

Anthony Bidulka Interview

Sandra: Let's start on background. Where did you grow up?

Anthony: I grew up on a farm. I'm a farm boy. About an hour outside of Saskatoon. Spent all my years there until I went to university in Saskatoon. For me, as I think for a lot of kids from rural areas, you move to the city, you make your first step and then the world is your oyster and you're wanting to see what's out there. I certainly remember thinking I would move someplace bigger eventually and actually Calgary was a place I had seriously considered for a while but once I went to university and did a little traveling... I don't know. On the one hand I couldn't find a place that I didn't like, if that makes any sense, but I didn't come to Calgary and think, "This is it for me, this is just the city that makes sense for me." Winnipeg didn't do that for me, Vancouver didn't do that for me. I loved every place. Then I realized for me maybe it's just the people. That's what has kept me in Saskatoon until now and when you have the good luck or fortune or what have you to do a little traveling, Saskatoon's a great place to call home. As I say in my first book it's safe and it's fun, there's stuff to do, I like it. But it's also nice to get away.

Being on book tour is just great for me because I get to go to all these cities. I was in Vancouver last week for the book and I was joking at that event that everyone should go on book tour because it's like being invited into someone's home in every city in Canada. I get to throw a party, I get to invite people and it's a party where only I get to talk. What's better than that?

Sandra: Exactly!

(5:25) **Anthony:** But I never say never. I never say I'll always live in Saskatoon. But today I'm very content.

Sandra: Well Saskatoon is lovely. And contrary to popular belief Saskatchewan has trees.

Anthony: It certainly does! One of the things I love about traveling around with the book and not just when I'm in the US but even in Canada there's a lot of people who haven't gone to Saskatoon or Saskatchewan. It's kind of one of those fly over provinces. Whereas other people get mad when people say bad things about where they come from or "Why would you want to live in Saskatchewan?" I kind of welcome it, because it's my opportunity to say, "Well, this is what we're about." It's like any other prejudice in the world. It's just ignorance. You talk to people about it and I like that.

And the one thing about being from a city where almost everybody leaves is almost everywhere I go I run into people from Saskatchewan and they love that you're there. I was in Ann Arbor last year doing a reading and at the end of the event everyone had gone and one guy remained and he came up to me. He had a jacket on and he started to open it and I thought, "Uh oh." He had the University of Saskatchewan t-shirt on that

he'd bought 15, 20 years ago when he lived in Saskatoon for six months doing some research project. He was just so excited to have that little touchstone again.

Sandra: That's wild.

Anthony: The world is so small, we're all tied together, one way or the other. I think that's one of the loveliest things that I experience when I travel around. People are very interested in where someone like me is from and part of the reason that I really like the idea that my books are set in Saskatchewan is that it is a place that people don't know about. It was interesting with the third book in my series *TAPAS ON THE RAMBLAS* was the first book in the series that takes place predominantly outside Saskatoon and a lot of my readers didn't like that.

Sandra: Really?

Anthony: I was very surprised. And particularly, the US-based readers. They just see Saskatoon as a bit of an oddity and to them it's like a new, foreign exotic location that they know nothing about. We've all read books and seen movies and TV shows about Seattle and Los Angeles and all these big places. You ain't seen much about Saskatoon.

I think it's part of that sense of place thing, which you probably know about in your writing too, where you develop characters and situations and particularly when you write a series you develop a sense of place. Your readers really attach themselves to the place as well as the characters. I really think most people have attached themselves to Saskatoon and that's where they think that most of Russell's stuff has to happen, even though part of his niche is that he's a traveling detective. Even though he always goes somewhere I think they like that Saskatoon touch base.

It was interesting to see the number of people who said, "Next time he better be back in Saskatoon."

(9:13)

Sandra: Your reader are telling you Saskatoon is as important a character as Russell is. That's a huge compliment, I think.

Anthony: Yeah, you know, now that I've had time to think about it, I think so too. And it made me think a lot about when I write and my process of writing, where Saskatoon fits in and how it comes in, because unlike you I am a plotter and I work from about three different outlines when I actually start writing a book. I know, you're rolling your eyes like, "You're crazy man!"

