



“Bob’s Interviews”

By Crime Writers of Canada Associate Bob Harris
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Bob Harris is a Vancouver writer, book promoter, publicist and event producer.

Meet Joanna Vander Vlugt



Joanna Vander Vlugt is an author and illustrator.

She has been writing since a child, and she's a graduate of Simon Fraser University's Writer's Studio.

Her motorcycle illustrations have been purchased world-wide and her Woman Empowered motorcycle art series has been featured in on-line art and motorcycle magazines.

She is currently creating the art for a lengthy graphic novel.

Joanna draws upon her experience of working many years in the prosecutor's office and 10 years working in the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner for inspiration for her novels.

She resides in Chemainus on B.C.'s Vancouver Island and is also a member of Sisters in Crime-Canada West.

“Thank you very much for an in-depth interview and the work you did behind the scenes, and your dedication and time. It is so important to promote Canadian authors. I enjoyed answering your questions. This was a fun experience.” — Joanna Vander Vlugt

The Interview

My conversation with Joanna:

Your debut thriller *The Unravelling* is set in the world of lawyers and the courtrooms of British Columbia's capital city Victoria. Explain why you chose that setting and your research.

I remember hearing, "Write what you know." I worked as a Supreme Court Assistant in the Crown Counsel (prosecutor's office) for 13 years. It annoyed me that in 2001, the criminal law novels out there were all situated in the U.S. William Deverell was the only lawyer I was aware of who wrote about criminal law situated in Vancouver.

I wanted to write about the Canadian legal system and B.C.'s prosecution process, despite being told by publishers that a novel situated solely in Canada would never sell.

I always liked Victoria, it is a recognizable city, and it was only a 2-hour drive from where I lived in Nanaimo. As it happened, when I was working on the final rewrites of *The Unravelling* in 2001, my family moved from Nanaimo to Victoria. It was fantastic to live and work in the city I had researched for my novel.

The Jade & Sage Thriller Series

The first two novels in the series – *The Unravelling* and *Dealer's Child* – were Canadian Book Club Awards finalists. The latest release *Spy Girls* received Chick Lit Book Cafe's International Book of Excellence Award for best spy thriller and suspense. Joanna publishes under her own imprint, Ozzy Imprint.



How did your protagonist Jade Thyme emerge? What is her lifestyle and motivation?

Gosh, Jade has been around since 1998. I originally wrote *The Unravelling* in 1998. I wanted a strong, independent, intelligent, yet flawed prosecutor as my protagonist. Jade makes mistakes. She second guesses herself. She's single, living her life, experiencing culture, and before "foodie" became a word, Jade was and is a "foodie". Ultimately, Jade fights for injustice.

***The Unravelling* was written many years ago but not published until June 2019. Explain the resurrection process. How long did it take?**

Some people believe I'm a new author. Under my old pseudonym of J.C. Szasz, I had two short stories – "Egyptian Queen" and "The Parrot and Wild Mushroom Stuffing" – published in two Crime Writers of Canada anthologies. I also had my essay "No Beatles Reunion" published in the *Dropped Threads 3: Beyond the Small Circle* anthology created by the late Carol Shields and Marjorie Anderson.

I was mailing *The Unravelling* to publishing houses in the early 2000s. Around that same time I became a fitness instructor and personal trainer. I switched from writing fiction to personal training articles. I didn't believe I would return to writing fiction.

It was approximately six months after my mother died, that I took out *The Unravelling* manuscript, and I remember thinking that if I "found something salvageable", I would re-write it. That's exactly what I did. It took me approximately seven to eight months, working with an editor, to re-write the book.

Several contemporary issues are present in *The Unravelling* such as cronyism and corruption, wealth gap, homelessness and drug addiction. What did you retain from the original manuscript, what did you cut, and what did you add?

The court scenes and the law office scenes were retained. When I originally wrote the novel, I worked in a prosecutor's office that had 10 prosecutors and only two of them were women. That has changed. How the murder victim was murdered was retained. Granted, I did think twice about it. The issues of homelessness and drug addiction were added to the story.

When I moved to Victoria, I thought it was a city of elderly ladies and high tea. I was surprised when I saw the homelessness problem Victoria had back in 2001. In the original novel Jade never had a sister. It was amazing to bring Sage into the novel. I now can't think of Jade without thinking of Sage.

You are an author and illustrator. How do they interrelate in terms of your creativity and your professional profile as a writer?

My art and writing I refer to the Yin and Yang of creativity. I have illustrated over 30 motorcycles. When I was re-writing *The Unravelling*, it only seemed natural that Jade and Sage would ride motorcycles. I had started my Woman Empowered motorcycle series, and Jade and Sage fit right in with that series. I then decided that if 007 could have different sports cars, then Jade could have different motorcycles. I've illustrated friends and female riders for scenes in my book.

Your second book in the series, *Dealer's Child*, was published in September 2021. It reached number 60 in Amazon's Top 100. As an indie author, how was that accomplished?

