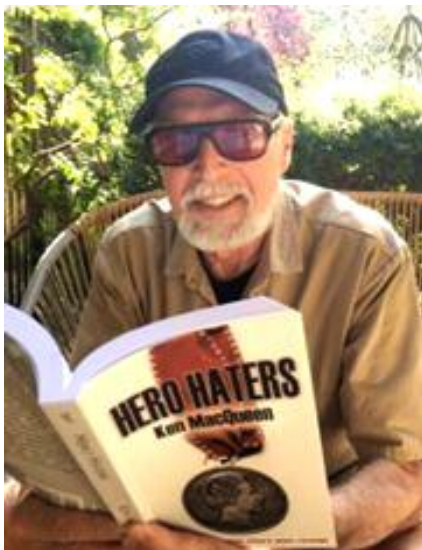


\* **Published by Winona Kent**—Crime Writers of Canada 2022 Vice Chair and BC/Yukon Representative—in her CWC Regional Newsletter, October 2022 edition.



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

He resides in the downtown West End, a neighbourhood containing heritage mansions, small parks, community gardens and a diverse mix of people, shops and restaurants.

It's bordered by English Bay, Coal Harbour and Lost Lagoon and is the gateway to the world-famous Stanley Park.

This month he interviews Ken MacQueen, an award-winning journalist turned thriller writer.

*"Bob Harris put me through the wringer for this interview, asking insightful questions that went deep into plot, structure and motivation of Hero Haters and its characters."*  
Ken MacQueen

\* **Bob Harris, CWC Associate, in conversation with Ken MacQueen:**

**Your debut novel *Hero Haters* was released in Canada and internationally on October 5th. Before you became a novelist, you spent several decades as an award-winning magazine and newspaper journalist. You also covered nine Olympic Games.**

**I would like to begin our chat with your recollection of those years with *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Vancouver Sun*, and as the West Coast bureau chief for *Southam News* and later for *Maclean's* newsmagazine.**

It was a different time in the business, Bob. There was money to spend. So, the *Ottawa Citizen* would send me on the road to cover Terry Fox, or go to Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, to write a series of stories on the Internet reaching the North, and the art and science of building an igloo. I walked into the *Vancouver Sun* one morning, and by that afternoon I was on a plane to London to cover the aftermath of Princess Diana's death and her funeral. Or *Maclean's* shipped me to places like Athens, Beijing, Sochi, and elsewhere to cover Olympic Games. It was exhausting, and exhilarating.

**When you shifted from journalism to writing commercial fiction books, what influenced you to write thriller and crime genre?**

I write what I read, which is primarily mysteries and thrillers.

**As a globetrotter covering a wide range of world events, both good and bad, did you find the transition to fiction easy?**

I wish. It took me six years to get a book published. I had to go back to school, in a manner of speaking, attending writers' conferences, taking courses, reading books on the craft, learning from fellow authors at wonderful events like Vancouver's late-lamented Noir at the Bar. An unusually long story at *Maclean's* might run 15,000 to 20,000 max. A recent example was my obituary for Queen Elizabeth II, which *Maclean's* posted on its website within hours of her death. *Hero Haters* is 81,000 words. This requires a huge commitment by my readers. I hope they heed my implicit promise: Your time will be well-wasted.

**Your *Hero Haters* protagonist Jake Ockham, a small-town newspaper editor, attended university on a rowing scholarship. Though he never considered himself a hero, he vetted heroes for the Sedgewick Trust Sacrifice Medallion. Why is he a rower? Who qualifies for the medallion? How did your work at the Olympic Games play into development of Jake's persona and motivation?**

That's a whole lot of questions Bob. Simple answer, Jake was a rower because over many Olympics I came to admire the remarkable hard work and sacrifice elite rowers put into their sport, all of it for a medal on a ribbon. Most come through the university system so they're also incredibly motivated and intelligent. In my office, I've an autographed photo of the Canadian men's eight who won the Gold Medal in Beijing. Any one of those guys would be a great role model for Jake, my protagonist.

**Your primary settings are on the tidal Wishkah River at Grays Harbor, Washington and in the state of Pennsylvania. Why those locations?**

I love port cities, they have an edge to them and a romance. Aberdeen, Washington, is edgier than most. It was the home of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, and Billy Gohl, a long-ago serial killer. As for Pennsylvania, I had Jake attend college in Pittsburgh for various reasons, including the fact that it is the headquarters for the real-life Carnegie Hero Fund, which has been celebrating extraordinary acts of civilian heroism for more than a century.

**You have a variety of female characters and one who is a very complex primary antagonist who operates in the Dark Web. What inspired you to create her?**

I have a thing for strong women. The women in *Hero Haters*—Dr. Tina Doctorow, lawyer Sue Price, the courageous Lyla Watkins and, yes, my sociopathic primary antagonist—are great fun to write. I draw on all the wonderful women I know, and then I let my characters run loose on the page.

**Several social issues surface in *Hero Haters* – bullying, spousal abuse, law enforcement intimidation and corruption to name a few. Can you expand on how you arrived at your choices?**

A great question. Crime fiction, the best of it anyway, is the perfect vehicle for exploring the dank, dark corners of society. Not to put myself among their number, but look at LA's Michael Connelly, Sweden's Henning Mankell, or South Africa's Deon Meyer to name just a few. Yes, they write fiction, but it's rooted in hard truth.