Sandra: No, it's just, how do you do that?

Anthony: The three outlines... one is basically the whodunit. It's like what's the crime, who committed it, how did they do it, how can Russell figure it out. The other outline is the one that shows me how all the subsidiary characters are going to fit in to the story

somehow. The Russell Quant books have Serena and Anthony and Jared and all these returning characters. That outline basically tells me what's going to happen to them during the course of this book. And then the third outline is the smushing together of all of that. So it was interesting for me to think about where Saskatoon falls into that and when I went back to some of my outlines I really had unconsciously included Saskatoon as a character and I knew places where I really wanted to focus on this particular odd place in Saskatoon. So even though I didn't necessarily know I was doing it I was doing it.

In this fourth book, I was at a book club meeting in Saskatoon and there's a couple scenes in the book that take place in a trailer park within Saskatoon city limits and people were just so excited about it because they had no idea that was there. People have actually gotten in their cars and driven there to take a look because it is kind of an oddity. That's part of the reason I wrote about it. About two years ago I came across it, just by turning the wrong way down a street, I ended up in this kind of No Man's Land, something that looked like nothing else in our city, and there it was and had been for decades. I love discovering stuff like that about your own city.

Sandra: Okay, I have this little theory. It seems to me that a lot of writers end up becoming writers because they never really quite 100% fit in, in the sense that they stand back and they see what's going on around them. They look at things in a different way. I grew up in a small town. You grew up on a farm. How does that play into the mind and the imagination and how you see the world and maybe why you write.
(13:45)

Anthony: It's interesting for me to think about that because before coming to writing full time I worked as a chartered accountant, which is a very social environment in many ways, where you're not standing back and looking at stuff, you're sort of in the trenches. I know that I'm the type of person who does watch things and when the lights go down in the movie theatre part of my thing is to look around and watch the faces. I love doing that because it's one of those moments when people who you don't know are completely honest.

I love types of people. I have a mentor, a woman named Holly and she taught me that there's something interesting about everyone and if you can't find out what it is it's your fault. I remember throwing a party and she lives on the coast but happened to be in Saskatoon and there's maybe fifty people at this party. Afterwards two or three of us sat down and she told me things about friends of mine that I didn't know, and it shocked me. In a span of two, three hours, she had talked to them, she asked in depth questions, she learned who they were and she found out something interesting about all of them. I know I'm still not good at it but it's something that I practice and I try to do because it just enriches my life. People are interesting creatures.

I think that affects my writing a lot.

As for the influence of the farm... I am the youngest of three kids, the only boy, brought up on a farm where I spent the majority of my time until I was 18. Even during the

school year, a bus picked me up at 8 and brought me back by 4. Rarely did I stay after school to take part in community events, hang with friends or pursue sports activities. As a farm kid, I worked. It was part of the life. Every day I was responsible for taking care of the animals, including milking cows, collecting eggs, that sort of thing. In the summer I worked on the field, helped put in or take off the crop, in addition to regular responsibilities. It was a busy life.

So how did this influence my current world? In some ways, as a writer I've continued on in a career with some of the same solitary characteristics of farming. Riding around in a tractor all day is definitely a solitary pursuit that allows for a great deal of quiet thought and creative imagination. To this day I remember sitting in that tractor or corralling cattle and just letting my mind run free to imagine great and wonderful things. As a young person who did not take part in some of life's usual social activities I suppose I felt a little apart, or removed, so when I did have access to these people and activities, instead of simply being a participant, I became more of an observer. Which, in many ways, is what fuels imagination and provides great fodder for writing.

Although I am now a full participant in life, I am still a keen observer of people, places, things, and that leaning helps me create worlds as lived in by my fictional characters.

In a nutshell, my background (a) gave me opportunity to think and be creative rather than be distracted by regular youthful pursuits, (b) taught me to observe, rather than only participate and (c) gave me good forearm muscles from all that cow-milking!
(16:30)

Sandra: There have been a few things that have happened in Saskatoon that have not been so nice in terms of crime. I'm thinking about what happened with the cops that took the aboriginal fellow outside city limits and left him to die. Does stuff like that influence you?