I wish I knew! I believe it has to do with the three categories Amazon allows you to categorize your book. Two of my categories are Lesbian Fiction ebooks and Lesbian Literature & Fiction. Jade's sister, Sage, is bi-sexual. Sage had a hard life growing up and being accepted by her father. I remember when I was writing *Dealer's Child*, I wanted Sage to experience love and happiness. When Gillian with a "G" appeared in a scene, my challenge was to type fast enough to keep up with their dialogue. I wanted to show their relationship.

Your novels and your illustration portfolio contain motorcycles. Why? Are you a rider?

I am not a motorcycle rider, but I do ride a Honda Giorno scooter. It's named Giorno.

My first commission was a Sprint car, a wife wanted me to illustrate for her husband as a birthday present. I then did a number of car illustrations. I was still a University of Victoria personal trainer during this time. I saw a photo of a personal trainer I knew, and she looked so cool. That was the start of my Woman Empowered motorcycle series.

I'm now illustrating a graphic novel, working with author Stella Harvey, who was the CEO of the Whistler Writers Festival.

What has been rewarding with the graphic novel, is that creativity works the same as writing a novel. After working all day on an illustration, I'll take the dogs for a walk and that's when inspiration hits, just like when writing.

Please give me the elevator pitch on *Spy Girls* (published in 2024).

Jade Thyme is coerced into finding an elusive double-agent, navigating political agendas, and escaping sticky bombs, while trying to outplay a psychotic Russian assassin.

What inspired the story?

It was a mix of a case involving a BC judge and hearing about Epstein. I was just sickened, and like all writers, in my novel, I wanted to see fictional justice. The spy element is because I'm a huge fan of the classic spy novels.

How long did it take to research and write this third novel in the series?

I had the good fortune of having a resigned CIA covert action officer read the novel and point out the scenes he enjoyed reading and what was inaccurate. I listened to tons of spy podcasts as well as purchasing non-fiction novels about espionage.

What was the most difficult scene to write?

There's a scene involving a judge and his cronies, and their attitude and action towards underage women was very hard and disgusted me. I needed a brain cleanse after that one. The ultimate fight scene between Jade and a spy at the end was easier to write than the scene I mentioned.

Reflecting on your journey as a fiction writer and illustrator, who influenced you the most and why?

I have read every Dick Francis book. He wrote about horse racing. His novels were different, and he immersed me into a new world.

In terms of illustrations, my two favorite fashion illustrators are David Downton and Hayden Williams. With only a few brush strokes, David Downton can create the most dazzling fashion illustrations. He's illustrated everyone. Hayden Williams got me hooked on Copic markers. He creates bright fashion illustrations.

As a teenager during the '80s, I drew portraits, supermodels, and I loved drawing clothing. I didn't know then that what I loved were fashion illustrations.

What is the best piece of writing advice you've received?

I think the best advice I received was told to me by different people in different circumstances.

My mother always told my sisters and I to "never quit". I can still remember her telling us, "You're not a quitter." I also remember an author telling me that no matter how awful that first draft is, keep going. Don't edit, just write whatever comes to you until you get to the end. You create a book through re-writes.

As an indie author and publisher, what can you pass on to emerging writers?

I would tell emerging writers the same advice. Do not quit. I refer to my first draft as the "porridge draft". It has a lot of lumps and doesn't look too appetizing but through re-writes, that porridge can be whipped into something special. But more importantly, write to entertain yourself. Some readers will love your book, some will hate it, the reader you need to impress is yourself.

Do you have another book in the works?

Due to world events and the hostilities and hate in the world, I have a romance novel with a publisher. I also have completed the rough first draft of a time travel, and I am working on a plot of a gothic thriller. I've been watching *Slow Horses* and I love that show.

What books have you read recently?

I've been reading romances, but given my work on the graphic novel, I've been re-reading many books about producing art for comics.

Thank you for this interview, Joanna. I've enjoyed reading the Jade & Sage series. In closing, kindly give me flash answers to:

Your favourite beverage: Gin and tonic in the evening, a mocha in the morning.

Your favourite Vancouver landmark: Lonsdale Quay.

A memorable book from your childhood: Enid Blyton's *The Fabulous Five*. That series changed me from hating to read to loving to read.

A memorable family vacation: Going to Maui. I miss Maui, the sun, the heat and that's the only place where I truly relax. Maybe one day I will return if the political situation changes.

An unexpected and thrilling moment you experienced during your employment as a Supreme Court Assistant in the Crown Counsel:

Sitting on a box, thinking there was a computer inside, only to fall in because the box was empty and having my heels sticking up by my shoulders.



Joanna with her New Westminster friend, CWC author **Winona Kent**, at a previous instore book signing I arranged with Maddie Ng, CEM / P&L at Chapters in Nanaimo. We enjoyed a nice turnout of book readers, had good conversation and were very happy that book sales were good!



Joanna visiting with Winona Kent and Jim Goddard at their merchandise table during the Word Vancouver festival on September 20, 2025. She also manned the Crime Writers of Canada information table at the event.

Winona recently completed her term as National Chair of the CWC and the Representative for the BC-Yukon Region.



The 2024 Vancouver Public Library CWC Writers Showcase
Daniel Kalla, Joanna, Charlotte Morganti, Erik D'Souza, Craig Bowlsby
Co-Produced by Bob Harris and VPL Programming & Learning



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