

Interview with Russell Quant
By author Neil Plakcy
November, 2007

1. You're half Irish and half Ukrainian. Do those two ethnicities blend well in you?

If you had asked me that question ten...maybe even five years ago, I would have stared at you with a blank look in my eyes, quickly followed by some not-so-quick witted reply. Growing up, I never considered myself half Ukrainian or half Irish. My parents—my dad in particular—always said we were Canadians, plain and simple. I think he'd gone through so much—leaving behind family he was never to see again, poverty, bone-breaking labour, heartbreak, disappointment—to come to Canada in the first place, that by Jove he was going to be a Canadian, and so were all his descendants.

Though my dad had a heavy brogue, and my mother to this day rolls her 'r's and wails her 'oi's' to great effect (and let's not forget her penchant for garish color combinations), I never caught on to the fact that I was made up of stuff from a country other than the one I was born in. Until recently. I find as I grow older, I'm thinking more about this. Especially now that my dad is gone. I've begun to recognize traits in me that speak loudly of who and where I come from. I like to think—as a tribute to my two fine parents—that they leave me with the best those two ethnicities have to offer. And maybe some of the rascally qualities too—but hey, what's life without some rascally qualities.

2. I know you were a police constable before you became a private investigator. What drew you to police work in the first place? And what caused you to go out on your own?

I am a sad cliché. I wanted to help people. Ever since I was a boy, the people I related to on TV, in movies, in books, in real life, were the ones who reached out a hand to those in need. I must admit, part of the whole cop/PI thing may have come from crushes developed on Starsky, Hutch, Magnum, Remington Steele and Sonny Crockett. And when I saw reruns of shows like The Rookies and Rockford...well, how could I not follow in those footsteps? Joshing aside, I just have this thing I guess, where it means something to me to ensure people in need are being looked after.

Although I have been accused of being a dreamer and taking risks when I shouldn't, I am smart, I am pragmatic, and I am realistic. I knew becoming a PI in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan wasn't any of those things. So I became a cop. When I left for training in Regina, I knew it wasn't my 'exact' dream. It wasn't a perfect fit. But I would get exceptional training—which I knew of no other way to get—and I believed that once I became a constable on the city streets, I could achieve most of my goals. And who knew, maybe I'd love being a cop.

I didn't.

In many ways, I am a lone wolf. To be a good cop, you need to be part of a team. The weakness is mine, not that of the profession.

And there was another problem. The people I wanted to help the most, I couldn't reach: the people who, for a myriad of reasons, are beyond the scope of the police

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service's scope. For the first time I truly understood the need for private investigators. They are not there to compete with the police, they are there—in the best sense of that profession—to give aid to those who fall between the cracks, who have a need that cannot be fulfilled by traditional policing.

That is what I wanted to do.

But I couldn't see a way to do it on my own. My greatest barrier still existed: the unknown. Could a private investigator survive in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada? Sure, there were other detectives in Saskatchewan. But from what I could tell, their bread and butter came from rather mundane activities I wasn't interested in. Without going into much detail, at about this time, my uncle and life mentor, passed away and left me with a small inheritance. The money came with a price tag. It was to be used to "Buy a Dream". And the dream I bought, was to leave my career as a City of Saskatoon Police constable and hang my shingle as Russell Quant, PI. I've never looked back.

3. Where's the place you've traveled on business where you wish you could have stayed longer?

France continues to appeal to me. It's odd really, as I don't speak French, so one might think I wouldn't feel all that at home there. Especially in the countryside where English-speaking locals can be more difficult to find. But there is something about the French attitude that I admire. They treat their daily lives the way you and I treat vacations. They nap in the afternoon, they dress up just to go for a walk, they drink wine all the time, dining is an experience, they don't take sex or themselves too seriously, humour is sharp and smart, relaxation is an art.

Also, my friend Anthony has a place in Tuscany that I'd happily return to. Africa changed my way of looking at the world. New York is adrenaline for me. I could go on and on, don't get me started.

4. People are always asking when you're going to get a boyfriend. Do you have commitment issues?

First off, I'd like to lay claim to at least some 'commitment' cred. The people who ask about my boyfriend-less status are generally only looking at my life in the last five years or so. They either don't know, or have forgotten, that I have a couple of long term relationships in my past. Then again, those obviously did not last, and here I am, single (for the most part) for over five years.

So do I currently have commitment issues? Yes. And no. It's not that I don't want to be committed, or feel incapable of it. But for whatever set of circumstances I haven't been looking for a commitment. Part of it is that I feel some compunction to prove, at least to myself, that being in my thirties and single is a viable lifestyle. I really love my life. I love what I do. I love my friends and family (most of the time). I love

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my dogs, my house, my car, my office. My life is very full. But yeah, yeah, I know, it's still empty of the love of a good man.