Anthony: It does and doesn't. Saskatoon is ranked, I think number two in terms of murders in Canada.

Sandra: So it would be just behind Edmonton?

Anthony: I'm not sure who's 1 but when you break down those statistics the number of murders or serious crimes that happen aren't a lot numerically but per capita we have our disproportionate share. Certainly our population leans towards aboriginal population and there's a lot of crime amongst aboriginals, the way statistics run, and in our province we're still shifting to that reality and making sure we're doing the right stuff for the aboriginal population, that's really important to me. We need to get smart about that. We have to work together. There's been a lot of very positive things happening in the last six to twelve months in that regard in terms of policing and just community development and I think we're heading in the right direction.

But certainly stuff like that is damaging to a community as a whole overall, to have a situation where you have allegedly two policeman who have taken an aboriginal youth out and dumped him on the edge of the city. It's horrendous.

And then we had the Martinsville daycare scandal. That was probably seven, eight years ago. It ruined families, it damaged reputations. It was basically allegations that were put against two men and a woman who were running a daycare and children started coming forward saying they were being abused and it just exploded. Very simplistically it turned out that most of that was not true. But in the mean time it was horrendous.

So I think how that affects me is that it communicates to me that a mystery novel can be set in a small city, such as mine, because often times when you have that whole Jessica Fletcher thing when she's in Cabot Cove and there's a murder every week, you have to suspend reality to believe that can actually happen. So I was very conscious of that when I began writing this series because I wanted the books to be based in reality, I didn't want people to read them and go, "That could never happen in Saskatoon." It's one of the reasons why I don't even consider my books murder mysteries. I consider them mysteries and the mystery can be something other than a violent death.

I also make sure that communication is made to the reader that in between these great, interesting cases that Russell has he's also having cases like solving the theft of a perogy recipe and someone's lost cat and that's just the reality of what it means to be a detective in that type of city in Canada. To me, that's one of the things that makes him interesting, is that being a detective in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is a much different thing than being a detective in Seattle Washington.

So, I guess long answer to your question, it gave me that sense of knowing that I can write some pretty serious stuff and it can be true. It could happen. Size of city and location don't really mean what people always think they mean. Not that I want to brag about Saskatoon being a murder capital of Canada.

(21:32)

Sandra: I'm so much more interested in going back there.

Anthony: The mean streets of Saskatoon.

Sandra: But that's funny because that goes to the whole issue of prejudices. I mean, there's this whole perception that Canada doesn't have crime. I don't know if you saw this guy on DorothyL who'd gone to Vancouver and was just shocked because he'd seen all the street people and violence, and then he went to Victoria and his faith was restored, and I thought, "Get over yourself." I mean, Vancouver is a city of a few million people. We used to live in New Westminster and if you know New Westminster you know the crime. Drive East Hastings... You won't see that everywhere. You won't see it in Stanley Park, but it's a reality in any city. This new law in Calgary, the public behaviour law, no swearing, no urinating in public. It's a broad law but they're going to

use it to target homeless people. You swear at people on the streets downtown and you're a panhandler, you'll get locked up.

Anthony: Can they really enforce it?

Sandra: I don't think it's going to work.

Anthony: I guess it gives them that out, if someone is having problems with a panhandler they can call the cops and cops can actually do something.

Sandra: Thing is, they can do something anyways. There's loitering laws. I think it's a backwards band-aid. It doesn't address the root issue, which is that we have a homeless population. We have people who need someplace to go. Everybody says, "Well why don't they go get a job?" You can't get a job if you don't have an address, if you can't wear decent clothes, if you can't have a shower. At some point in time people actually have to give these people a start.

There's a real misconception about Canada.

Anthony: I think that's why we need to keep on writing about it and showing different versions of it, and creating worlds like the Russell Quant world that a lot of people haven't seen, because there is a lot of pressure from publishers, editors and agents, saying to Canadian writers I know, "You do great work but the next book, set it in the US."

Sandra: My first book is set in the US.

Anthony: Is it? See, that hurts me.

Sandra: It hurt me too.

Anthony: Did you do that because you knew the setting? Did you feel you needed to have it set in the US to help sales?