**How long did the book take to complete from concept to final sign-off by your editor?**

Gads, maybe 18 months all told. And it doesn't stop when it's out in the world. Now, there's marketing, *terra incognita* for me.

**What was your storyline "elevator pitch" to agents, editors and publishers?**

*Hero Haters* follows a man who has a dream job recognizing and rewarding civilian heroes, until he becomes the suspect in their disappearances. He must now overcome his doubts and risk everything to save them, and himself.

**Describe your journey of shopping manuscripts and landing a publishing deal with Wild Rose Press in New York.**

To be honest, it was a soul-sucking experience. There are too many gatekeepers and not enough gates. My break came when an early version of *Hero Haters* was a finalist in the 2021 contest for the Seattle-based Pacific Northwest Writers' Association. That got the attention of the wonderful folks of Wild Rose, who gave this debut author a chance.

**How are you publicizing the book today to broadcast media (radio, television and newsprint) and new media (digital)?**

The media landscape has changed substantially even in the relatively short time since I left full-time journalism. There isn't as much time, space or expertise given to covering books, at least in what you might call the traditional media. Fortunately, bloggers and all manner of digital media are filling the vacuum. And folks like you, Bob.

**Reflecting on your path as a journalist and novelist, who and what are your influences and why? Past and present. What about mentors?**

In journalism, there's too many to mention. At places like the Canadian Press, Southam News and *Maclean's* I worked with the best of the best, in my view. My editors, poor dears, were extraordinary and not at all like the gruff, cigar-smoking, rum-bottle-in-the-desk stereotypes of old. Well, with an exception or two. It was often my fellow reporters who made me better. On any given day or week there'd be stories on the news budget that I wish I'd written. *Work harder, Ken. Be better.* Fiction is a lonelier business, but all I need to do is crack open a book to realize I can't rest on my laurels.

**What is ahead of you for the remainder of this year?**

More marketing for *Hero Haters* to anyone who'll listen, and returning my focus to the next adventure for Jake Ockham and his pal Erik Demidov.

**Are you planning to attend writer's conferences and book fairs in 2023?**

ThrillerFest in New York, and the Pacific Northwest Writers' Association conference in Seattle, and the Surrey (BC) International Writers Conference, which is always overloaded with great workshops.

**What have you read recently?**

*In the Clearing* by Robert Dugoni, one of his bestselling series featuring the relentless detective, Tracy Crosswhite. And *Five Moves of Doom*, the third in A.J. Devin's trilogy featuring pro-wrestling private investigator "Hammerhead" Jed. Devlin's book is billed as a comic thriller, but it's an intriguing mix of light and dark.

## **Who are you reading now?**

*The Institute*, by some upstart named Stephen King, a wonderful audiobook. And, in paperback, *House Standoff*, the further misadventures of author Mike Lawson's Washington, DC fixer Joe DeMarco. Oh, and *Lucky Jack Road* by North Vancouver's J.G. Toews, because the world needs more reporter heroes like her Stella Mosconi.

## **Do you have a Jake Ockham sequel or spin-off in mind? Do you write other genre?**

I'm six chapters into my next Jake and Erik adventure. Nope, I'll stick to mysteries and thrillers. Can't do science fiction or fantasy. My head would explode.

## **With a focus on your thriller writing and research, what are you watching on television, film and online?**

I'm eagerly awaiting the next *Reacher*, and Michael Connelly's *Bosch: Legacy*. I'm contemplating rewatching all of *Justified*, because Tim Olyphant and Walton Goggins are so damn good, and I hear Elmore Leonard's voice in the dialogue.

## **What keeps you writing?**

It used to be a mortgage. Now it's just an addiction.

## **Based on your experience as a career journalist and a published author, what would you like share with writers and aspiring journalists?**

I'm not one of those folks who says follow your dreams and the blessings will follow. Fiction writing and, sadly, even journalism these days, while fun and challenging, may not pay the bills. Try either or both by all means, but there's much to be said for having a day job to fall back on.

## **Thanks for today's chat, Ken. How about some flash answers to:**

### **1. Favourite beverage.**

I'll never say no to a Barolo.

### **2. Your first "prominent person" interview as a journalist.**

Ontario Premier William G. Davis, while I was a rookie reporter at the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* and looked about 12 years old.

**3. Your most memorable childhood hero, book, comic book, television show and movie.**

Frank and Joe Hardy. Call of the Wild. Superman (comic book and TV) and Dr. No, my first James Bond movie.

**4. Favourite national and international city and small town.**

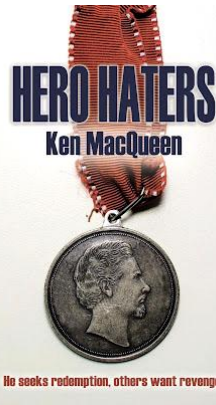
Vancouver, London or New York City, and Gibsons, B.C.

**5. Most thrilling airline flight.** Flying on an old DC 3 out of a research ice station near the North Pole. The plane hit a snow drift and launched prematurely into the air. It struggled forever to gain altitude. If it hadn't, rescue was a long way away.

**Ken MacQueen:** <https://kenmacqueen.com/>

**The Wild Rose Press, Inc.:** <https://wildrosepress.com/>

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



“Ken MacQueen’s debut thriller is the first in his Jake Ockham series. Bob’s tool kit for a reading session at English Bay.”