

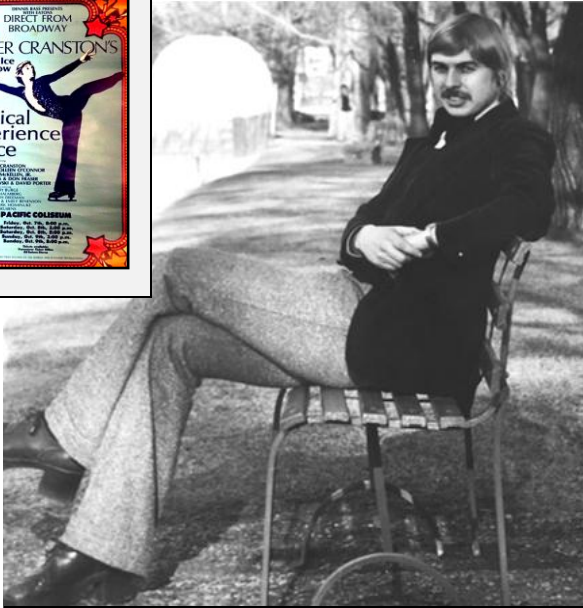
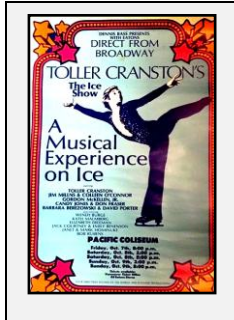


“Bob’s Interview”

By Crime Writers of Canada Associate Bob Harris



*** Published by Winona Kent**—Crime Writers of Canada 2023 Vice Chair and BC/Yukon Representative—in her CWC Regional Newsletter, April 2023 edition.



In 1977, I toured with the iconic figure skater Toller Cranston—a sharp dressed man in black on skates—and his highly acclaimed “The Ice Show” as an Executive Producer and Tour Manager of his Canadian tour. Toller and his cast delivered amazing performances and set box office records for an ice show.

Bob Harris is a Vancouver writer, book promoter and publicist.

This month’s interview is with Calgary crime mystery author **J.E. (Jayne) Barnard.**

It was in Calgary where I met another sharp dressed man in black. He came from the dark side of money. He had silver hair, sported a Florida suntan and was smoking a fat Cuban cigar. He wore a fedora hat, horn-rimmed glasses, a fine tailored Italian suit and spit-shined Oxfords.

He was backstage in the arena—where he wasn’t authorized to be—and there to collect \$28,000 US from someone with the show. I knew who it was.

No, Martino wasn’t the guy who broke legs. He was the negotiator. The professional debt collector for The Outfit and mega hotels from the streets of neon. He possessed a grandfather’s smile and an iron-fisted handshake. He said he came to Canada to do a favour for LA people. **I’ve never forgotten him or the grip of a mob guy.**

“Bob Harris’s comprehensive interview style takes writers deep, drawing readers into hidden webs of connection between the published books and the authors’ complex inner lives.” J.E. (Jayne) Barnard



J.E. (Jayne) Barnard

Jayne is Canadian, raised on Air Force bases in Europe and North America. She is a CWC award-winning author who has been published in short fiction, scripts, novels, and non-fiction since 1990.



* Bob Harris, CWC Associate, in conversation with J.E. (Jayne) Barnard:

Hello Jayne, thank you for making time for me.

I would like to acknowledge you as the second author to respond to the announcement from CWC Executive Director Alison Bruce that I am now interviewing authors from across Canada for postings on the newly created "Bob's Interviews" category in the Author Interviews section of CWC's website.

As you know, being a reader of the monthly CWC Regional Newsletter produced by Winona Kent – the BC/Yukon Regional Representative and CWC Vice Chair – my opportunity to "go national" stemmed from a year of my author interviews which she published in my "Bob's Notes" column.

While undertaking research for your interview, I was intrigued by your publishing diversity and educational background.

You've been published in short fiction, scripts, novels, and non-fiction for over three decades culminating in an impressive list of awards and finalist acknowledgements.