Sandra: I wasn't happy it sold first. I wasn't even marketing it. I was working on something set in Canada I really believed in, and I was getting high level rejections in the UK. It was enough to tempt people but it was always the Canada issue. Nobody came back and said I couldn't write, it was always that it was in Canada. It just killed me. My heart is more in writing about Canada. I've got great blurbs, not one American author who's read it has come up with an issue about the setting, including one who lives in Connecticut, but I'm sure there's going to be someone who raises an issue once the book is out. It isn't that I'm opposed to setting my work in the US, I just don't want to have to.

Anthony: That's the thing. I don't think there's anything wrong about a Canadian writer writing with a US setting but you hit it right on the nose. I don't want to have to.

(32:49 – cut out portion to 48:55)

Sandra: Now, you have a really weird background.

Anthony: It is a really weird background.

Sandra: Does it help you with your writing?

Anthony: I think yes, absolutely, immensely. Now I can look back at all of those years with some sense of being able to stand back and study it, analyze it, think what was I doing and why was I taking those steps, and I have so much admiration for young people who come out of high school and they want to be an artist or they want to be a dancer or they want to be a writer and they do that. I think that's just so amazing. I was less brave as a young man and I came from a family where education and post secondary education was a big deal and it was just known that if you left the farm, if you weren't going to be a farmer, then you went to university.

I was the only son of an only son so the pressure was "There's a farm here" and that was the last thing on my mind so I headed to university as quickly as I could. I think partially to escape being a farmer. My dad was a great man and once I made that decision he never once made me feel guilty about that because he always felt education was very important and he had been a teacher and a reflexologist at one point. He had a varied background as well.

So I think when I first headed to university it was just because I could and it was what you did and it was difficult for me because I came through very very small schools and I was used to getting very high marks with very little effort and then moved to what was at that point in my life the big city and went to university and not many people at that point came from where I did so I didn't know a soul. So I was by myself in a city I did not know and in this university environment and I originally wanted to become an optometrist and that was my dream. (Laughs)

Sandra: (Laughs) You're weird!

Anthony: Yeah! So I think I thought that seemed like a good job, a clean job, very different from farming, I understand they (optometrists) made decent money, you're in an office, there you go, what a great career. But I very quickly recognized that sciences were not my thing.

Sandra: Hence the Bachelor of Arts degree.

Anthony: Exactly. Which is what I did. I got my BA and of course you can do nothing with a BA, so then what do you do? And back in those dark ages you could actually teach with a teaching certificate, you didn't even have to get a degree. So to me that was a quick fix. My dad had been a teacher and my brother-in-law was a teacher and I thought, "I'll be a teacher." So I went back for that extra year after the BA and I was sent to a very very small town to do my practical teaching and had some great

experiences and some bad experiences but probably the best thing that I learned from that was that I couldn't teach young children. It wasn't good for me, it wasn't good for them. Sometimes I wonder, I had an opportunity to teach grades 6,7,8 and I love the age because you can discuss things, their minds are just at that point where stuff is happening. I think I would have enjoyed that a lot more but my training was in elementary and I taught a grade 2 and 3 split and another group of people I have a lot of respect for are teachers. It's hard work.

So I went through all of that, then I started realizing, "Well, you know, perhaps instead of spending thousands of dollars every year educating myself in a direction that I'm not sure I want to go in, I need to experience more about life. And that's when I did a lot of the other things in my bio, in terms of working in a uranium mine, I bartended and waited tables and it really was a wonderful part of my life. I learned so much, I met so many people, I experienced so many different things. You know, for a while it was a life I would never think of choosing today, but at one point I remember working three jobs in a row every day, and the last one was a bartending job that ended at 2 o'clock and by 2:30 I had my nighttime friends and we would go out to after hours clubs and the next day I'd do the whole thing over again. It was exciting and it was fun and I remember so much about those years and I think a lot of those things inspire me even today. I think I can probably say that about every career or mini career that I've had. I don't regret one of them. They weren't all great, they weren't all inspiring to me, but they all taught me something and there is at least one person from every one of those lives that I still have in my life today. When I have parties there's such a wide range of people and backgrounds and I consider myself lucky. They colour my life and I gain so much from them.

