



"Bob's Interview"



By Crime Writers of Canada Associate Bob Harris
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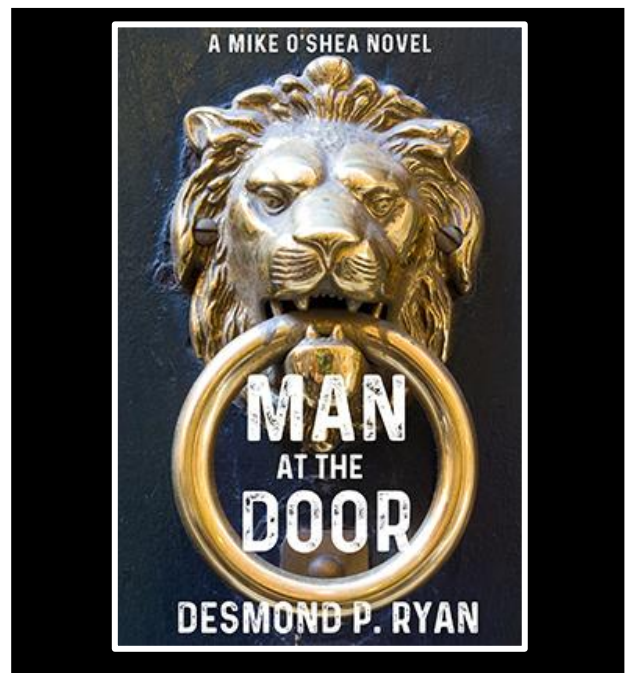
Meet Desmond P. Ryan



For almost thirty years, Desmond P. Ryan worked as a cop in the back alleys, poorly-lit laneways, and forgotten neighborhoods in Toronto, the city where he grew up. He is now a retired detective writing crime fiction novels. *Man at the Door* was a Finalist in the 2023 Canada Book Club Awards.

Bob Harris resides in Vancouver's West End. He is a writer, book promoter, publicist, and event producer.

His background is in the music industry, professional sports entertainment technology (televised baseball pitch tracking analyzer), and corporate governance of private and public companies.



"Thanks, Bob. I've done a lot of interviews and I must say, you ask good questions!" - Desmond P. Ryan

The Interview

Our Conversation

Hello Des, thank you for making time to chat with me today. Let's begin by giving me an overview of your background in law enforcement. What led you into police work?

I served with the Toronto Police Service for almost thirty years. I began in uniform doing front-line policing, moved into what was then called the foot patrol and is now known as community policing, was selected to work on various projects, and then spent the second half of my career as a detective investigating serious crimes.

I pretty much fell into policing after completing my undergrad degree at U of T. I had worked as a summer student for a couple of years with what was then the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force and was called back to apply to become an officer. I said no for about three years, but they kept calling until I finally said yes. I'm very glad they were persistent because I was given, in essence, a front row seat to the greatest show on earth. I particularly enjoyed the process of an investigation and the challenge of solving complex problems under pressure.

I was also given the opportunity to work alongside remarkable women and men whose courage and compassion shaped not only my views on policing but also my approach to how I write my novels.