Let's begin with you giving us a snapshot of your academic accomplishments. And, what motivated you to acquire a BA in Theatre?

While working as a bookkeeper, way back in the days of huge paper-bound ledger books, I went to university to study Child Psychology. I started part-time, but to keep myself employable, I went after Business Administration and Human Resource Development certificates in alternate semesters. Except I was already, for fun, acting in community theatre, doing a couple of plays a year.

A friend and I, also for fun, began a summer theatre company whose chief goal was to make reading fiction seem so much fun that little kids would leap at the chance to learn to read for themselves. When my Psychology degree required a Fine Arts class, I took first-year Theatre. It was so much fun that I stayed in school an extra 2.5 years to finish the Theatre degree too.

* * *

The Writer and Reader

When did you realize that writing was your destiny?

Third grade. Our teacher started a film that showed a kid walking toward an old, weed-wrapped barn and told us to write half a page about what they would find inside. It was my first taste of writing suspense and I kept at it long after the allotted class time. My teacher, bless her, let me take the story home to work on it for the rest of the week. I was already reading my dad's very old and tattered Enid Blyton kids' adventure books, but when my first Trixie Belden book landed in my lap the next year, my crime writing destiny was revealed. It was a long, slow learning curve, as I didn't get a crime story sold until thirty years later.

What genres have you pursued? What is your preference?

I'm a magpie. I'd had some prairie history articles published but my first fiction award was for a children's story about a princess and a dragon. I was also passionate about using performance to educate about social issues, so my next project was a short film about intimate partner violence being transmitted to the next generation through their experiences in abusive homes.

*A story set in Saskatchewan history got me to the Great Canadian Story shortlist, and then one rooted in BC history followed a few years later. That history was the attempted murder of a Victoria police sergeant, right in the police station, in broad daylight. By then I was entirely hooked on crime fiction again. Apart from a few detours into speculative fiction and Steampunk (especially *The Maddie Hatter Adventures*, which were twice finalists for the Prix Aurora and won the Alberta Book of the Year).*

As with that earlier film, my crime fiction tends to highlight societal and family problems, and more recently themes of disability and equity.

Who and what are your influences and why? And mentors?

Ooh, mentors! There were many. My first writing encouragement came from Saskatchewan author Sharon Butala, who came to my small rural library with her Governor General finalist book, 'Perfection of the Morning.' She talked to me about writing, loaned me a short story anthology, and later gave feedback on a short story.

Gail Bowen led a week-long writers retreat at St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster SK and later critiqued an opening chapter for me. When I became a finalist

for the Crime Writers of Canada Best Unpublished award, previous winner Phyllis Smallman cheered me on.

At Bloody Words 2011 in Victoria, notable crime writing dames Barbara Fradkin, Mary Jane Maffini, and Robin Harlick plied me with wine and hilarious wisdom about dealing with publishers and readers. Barbara, and later Lou Allin, cast eyes over the opening chapters of the novel that later—thanks to their invaluable comments—won me the Dundurn Unhanged Arthur and a contract with Dundurn Press. They showed me the power of an encouraging word or wise feedback, and I’ve tried to pay it forward ever since.

Please describe a typical week in your writing life.

Sunday nights I watch British crime shows for a solid refresher on tight plots, rising tension, and character introduction and development. Monday and Wednesday I answer emails and write short stories, guest blogs, and articles, or work on manuscript evaluations. Tuesday and Friday I plot, research, or write scenes for my current novel, or edit the novel that’s been crawling toward publication since the first year of the pandemic. Thursdays are for volunteer gigs with my writing organizations.

I do my best writing between midnight and 4 a.m. I can’t not write. If I stop for more than a week, my brain persists in turning every headline into a potential mystery and any chance-viewed setting into a place to hide (or discover) a corpse.

As a reader, what keeps you burning the midnight oil?

Interesting characters trying hard to face their problems head on. Plots that twist on a dime to send us scrambling in a whole different direction. I still love a rollicking kids’ adventure. And I’ve been known to root for a really intriguing or humorous villain.

Do you have an ideal reading experience? (Please describe in terms of when, where, what, how and purpose).