(55:09)

Sandra: I prefer to keep all my groups separate.

Anthony: Well sometimes they don't mix very well, but that's the fun part. Sitting back and doing the writer thing and seeing what happens.

It definitely all affects me today. What I'm doing today, I feel the most comfortable in my skin, ever. And sometimes I think all the things that I did and all the pathways I went, it was all meant to be, leading me here on a rather circuitous route. Today I feel a passion for what I do that I didn't feel before. (56:47)

Sandra: What prompted you to start writing? When did that start for you?

Anthony: It started as soon as I could put pen to paper. I was born a writer. People are born a lot of things and this is one of the things I was born as. I remember as a young boy, and I had nieces and nephews that were only about maybe 6, 7 years younger than I was and I would write children's stories for them and draw the pictures and there was this whole series, I actually wrote my first series, about this group of woodland creatures who actually had adventures. So every Christmas and Easter they'd come to the house and that was their big treat. Eventually one evening I'd take them all into a little room and I'd read them the story and show them the pictures I drew

and to this day they talk about those stories and actually two or three Christmases ago I replicated one and gave it to one of my nieces so she could start reading it to her children, so that was a lovely moment for me and her and it was a nice tie for me, so many years later, to have something that I wrote when I was twelve.

Sandra: Most of us wouldn't let that out.

Anthony: Yeah, well (laughs). That's where it began. There were many stretches where I didn't write at all but I was a big journaler in my early twenties, in particular when we're in the twenties we're all going through stress and drama and all this stuff. There's nothing better than writing it down.

Sandra: And obsessing about it more.

Anthony: Exactly. So I went through all of that and it's interesting, I was looking at those again some time back and I thought, "Why did I stop doing this?" and I stopped doing it when I met my current partner. It was all because life was great now. There's nothing left to really stress about.

Sandra: Writing is therapy.

Anthony: Absolutely. So it did its job for me in that regard. I also remember as a young kid I used to take TV shows that I liked and then I'd go into my room and on a typewriter I'd write out that script, adding all my own embellishments, describing what people wore and what the place looked like and smelled like and all that sort of stuff. That was my first real practice at writing and they were usually mystery shows. So that could be my first mystery writing.

But I went many years without doing much in the creative writing field. As a teacher I wrote a lot. For my BA, as a chartered accountant I wrote a lot of reports. In that career, which was the most recent, before becoming a writer full-time... That was a decade long career and that was a serious professional world that I was in and I was working 50, 60, 70 hours a week sometimes and to come home and get in front of a computer again and write just wasn't going to happen.

What brought me to this, where I am today, is that every year... I'm a pretty goal-oriented person. And every year my spouse and I get together on a beach somewhere in January and talk about what the last twelve months were like and what the next twelve months should be like and I was like a broken record, I was always saying the same thing. This year I've got to write. It was bubbling up inside me. I just knew that that was my thing. It just felt like I was destined to do this. And you know, years had passed by and I still had this career and I was building this career and it had gotten to the point where I needed to make another step in my career. I needed to become a partner, or not.

I looked around at that point and many of my colleagues and friends were entering partnerships and I looked at their life and thought, "Yes, I could do that and I could be good at it" but there was no passion. I liked what I did, I was good at it, but there wasn't any passion. I was getting close to one of those ages in life when you look at things a little more seriously and I said this many times, I didn't want to be 85 and look back and be disappointed in myself that I didn't try.

So, when that hit my brain, it was a pretty slippery slope for me and I decided it was time and I had to do it and it happened pretty quickly after that and mostly, as with a lot of big things in life, I had great support around me. Namely a great spouse who said (to) go for it. And a boss who, when I went to tell her of my decision, she just said, "You know, when and if you ever want to come back I'll hire you." How great is that? You always knew you had that to fall back on. And that's, with good strong family and friends around me, is what made it possible for me to do this. It boosted my confidence to an extent where I could feel so good about doing it and a lot of the normal stressors weren't there.