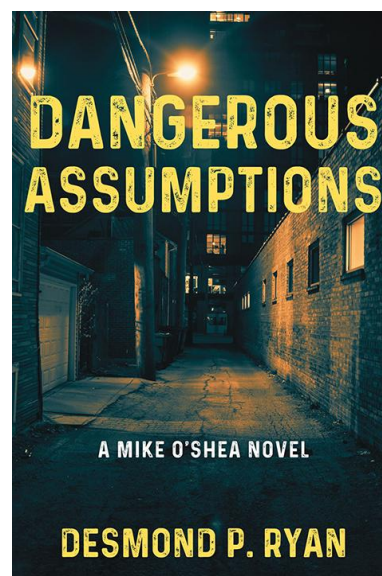
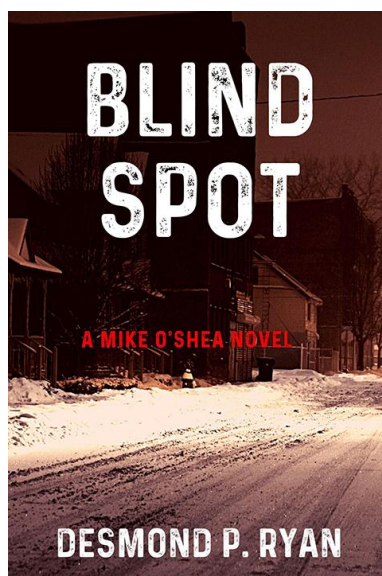
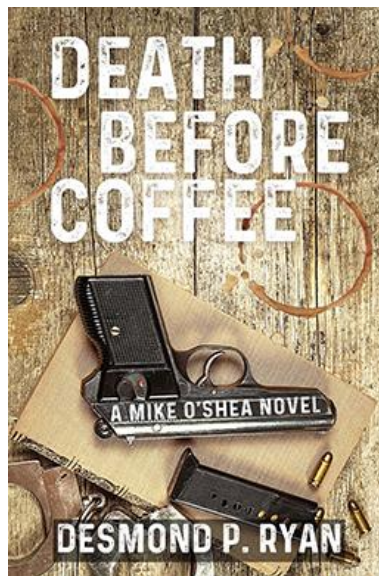
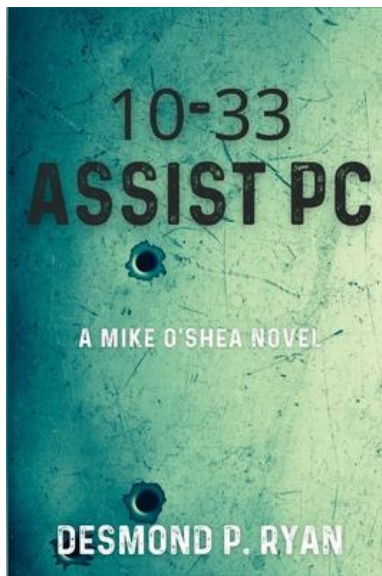
As a writer, who and what are your influences and why? And mentors? Past and Present.

My influences are quite varied. From a crime fiction perspective, I admire writers such as Michael Connelly, Ian Rankin, and Peter Robinson for their ability to create authentic investigators and place them within larger social issues. I also enjoy writers who understand that crime novels are ultimately about people rather than puzzles.

My greatest influence, however, comes from real life. Three decades of policing exposed me to extraordinary acts of kindness, bravery, greed, forgiveness, and resilience. Human nature is endlessly fascinating, and I try to bring that authenticity to every page.

As for mentors, I have been fortunate to learn from many experienced detectives, supervisors, and colleagues throughout my career. In writing, fellow authors, editors, and members of the crime writing community have been generous with their advice and encouragement. Every manuscript I write teaches me something new such that I don't expect to ever master the art of writing.

The Mike O'Shea Series



What inspired this series?

As my policing career was coming to an end, I realized that I had had a lot of experiences that were quite unique and had picked up some very unusual knowledge. I also realized that I had nowhere to transfer those experiences or share what I'd learned outside of writing about them.

The Mike O'Shea Series is based on investigations I'd been involved in, which made for a great starting point. I took those investigations and dug deeper into the social and emotional world that I then intentionally populated with complex and mortally flawed characters. I specifically created Mike O'Shea, my protagonist, to be competent but imperfect and placed him in situations where ethics, loyalty, and personal responsibility mattered as much as solving the crime. The series also allowed me to explore the emotional toll that violent crime takes on everyone involved.

Describe the setting, lifestyle, ethnic and personality profile of your main character, Detective Mike O'Shea.

Toronto plays a significant role in the series. I was born and raised here and it's also where I spent my policing career, which makes setting the series in Toronto an obvious choice. Also, as a city, Toronto is diverse and multicultural and filled with contrasts that are often quite stark, which is perfect for crime fiction.

Detective Mike O'Shea is a Toronto detective of Irish-Canadian heritage who is, at his core, driven by an unwavering sense of duty. He's not flashy or larger than life. Instead, he's plagued by guilt, remorse, and mental health and addiction issues. Despite all of this (or maybe because of it), he doggedly digs for the truth, regardless of how unpleasant or unpopular it may be.

In terms of antagonists and their portrayal, how do you manage the "realism" balance of their every day human side (i.e. villain versus non-villain traits) while treading the thin line of reader empathy?

Again, I have to fall back on my policing career. Most "villains" I encountered were good people who did bad things and, under the right (or wrong) circumstances, I genuinely believe that any one of us might behave the same way. People who commit terrible acts generally have ordinary routines, relationships, fears, ambitions, and regrets just like the rest of us.

As an author, my goal is to help the reader understand the criminal behaviour without necessarily sympathizing with my antagonist by showing (I hope) how that person arrived at that decision or action. From a creative perspective, I think that type of complexity makes the antagonist more compelling.

Your publisher Level Best Books is headquartered outside of Washington, DC in the historic city of Frederick, Maryland, and has offices in Boston, Massachusetts and London, England. In 2023, they released the first three books in the series.