I’ll read anywhere, any time. But ideal? A shady patio, a water view, a comfy chaise, a light blanket, and a cat wandering among the flowers. That almost describes both my Calgary patio and my deck in Comox except neither has a water view. And one has a pair of raccoons instead of a cat.

What books have you read recently? (What format--print, e-book)? **Do you listen to audio books? How do you organize your book library?**

My library organization is by shelf and stack: the former for books I've long ago read and decided to give permanent home to (non-fiction by subject, fiction loosely by genre), and the latter according to its purpose. I have a stack of incoming library books and outgoing ones, same for review books and awards juries, one in the bedroom for curated calm reading and one by the couch and one in the bay window. My e-reader also plays audiobooks and if it's not beside me in the house it's with me in the car.

As for what I've read recently, it's mostly been for awards juries or advance reviews, which I can't discuss publicly until the various awards are announced or the books are in pre-release publicity. Some of those are fabulous, sure to delight readers for years to come. For bedtime relaxation I'm rereading the Brother Cadfael medieval mysteries by Ellis Peters, and in audio a delightful fantasy novel titled STUFF AND NONSENSE by Andrew Seiple (narrated by Tim Gerrard Reynolds) about a questing teddy bear who forms an uneasy alliance with the household cat to battle rats and protect their human girl in the face of growing peril.

In 2020, you launched your "sensitivity reading for disabled /chronically ill characters". Please give me a quick overview of what that involves.

Disabilities come in a vast range of causes and impacts. Each additional health challenge adds a new daily burden of management tasks and energy limits, some of which overlap with other conditions and others that are unique to that subgroup. Disability sensitivity feedback therefore requires someone familiar with the same conditions the character faces, both as physical and external experiences and as emotional/psychological internal thoughts, feelings, and traumas.

My chronic illness life extends back more than thirty years. I rely on helpers for many aspects of daily life and have been essentially trapped in my own home, even my own bedroom, for years on end. I have a lot of experience with the isolation of that life: not only the physical decay but its thoughts and feelings, and the stigmatizing treatment faced in public as well as in medical offices. So that's my specialty.

I can also educate authors on basic adult wheelchair etiquette and common obstacles users encounter, as well as the hassles of being tied to supplemental oxygen (and what it feels like to be deprived of it!). Don't ask me to sensitivity read your manuscript about a mentally ill teenager, though. Yes, they might be equally disabled, but no, I have no relevant experience of their experiences internally or externally to help breathe truth into your portrayal of such a character. If I am writing a character outside my own experience, I hire a suitable disability sensitivity reader for that.

* * *

The Falls Mysteries

(Women's Wilderness Suspense)

Your debut novel, *When the Flood Falls*, won the Crime Writers of Canada Award of Excellence for "Best Unpublished First Crime Novel" in 2016. It was published in 2018 by Toronto's Dundurn Press.

What creative spark ignited you to write this story?

Partly the spark came from my high school best pal leaving the RCMP. She applied for the Mounties before leaving high school, got accepted halfway through university, and then came out of the force 8 years later, a very much more hardened and guarded person than the lively girl who went into training. The character of Lacey is loosely based on her: traumatized by on-the-job experiences and lack of support from a husband she had quickly outranked, needing support from an old friend to get her feet under her in this isolating civilian world she didn't expect to return to for decades.

I was halfway through the first draft when I had a severe relapse. For five years I couldn't reliably write a two-line email. When I came creeping back toward the world, it was with the understanding that I might only get one book finished before the illness swept me under again. I wanted the world to see the non-life that I and half a million other Canadians with ME/CFS were forced into, so I added the character of Jan. She, like me, spent a lot of time looking out the window as the neighbours came and went, got married and had kids and argued and divorced. She's the ideal sidekick for a trained investigator who has only recently moved into the neighbourhood.

How long did it take to complete the book from concept to competition submission to final publication by Dundurn?

Started in 2005, stopped from 2006 to 2010, finished in 2013, won the Unhanged Arthur in 2016, was out in print and ebook in 2018, and in audiobook in 2020. So fifteen years. Another 'overnight sensation'.