I know I may sound like I do have commitment issues, and just don't know it (or won't admit it). But deep down, I really feel when the right guy comes around, I'm going to know it and I'm going to go after it with greater vigor, aggression and commitment than anyone has ever seen from me before.

SPOILER ALERT

As you know, I have met someone who I've been spending a lot of time with. It's the longest relationship I've had in some time. Obviously I don't want to get into it here, but I'm still working on where this thing will go. To be honest, I am having issues. Emotions are a complicated thing. And I'm not helping any. I don't know if it will lead to a greater commitment.

5. Where's the place you most hope a case will take you?

You know, I'm kind of hoping that sooner rather than later I'll get to go somewhere just for a vacation. No bad guys/girls. No guns. No tracking down leads. No jumping out of exploding jeeps or ducking punches. I think it would be a delight to go somewhere hot and only worry about my tan line and whether I want a margarita or a nice cold beer.

6. Do you have any regrets about the cases you've handled?

Uh, yeah. There was this young man while I was on a case in New York...

At first it appeared to be suicide. It wasn't. His death wasn't my fault of course. I know that in my head. But in every other way I am filled with regret about what happened to him. I can't help but wonder if I'd stuck a little closer to him, knew more about what was going down, that I couldn't have saved his life. He was a beautiful, charming, intelligent, witty, young man who should not be dead. This is the crap part about what I do.

7. Tell us more about those black pants of yours!

Do you remember Lassie? Or The Littlest Hobo? Or the Olsen twins? Like them, the wonder pants have actually been more than just one specific pair of pants over the years. There have been certain immutable occasions in fashion history that have necessitated my wonder pants be updated. Stuff like wide leg changing to slim fit, flat front in favor of multiple pleats, that kind of thing. Other than that, wonder pants are that one pair of black trousers in your closet that you can always turn to, regardless of the occasion, time of year, or whether or not you've just ingested a bag of Zesty Dorito chips. They always fit, they never wrinkle, never show stains, and they always make your butt look great. Everyone *must* have a pair.

8. Is Saskatoon really as great a place as you make it sound?

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I'm asked this question a lot. I think it's because Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is a place not many people have heard of, and fewer have been to. And, let's face it, it's not L.A., Paris, Toronto or Hong Kong. But why should that mean it's dull and boring? It is an awesome place to live. But so are L.A., Paris, Toronto and Hong Kong. One is not better than the other, just different. And, I'm a full believer that anyplace is a great place to live, as long as you surround yourself with people you love, and/or love to spend time with. Fun is in the air. You just have to breathe it in.

9. What's your favorite food? And how do you stay so slim?

May you live forever with all the riches of life at your feet!

Sometimes I think my obituary will say (along with other more uplifting things): Russell endured a lifelong battle against weight gain.

I am not naturally, genetically, or any other way, predisposed to be thin. My body wants to be bigger than I allow it to be. I've known this since my first, much-beloved, forever-owned, pair of wonder pants (see above) had to be "super-sized" two sizes bigger. This happened when I was about 27, and there was simply nothing I could do any longer to maintain my grade twelve waist size.

So, I work hard at it. I go to the gym and walk the dogs. Now, to be fair to my metabolism, I do cheat—outrageously at times—which brings me to my favorite food: cinnamon buns. My mother makes these incredible cinnamon buns, the kind that are soft all the way through (I don't like crusty buns) and they're slathered in this sauce that is creamy, rather than sticky, and tastes vaguely of butterscotch.

10. Tell us about your dogs—you seem to have a real fondness for them.

Barbra and Brutus are standard schnauzers, pepper and salt in colour. They are brother and sister. I will admit, given my line of work, and the fact that I travel as much as I do, it might seem wiser for me not to have pets. Or to have a cat or fish or some other type of pet that needs less attention than dogs do. But I am fortunate to have people around me who love Barbra and Brutus too, and are willing to watch after them if I'm busy on a case or out of town. And, over the years, the two of them have become quite accustomed to my sometimes odd hours and lifestyle choices.

There are times, its true, when I've been on surveillance for the past fourteen hours, I haven't slept or eaten, I'm exhausted, and I come through the door and the last thing I want to do is take a dog for a walk or fix dinner for anyone other than me. But mostly, there are the times when, even though I live in a large house, all three of us are cuddled up on the same sofa, it's cold outside, we're watching a movie together, there are cinnamon buns nearby, and I could not be more content. There's something about having something living in your home other than you. Yeah, it could be a boyfriend or husband, but for now, well, I love my dogs. Who says I have commitment issues?