In my view of success with writing is just doing it. As I mentioned before I'm a pretty success oriented guy and I didn't go into this as a fool. I knew the chances of becoming published are low. They just are. It's the nature of the beast. But I couldn't imagine myself going into something and not being successful. So I thought, "Well how can I enter this career and just think I can't be successful?" Then I thought, "Tony, that's ridiculous. Of course you can be successful, you just need to define it the right way." So to me, my first definition of success was when there comes a day that I get up in the morning and instead of putting on a suit and packing my briefcase and going downtown to my high rise office, instead I put on my jeans and a t-shirt, go downstairs to my home office and my job for that day is to write. So on day one I was a successful writer. It was just the best feeling ever.

And my career since then... It's about seven years I've been doing this full-time...has been a series of redefining goals and redefining success, reaching those goals and always remembering to celebrate each success, no matter how small they are.

Every time I get a great little blurb or a review somewhere, you know, I'll have a glass of wine. (Laughs) Nothing's too small to celebrate.

Sandra: Damn. I haven't done that.

Anthony: You've got to do it. I believe in that very very strongly and especially in a career like this, sometimes it's very solitary, and we need to be cognizant of the fact that we're not in a business filled with people who come over and clap you on the back and give promotions or a new title on your business card.

Sandra: We don't get the staff Christmas party.

Anthony: Exactly. Or if we do, it's a pretty quiet affair. Ends early.

Sandra: No great conversationalists.

Anthony: So I think that's very very important and just making sure that there's things that you can succeed at. With every book I have a new goal about what I want to achieve and there's just a million little touch base points where I go, "I did that" and celebrate. Some of it is just little mental games that you play with yourself but why not? And at the end of it all, how lucky am I to write?

It's amazing.

Sandra: I'm a bit of a workaholic. What about you?

Anthony: I'm a balance guy.

Sandra: I could learn from you.

Anthony: I don't know about that. I used to be much more of a workaholic, particularly when I was a CA. Again, I think it comes back to being a goal oriented person, there's things I needed to do to accomplish what I needed to do in that career. In this career, I think part and parcel with deciding to do it was the fact that I wanted more balance in my life and I wanted more time to travel and spend time with my spouse and to enjoy the world and the things that we do and we talk about retirement. My spouse is a financial planner, so we talk about stuff like this and we've talked about the cost of rushing headlong to some predetermined age like 65 when we say, "Now that's over and we can sit back and relax." We wonder about the concept of pulling some of those retirement years into today and perhaps instead of taking three weeks of holidays a year how about we take seven weeks of holidays? Or every second year maybe we take a two month sabbatical and lets go live in the south of France. Or every five years just nip off to Greece for a month and live there and eat bread and drink wine and see what that's like. There's something very lovely about that and we've experimented, certainly not to that extent, but we spent a good part of September in France. Instead of doing the touring around that we often do we rented a little place in a very small, little town and just lived. Went to the bakery and made our meals. There was something really marvelous about it and boy could I write there. I rarely even take a computer when I go on what I call vacation, I will hand write stuff, especially if I think it's something that might make it into a book or I tend to journal our adventures every day or stuff like that, or what the market smelled like.

But this time I actually took my computer because it was getting close to release time and there were a lot of decisions that needed to be made so I needed to be in touch email wise and I found a new way of writing which is kind of neat after seven years. To me, I write the same way every day, pretty much, but there, one afternoon I was on my own so I went into this room that we rarely used and I threw open the windows on one side and the shutters on the (other) side and there was a beautiful view of hillside with a vineyard and there was a nice gentle wind blowing in and I got a glass of wine. I had

such a lovely time writing and it was something new that I'm working on. And after I did the first day I thought, "When I go back and read this it's going to be drunken stream of consciousness stuff that doesn't make any sense" but it was darn good. And I probably did that three or four times over the course of the time that we were there so that was kind of exciting to do.

For me, although sometimes in some ways I think I work all the time, in that I'm observing things and it could be I'll be writing something in a year from now and I'll remember how your hair sits on your shoulder and that will just come to me and it will become part of a character.