* * *

The Editor and Literary Jurist

What motivates you to keep working with writers as a mentor and a manuscript editor?

Paying it forward for the great crime writing women who mentored me. As for editing, well, I've learned a lot over the years, had some really good edits and some that crushed my spirit entirely. As much as possible I want to encourage and validate newer authors, to make their learning curve a little faster and less painful than mine was.

What is your opinion of adding a prologue in a novel? First, from an author's perspective. Second, from an editor's perspective.

Prologues get a bad rap. A good one sets up not only the crime to come but also the opening mood. It primes the reader to pay attention to certain elements or themes. Sadly, many prologues run too long, fail to set the mood for the reader, and/or give away too much in their effort to be exciting. As an author I love writing them. As an editor I am ruthless with them (in a kind and friendly and non-shaming way).

Given that editors have their own style and method of application, I am curious how you, as an editor, jurist, and award-winning author, find common ground for edit collaboration of your manuscript with a publishing house editor. Kindly enlighten me.

Ever hear the expression 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'? It's the same with edits.

When I'm working for a client privately, they're at liberty to disagree or entirely disregard my suggestions for improvements. It's their book. When the publisher is paying my editor—after they've paid me—the book, this version of it, belongs to them. I may register disagreement and propose alternate solutions to the problem identified (which, frankly, they usually accept), but if the editor insists on having it their way, I'll do it to the best of my ability. Partly because I accept that I may be too close to the work to be the best judge of its impact on a fresh reader and partly, well...I've written over a million words, had around half a million published, and if I live long enough I'll write a million more. Why get my ego in a knot over a few hundred words here or there?

Please share some background of your experience as a competition jurist.

Let's see... Based on having won a Saskatchewan Writers Guild award back in the 1990s, I started off judging short crime story contests in Calgary. Then I sat on on the Children's/YA jury for the old Arthur Ellis Awards. After my big relapse I spent a handful of Februaries reading for the Derringers and, as my overall health improved, used the spare energy to volunteer for the Crime Writers of Canada Awards again.

After my back-to-back shortlistings for the Prix Aurora for Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy, I got asked to be a juror for some local SFF. As a previous winner of the BPAA Alberta Book of the Year, I was invited onto a jury for those awards, kind of closing that loop, and then for the Writers Guild of Alberta, in categories ranging from Children's to Book of the Year to published scripts to, most recently, the inaugural Alberta Crime Fiction Award.

One intense jury job was matching emerging authors with their best possible mentors for a 3-month mentorship; four times as many mentees applied as we had mentors for, and a lot of winnowing was needed. I haven't yet read for the Debut Dagger in London although one of my early manuscripts was tagged as the year's Highly Recommended (2nd place). If I got invited to that jury, it would be really cool, and close another circle.

Every jury teaches me something new about the process, about collaborative evaluations, about writing that knocks your socks off even if it's something you wouldn't have picked up for pleasure. I'm midway through a two-year stint as the jury selection chair for the Crime Writers of Canada Awards, and would be happy to hear from any readers, writers, reviewers, booksellers, librarians, or publishing industry people who'd like to put their names forward as jurors for the 2024 awards.

As a jurist, what key elements must be present to hook you in the first 5 pages of a mystery or thriller novel?

- *An engaging protagonist (not necessarily a likeable one)*
- *A compelling story question (not necessarily a murder)*
- *A well-realized setting that the protagonist interacts with*
- *Competent writing that follows basic rules or breaks them creatively*
- *VOICE. Agents & editors will be willing to work with you over a few flaws if the VOICE grabs them*

What are the 3 most important tips you can offer a writer on submissions for competition?

- *Know the genre/subgenre's rules and tropes before you break them*
- *Don't try to second-guess the jury through copying past winners. Most juries change members every year, bringing different preferences and experiences to the process. Just write your best book.*
- *Your opening pages may be the only part a jury sees, at least in the first round. Make every word earn its place in this prime real estate by doing double or triple duty as description/mood-setting/character introduction/plot incitement.*

* * *

In addition to membership in Crime Writers of Canada, you have been active in several writer organizations including Sisters in Crime – Canada West, Women's Fiction Writers Association, and Calgary Crime Writers to name just a few.

