasonable goals, achieve them, celebrate (more on that later), set new goals. Third, communicate with other writers. Spend time with writers. Take a class. Join a local or provincial or national writers group. Meet people who see the world the way you do (or maybe not), who can dispense personal "how to" advice. Try to understand how the writing life fits with your own. The fourth and last piece of advice I have is for if and when you do become a writer, in whatever way, shape or form: never forget to be grateful and celebrate. To this day, for even the slightest achievement or milestone, for every good book review, or the first time I see the cover art for a new book, for every bookseller who invites me to read in their store, I am grateful and I celebrate.

18. What are you currently working on?

I am battling a bear, called 'the new book'! I'm currently taking a bit of a break from the Russell Quant series, and working on something very different for me in many ways. It is still in the mystery genre, but in all other ways quite experimental for me. It is me stretching my writer-ly muscles. So it is challenging, and frustrating, and ultimately, very rewarding for me. I'm also letting my mind wander ever so often into the sixth Russell Quant book. Somewhere in the back of my brain I am working out plots and character development stories I want to work with in that book. So, as always, I am finding not enough time to do all I want to do.