When I'm actually in the process of actually writing a book, my typical day is I'll be at the computer by 7 am and write through to about 2 pm. And then I'm pretty much done creatively by that point and then I do other stuff that needs to be done. So generally that's my day but if it's the time when I'm actually creating the book if it's after 2 o'clock I think I shut my brain down for a few hours and don't even think about it, but by the time evening rolls around I'm very busily thinking in my head about what I'm going to be writing tomorrow, how I want to arrange things, where I'm going to start. When 7 am comes the next day I'm not going, "Hmmm." I'm just going. In that way maybe I don't have whole balance, but I try to make time for family, friends, community stuff. I really believe in giving back to communities. I sit on boards, do committee work, that type of stuff. I have a long way to go, to know how to do this well. But it's what I'm trying to do.

Sandra: Now, this is your fourth novel and you've got exciting TV prospects in the works. What does that feel like?

(Reworded to remove Bloody Words stuff)

Anthony: It's wonderful to have a newbie Saskatchewan writer with a gay genre book in that position. That speaks so highly for literature in this country.

Sandra: Since you opened the door, how hard is it for you, with a gay genre book? Do you find it more challenging?

Anthony: In terms of sales, or...?

Sandra: Encountering prejudice, sales, any aspect.

Anthony: I've always approached that expecting acceptance and if anything else happens then I'll deal with it, because you have to, and it's really held me in good stead over the years. Certainly, from my perspective when I first conceptualized the series and thought that it had to be something I'm interested in writing, and also, hopefully have people interested in reading it, I was very conscious of the fact that I wanted to do something different. And I really did the old standby, write what you know. I knew about mysteries because I've loved them in every format all my life and I knew about Saskatchewan and I knew about what it means to be a gay person. I know about Canada, I know about traveling, I smushed them all together.

What I hope I'm doing is giving people a character and a world that they maybe haven't met before and that that is what's going to be interesting to them to have all of those odd pieces put together into one book.

And thus far I think I've been lucky in finding a readership who does appreciate that. It's great for someone like me to have books optioned and this film company I'm working with, they seem to be very intent on keeping the real bone structure. They want, if it's going to be a TV series, to base it in Saskatchewan and they want that gay hero to be there. And wouldn't it be cool for good, ol' Canada to have a TV series with a Canadian prairies gay detective? Good on us.

Sandra: Yeah, we can come here and knock things about Saskatchewan fly-over and all that, but obviously the mentality here is a bit different than it is elsewhere, which is nice.

Anthony: I think it can be a curiosity. When I read I love nothing better than to find out stuff I didn't know before and to meet people and characters I didn't know before. To me that's one of the great things about reading, is you get to experience what you don't get to experience when you wake up in the morning and go to our offices every day or whatever we do.

I sometimes wonder, and I've put some thought about this, and when people come into bookstores and look at one of my books, are they making that decision to read it or not based on the fact that it's a gay protagonist. Is that discrimination or is that just lack of interest? I know a lot of gay writers who think that's pure discrimination and you know, it could be either. All that I'm interested in is having people willing to ask questions and if they think that they're not going to like it, lets talk about it.

I've done book clubs, some of my best experiences I've walked into rooms where the person who selected my book did so without knowing how the other members were going to react to it and they read it, and some are uncomfortable with it. I remember this one particular book group and walking in, I could feel this wall of resistance. I took a deep breath and I thought, "Okay, that's what this is going to be, and lets just put it on the table." When I left that evening I'm not saying that everyone was going to wear ruby red slippers but they had taken a big step towards understanding and with anything like that there needs to be communication and I'm very happy to talk about it and listen to why it bothers people.

Often times they surprise me, about what bugs them. Often it has nothing to do with the gay content whatsoever. My very first book there was a scene that revolved around gay people and the church and the church aspect bothered more people and the fact that it involved a Catholic priest. It had nothing really to do with the gay aspect. That was really my discrimination, thinking, "Okay, you're anti-gay" but instead they just didn't like that combination I put together in that book, so I learn a lot as well.

I think there are hurdles, there are challenges, but that's what makes this interesting. I would rather have this than have written a boring book.

(1:25)

Sandra: Okay, before we wrap this up, what's next for you? What are you working on?