How have they benefitted your career as a writer and editor?

These groups and the programs they offered significantly shortened my learning curve about the basics of writing fiction in general, and crime fiction in particular. They introduced me to learning buddies, critique partners, and mentors. They provided essential volunteer opportunities that taught me a lot.

Please share a few "light bulb" moments you have experienced as a writer and editor.

Every edit I do is an opportunity to learn something new.

Often it's identifying what not to do—an ever-growing list of ways that don't work for the reader even if they seem ideal to the author—but sometimes it's a fresh way to solve a common writing problem, such as how to describe a point of view character for the reader without resorting to the much-overdone 'mirror scene'. The most recent twist was a character manipulating their own image for their social media. The reader received not only the character's basic description to form their mental picture but also learned of the need to alter it, with a clear hint of danger if the character were recognized. Younger writers are much more fluid with writing tech than writers of my generation.

What major milestones and accomplishments come to mind?

The first really big one for me was 2011 Bloody Words, where I got to meet my Canadian crime writing idols in person. In July 2013 we went to England for the Dagger Awards; my feet didn't touch the ground between getting the email in May and getting back home after the awards two months later. After that, life's a blur. I wrote eight full novels and about as many short stories, saw six of each into print, won and got shortlisted for a slew of awards, heard my first audiobooks and am currently awaiting news about my seventh book's publishing future. After losing a lot of peak career years to illness, this later-life return to the creative industries has far exceeded my expectations.

Are there writing and publishing conferences, book fairs and related events that you would like to participate in or attend during 2023 and 2024?

As a housebound, chronically ill person, I am rarely strong enough to attend in-person events, including the marketing tables at book fairs that bring authors and their books to the notice of many potential readers. Leaving home like that takes me weeks to months of planning and lining up support people. And, during the pandemic, any outing could end my career entirely; if I catch even a minor illness it could trigger another years-long relapse. It's just not worth the risk to my future book plans. Like Jan in my Falls Mystery novels, I live with my nose pressed against the glass, watching the world pass by. Or I would, if I wasn't busy writing, editing, and volunteering from the more manageable and much safer surroundings of my own home.

What projects will keep you busy for the remainder of this year?

The usual mix: some work on my next novel, a few manuscript evaluations, developmental edits on a series of historical novels, and volunteering. When awards season starts next fall, I'll know what juries I'll be working on over the winter. But mainly, starting in July, I'll be recruiting jurors for the Crime Writers of Canada Awards of Excellence. If you love mystery, whether reading, writing, reviewing, editing, narrating, or marketing it, check in with me. I'm happy to send you the guidelines to see if you'd be a good fit.

Thank you for this interview, Jayne. I've enjoyed undertaking the research and reading your work. kindly give me flash answers to:

Your favourite beverage. *I flip between a good dark coffee latte and a chai latte. Hot in winter, cold in summer.*

An unforgettable theatre script. Oh wow! So many!

*Old: **The Children's Hour** by Lillian Hellman, a 1934 script that first showed me the power of performance to expose societal inequity in women's lives.*

*New: **Alex and Michael and Hannah**, new last year from Alberta playwright Heather Morrow. It's like a Neil Simon relationship play but for the 21st century, exploring the tension between old and new relationship forms, between traditional family values and living as one's authentic self.*

A happy moment during production of the 1994 short film *Daddy Is Not Like Grandpa*.

An out-take from one of the scenes with the kids. Those days on set could feel very tense and scary; sometimes the kids cried for real and I felt like such a monster. But as soon as the cameras stopped rolling, they'd recoup and lift each other up. Lift me too. We'd done a scene where the mom had been beaten by the dad, traumatizing the whole cast and crew. It ended with the teen son taking her to the hospital. He tenderly escorted her out of camera range with the perfect expression of shock and fear and concern, and then he said "Come on, Mom. We're going to the Brown Derby." We all cracked up.