Please share your journey to landing the publishing deal with them, resulting in release of your debut novel *10-33 Assist PC* (Book 1) on February 7, 2023.

How long did it take to complete this novel from concept to publication?

I began writing The Mike O'Shea Series in around 2014 or so and, once the first book was done, began sending it to agents and publishers. It was like speed-dating with no luck.

I kept writing the books and then decided that I couldn't face any more rejection and self-published the first three in the series. In the meantime, I began A Pint of Trouble series, which is a much lighter spin-off of The Mike O'Shea Series. It was this series that put me in front of Level Best Books in 2021, who stipulated that I could not use the same characters in any other work. By this time, I had three Mike O'Shea books written and self-published and was committed to completing the story arc, so I approached the publisher with my situation, and they agreed to take on The Mike O'Shea Series, republishing the three books that were already out there in quick succession.

Book 2, *Death Before Coffee*, was released on August 1st. It was followed by *Man at the Door* on December 26th which garnered a Finalist nod by the 2023 Canadian Book Club Awards. From your debut release, there is roughly a five month window between consecutive releases during that year.

Is your turn-around time less than six months to produce a novel? Please expound.

As previously mentioned, I had already written the first three Mike O'Shea novels by the time Level Best Books signed me and, because they had already been published, Level Best Books was anxious to republish those books and move on to newer material, so the release dates are a bit misleading.

Having so said, I now have four series with Level Best Books, so my turn-around time is about three to four months per book. I'm a bit of a compulsive scheduler and have learned to write quickly (again, policing career!), so that helps.

How are your book titles determined? By you or your publishers?

I come up with the titles myself, but I suppose my publisher could veto them if they were horribly off the mark. In The Mike O'Shea Series, I try to find a subtle link to the crime and character experiences. In A Pint of Trouble, I pay homage to the Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew naming convention and then point to the flaw of the victim, so every novel begins with "Mary-Margaret and The Case of The..."

In the upcoming Yorick's Arms series, I try to come up with something compelling, and I haven't quite figured out how I'll come up with the titles for the upcoming O'Shea Files (but am hoping every title will be brilliant and compel readers to devour every book in the series!).

***Moral Injury* (Book 6) is the finale of the series and tentatively scheduled for release at the end of 2026. What influenced this decision to wrap up The Mike O'Shea sextet?**

From the beginning, I set up Mike O'Shea's story to have a finite arc rather than go on indefinitely. I also wanted to keep the running conflict involving Malcolm Oakes going and knew I could only do it for six books (I really dislike books series that should have ended two books ago!) so that's why The Mike O'Shea Series is coming to an end.

Having so said, once the final manuscript was submitted to Level Best Books, they immediately wanted another three. Initially, I said no because that's not what I saw, but they, too, were persistent, so I came up with another idea (The O'Shea Files) that moves Mike beyond the original six-book story arc into a new phase of his career.

Your work is known for addressing social issues and a "unique perspective, distinctive style, and unwavering commitment to authenticity."

Looking back on the six novels, give me the elevator pitch on the central theme and moral function of the series.

The Mike O'Shea Series asks a simple question: What does justice look like when imperfect people pursue it within imperfect systems?

Every book in the series explores loyalty, accountability, trauma, corruption, resilience, and redemption. While the books feature murder investigations and suspense, they ultimately examine the consequences of our choices and the moral obligations we all have.

Please share a few "light bulb" moments you experienced as a fiction writer during your journey from Book 1 to Book 6. What major milestones and accomplishments come to mind?

I originally set out to write a really good police procedural, which I think I have. But what really surprised me was how important the emotional depth of the characters is to me and my readers. I always knew that technical authenticity was important, but creating characters that readers really relate to gives me a surprising amount of joy.

Being named a Finalist in the 2023 Canadian Book Club Awards for *Man at the Door* was pretty great because it reaffirmed that what I was writing was connecting with readers.

Being invited to speak to book clubs, at libraries, and at MOTIVE have also been great. I've had a very forward-facing career in policing but very seldom saw people at their best, so being so well-received is lovely!

Is there another police procedural series forthcoming?

The Mike O'Shea Series will be completed by the end of this year. While I'm moving many of the characters into the upcoming O'Shea Files, I'm seeing that series more as a thriller than police procedural. And, with two other series on the go, I'm not seeing a lot of time to create another police procedural. But you never know...!

"Ask The Detective" on YouTube

Having produced and published 160 videos on this channel, what have you learned from your subscribers?

