

Master of Ceremonies

Anthony Bidulka



By Caro Soles

Touring Texas with Tony

It all started in 2006 in New Orleans. In a bar. On Bourbon Street. Honestly.

I hadn't met Tony before, though I felt that I knew him. We had corresponded and were often the lone Canadians on the same on-line list-serves. Now we were at the Saints and Sinners Literary Festival, both of us slated to appear on the mystery panel. But that wasn't until Sunday, and this was Friday night. I had Tony to myself for at least half an hour and I intended to make the most of it.

So far I knew that Tony was friendly, helpful, a very good writer who had won a Lambda Literary Award, devastatingly good looking and was from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I also knew that he had been busy doing publicity for his latest Russell Quant novel *Tapas on*

the Ramblas, and I had been seeing his name everywhere, it seemed. Since my new mystery *Drag Queen in the Court of Death* would be out in 2007, Tony looked a good person to ask for advice about what were the best places to tour, the welcoming bookstores, the really good shopping.

"Someone told me Texas was good place to start," I said. "Say a week or two before this conference, so I could end up here. What do you think?"

"I'd love to do Texas," Tony said, a dreamy look in his dreamy eyes. "Could I come too?"

"Let's do Texas together!" I cried, raising my Hurricane in a toast.

And so it was decided as we weaved our way down Bourbon Street to our dinner party, Tony clutching a beautifully wrapped and no doubt tasteful host gift.

Later on, we met at various conventions, including Bloody Words, and talked more about this idea. We had the same publicist so a lively three way correspondence was soon set up, Tony contributing as many ideas as the publicist. Never having set up a book tour in such an organized way, I just sat back and watched it all, mesmerized. And then one day in April 2007, I got off a plane in Dallas, Texas, took a taxi to the Cathedral of Hope where we would do two readings, and met Tony again.

"Where is your luggage?" was the first thing he said, sweeping out the door to greet me.

"Right here." I pointed to my small carry-on case on wheels.

He stared at it incredulously. "That's it? I have two large suitcases, and they're positively bulging!"

I began to regret having been taught by my mother many years ago that travelling light was the only way to go. As the tour progressed, I saw the logic of the Tony system, as night after night he appeared in arresting outfits in pristine condition and I began to feel more and more rumpled and grumpy. My mother, I recalled, had never gone on a book tour with a gay man.

What else did I learn about Tony on the trip? His manners are impeccable. Although always ready to talk about his own series, he never once forgot to include me in the conversation. He introduced me to his friends and brought me along on dinner

parties. Even though he must have been tired at times, I never saw him lose his temper. And he loves grand old hotels.

What's new with our witty MC? In April this year he eloped with his long time companion Herb, got married and ran off to Paris, (where they stayed at the Georges V, of course) then on to Dubai, Egypt, Jordan and other exotic spots. Best wishes to you both!

In May Tony was back in New Orleans, hosting his own dinner party to raise funds for the NO/AIDS task force. I hope someone thought to bring him a tasteful host gift!

Life is short,
But it can be wide.



The Russell Quant Mysteries

- Amuse Bouche (2003)
- Flight of Aquavit (2004)
- Tapas on the Ramblas (2005)
- Stain of the Berry (2006)
- Sundowner Ubuntu (2007)

From Anthony Bidulka's web site,
www.anthonymbidulka.com:

One of my favourite sayings is "Life is short, but it can be wide". I try to remember to do whatever I can to make my life wide, wide with people and places and extraordinary experiences. And I am grateful for every second of it so far and every second of it yet to come.

One senses that this is the author's most personal novel to date. Presumably much of what happens to Russell in Africa must have happened to the writer, whose safari photograph appears on the back cover. But the experience has been transformed via Russell's experiences into something more universal.

Though the novel stands completely on its own, readers who have followed the series will encounter old acquaintances. Russell's wonderful mother shows up briefly. His friends Jared and Anthony are wrestling with Jared's depression subsequent to the attack (in the previous novel) on his model face. The constable with whom Russell always spars continues his customary role. Russell makes a breakthrough in his

understanding of the mysterious Sereena. And his relationship with Alex Canyon, with whom he began an affair in the previous novel, moves to a new level. These returning characters make only cameo appearances, but they seem more integral to Russell's life as that life becomes more integrated. Upon finishing the novel, the reader might wish to return to the comical opening scenes. One can find all kinds of playful symbolic meanings in Russell's encounter with "Mr. Crow"

and his near asphyxiation. Despite all the darkness in the novel, this is the author's most joyful to date. It is also his finest, a work that radiates a deep sense of humanity and wisdom.

- *Reviewing the Evidence*