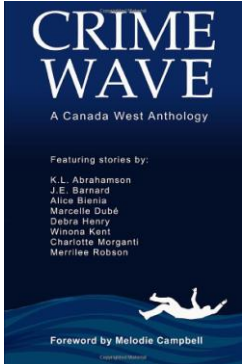
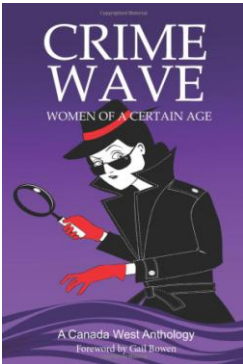
Your favourite Calgary landmark. *Calgary Zoo. Always and forever.*

An unexpected and thrilling moment you experienced while attending a writer/publishing conference.

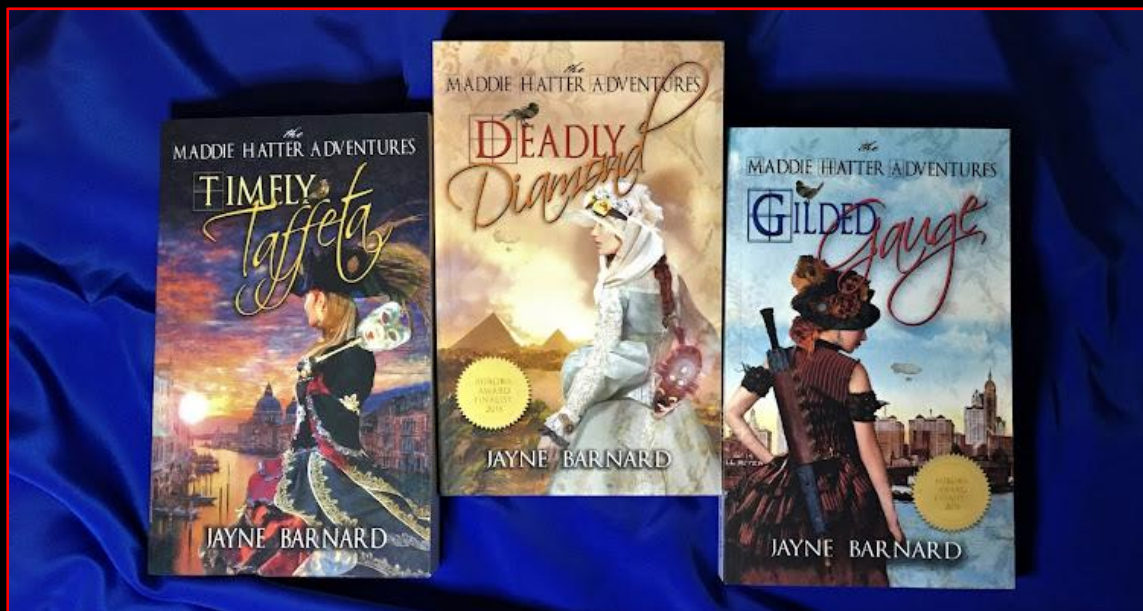
In London, Louise Penny walked up to me and introduced herself. I stammered something like, 'Oh my god, you're HER!' She was very gracious about my fan-girling.

* * *

J.E. (Jayne) Barnard website: <https://jaynebarnard.ca>
Dundurn Press: <https://dundurn.com>

		<p>Jayne has been on the editing team of the Sisters in Crime-Canada West <i>Crime Wave</i> anthologies.</p> <p>Her short story <i>A Midwinter Night's Scream</i> was published in the first edition. <i>Midsummer Day's Dream</i> was published in the second edition.</p> <p>Available at Amazon.ca.</p>
---	---	---

Maddie Hatter Series – Fashion, Frivolity, Clockworks, and Crime.



Available at many fine ebook retailers around the world!



The Falls Mysteries – Women's Wilderness Suspense

An urbanite ex-cop flees the Lower Mainland for the peaceful Alberta foothills and finds friendship with a disabled neighbour. Together they face ME/CFS, protesters, stalkers, and predators. Published by Dundurn Press.

* * *

Writing professionally as Robert H. Harris and working as a consultant to writers, Bob Harris accepts email inquiries at: harrisbobh@hotmail.com (Profile and publicity photos available on request).