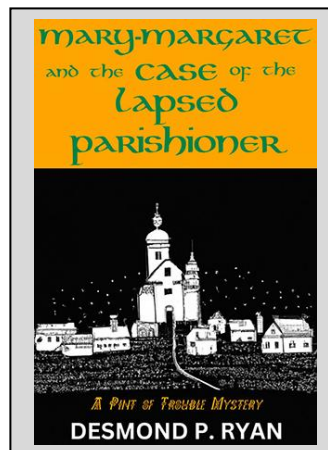
I've learned that people are genuinely curious about how investigations work. They are interested in the realities of policing rather than sensationalized portrayals.

I've also learned that trust and authenticity matter. Viewers appreciate honest answers, practical insights, and a willingness to acknowledge the complexities of a criminal investigation. I've also learned how challenging it is to create even a short YouTube video!

A Pint of Trouble Series

Level Best Books has published three books. Briefly, please tell me about them and what inspired them.

A Pint of Trouble Series follows Mary-Margaret O'Shea, the mildly-Machiavellian Irish mother of Detective Michael O'Shea from The Mike O'Shea Series, as she attempts to go about her life, but always finding herself in the middle of murder investigations. Give that the officer in charge of the investigation is incompetent, she has no choice but to involve herself and, in true traditional/cozy fashion, solve the murder and catch the murderer.



The Case of the Lapsed Parishioner introduced readers to Mary-Margaret and her community. *The Case of the Thieving Barmaid* expanded both the cast and the scope of the mysteries.

The Case of the Unfaithful Mechanic continued the series while exploring family, friendship, and tight community secrets.

Mary-Margaret O'Shea began as a minor character in The Mike O'Shea Series. She was intended to offset the intensity of the plotlines, but readers really enjoyed her and she just kept getting bigger. By the time *Man at the Door* was written, her character was almost as strong as the main character, so I decided she needed her own series. I had set the idea aside for a bit and, during the pandemic lockdown, I found it too dark to continue writing the next book in The Mike O'Shea series, so I started writing some books featuring Mary-Margaret, mostly to amuse myself.

Apparently, other people like her, too.

Do you belong to other writer organizations? How has your membership in Crime Writers of Canada benefitted you?

One of my major downfalls is that I spend so much time writing that I don't have time (or so I tell myself) to join other writing organizations. I do, as you know, belong to the Crime Writers of Canada, and it's been great. I've met a lot of other authors and been given many opportunities that I wouldn't have developed on my own.

Writing can be a solitary pursuit, so belonging to a professional community is really important. It's nice to share experiences and talk to people who understand what you do and why you do it.

What are you currently reading?

I'm a pretty eclectic reader, and right now, I'm reading a very interesting biography of Terry Pratchett by Craig Cabell.

Thank you for this interview, Des. In closing, kindly give me flash answers to:

Your favourite food and beverage:

I'm a big pasta fan, and my youngest son says my meatballs are the best in the world (he may be biased/have limited experience in such matters), so I'm going to go with spaghetti and meatballs.

I enjoy Guinness but am not beyond a glass of Prosecco every now and then.

Your favourite hat:

Hats are very situational, but I do like my Irish newsboy cap.

A memorable book from your childhood:

Perhaps surprisingly, I had a very difficult time reading as a child. I have since made up for it.

An unexpected and thrilling moment you experienced as a rookie cop:

I know I'm going to disappoint you by not offering one specific incident. The truth is, though, that some of the most thrilling moments for me weren't a single dramatic call, but those emergencies when an entire platoon suddenly had to work as one.

We talk a lot in policing about "muscle memory," and I think people sometimes misunderstand what that means. It isn't simply the physical training where you fall back on what you've done a hundred times before. There's a mental muscle memory too: the ability to take in a chaotic situation, make sense of it in seconds, and trust that the people around you are doing the same.

No two emergencies were ever really the same, so all the training in the world wasn't a rehearsal for that exact moment. And yet, when it mattered, eight or ten Type-A personalities who were accustomed to taking charge would instinctively find our roles. Someone would lead. Someone would communicate. Someone would watch the perimeter. Someone would notice the thing everyone else had missed. And nobody had to announce any of it.

For me, there was something almost beautiful about that. All those strong personalities, all that individual training and instinct, somehow becoming something greater than the sum of the parts.

That was the thrill I remember most: standing in the middle of something chaotic and realizing that you could trust the training and the people beside you to get on with it. And that feeling stayed with me throughout my career.

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Novels available at: Amazon, Indigo, Barnes & Noble, MIGHTYape (AU), Waterstones (UK upon request), Hooked (Lansing, MI, USA)

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