



“Bob’s Interviews”



By Crime Writers of Canada Associate Bob Harris
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Meet Winona Kent

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



Winona and me at a Vancouver International Film Festival crime movie event in VIFF Centre downtown.

What can I say about my good friend and author Winona Kent? Quite simply — she's an amazing woman and a pleasure to know and work with. And, if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to write a "Bob's Notes" column in her monthly CWC Regional BC/Yukon news-letter. That monthly column started me interviewing CWC authors in the region.

One day, I asked Winona to send the newsletter to Alison Bruce, CWC Executive Director at the time. Alison read my author interview, liked it, and presented an idea to the CWC's Board of Directors: Consider having Bob Harris interview interested CWC authors nationally at no cost to anyone and publish them on the website. The Board approved and here I am. Thank you to Alison, Winona, the Board and the many authors coast-to-coast who responded.

"It's tough to compete for attention when you're an indie author. Bob has a knack of focusing in on what's important to you as a writer, and, as a result, delivering a knockout interview that showcases what matters to your potential readers." — Winona Kent

Winona Kent is an award-winning author who was born in London, England and grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan, where she completed her BA in English at the University of Regina. After moving to Vancouver, she graduated from UBC with an MFA in Creative Writing. She received her

diploma in Writing for Screen and TV from Vancouver Film School. She is the CWC BC/Yukon Regional Representative and national Chair.

Winona has been a temporary secretary, a travel agent and the Managing Editor of a literary magazine. She retired from her full-time job as a Program Assistant at UBC's School of Population and Public Health. She resides New Westminister, BC, happily embracing life as a full-time author.

Winona's writing breakthrough came many years ago when she won First Prize in the Flare Magazine Fiction Contest with her short story about an all-night radio newsman, *Tower of Power*.

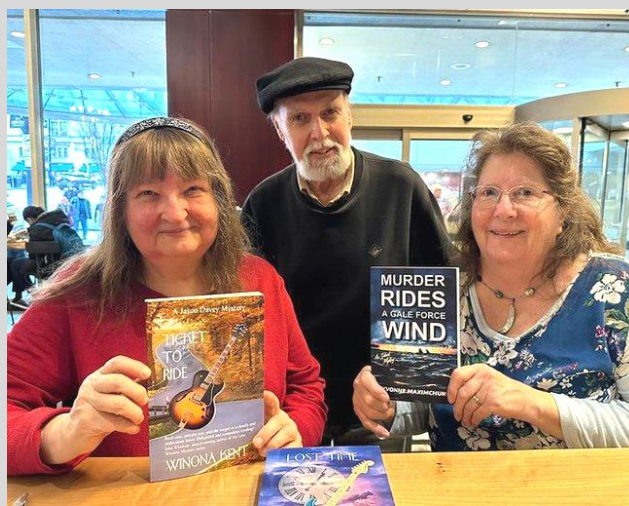
Her short story *Dietrich's Ash* was an Okanagan Short Fiction Award winner and was published in *Canadian Author & Bookman*, anthologized in *Pure Fiction* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside) and broadcast on the CBC Radio program *Ambience*.

Her short story *Creatures from Greek Mythology* was a Second Prize Winner and WQ Editors Prize and was published in *Cross-Canada Writers Quarterly*.

Her spy novel *Skywatcher* was a finalist in the Seal Books First Novel Competition, published in 1989. This was followed by a sequel, *The Cilla Rose Affair*, and her first mystery, *Cold Play*, set aboard a cruise ship in Alaska. After three time-travel romances (*Persistence of Memory*, *In Loving Memory* and *Marianne's Memory*), Winona returned to mysteries with *Disturbing the Peace*, a novella, in 2017 and the novel *Notes on a Missing G-String* in 2019, both featuring the character she first introduced in *Cold Play*, jazz musician/amateur sleuth Jason Davey. Then followed more of Jason Davey in *Lost Time* in 2020, *Ticket to Ride* in 2022, and *Bad Boy* in 2024.



Road crewing for Winona at the CWC display she organized at a previous WORD Festival at Simon Fraser University Harbourside in downtown Vancouver.



Winona made a special trip from New Westminister to the Hyatt Regency Vancouver hotel and met my friend and new CWC member Yvonne Maximchuk who was a presenter and exhibitor at the huge 2023 International Boat Show in BC Place Stadium.



Winona's husband, broadcaster Jim Goddard, hams it up with his guitar at an in-store signing we set up for CWC authors at Indigo Robson in Vancouver.

My conversation with Winona:

Describe your main character and his lifestyle. What motivates him?

My main character is Jason Davey. His real name is Jason Figgis, and he's the son of a couple of famous musicians who made their name in the 1960s and 70s with a folky pop group called Figgis Green.

Jason grew up in the spotlight, and is a musician himself—he's a jazz guitarist with a gig at a club called the Blue Devil in London. But he hates the idea of nepotism and would rather make a name for himself without trading on his parents' fame. So he uses the name Jason Davey. Ironically, he ends up actually replacing his dad in Figgis Green when the band reunites for a tour in *Lost Time* and *Ticket to Ride*.

The other interesting thing about Jason is that he's an amateur sleuth. There aren't a lot of those around—musicians who also solve mysteries—so he's a bit of a trailblazer in the crimewriting world. In my latest book, *Bad Boy*, Jason's tasked with tracking down a collection of musical scores by famous British composer Sir Edward Elgar. The manuscripts were stolen to order years earlier, and now a Soho crimelord—who Jason is well acquainted with—desperately wants them back.

What inspires your book titles? How do they emerge?

I am SO bad at coming up with book titles. To be honest, out of the twelve books I've written, I've only thought up five of them myself.

Skywatcher was a play on a popular book published around the same time, *Spycatcher*.

The Cilla Rose Affair was inspired by the naming conventions of the old *Man from UNCLE* television series.

Persistence of Memory was stolen from the Salvador Dali melting clocks painting.

And *Disturbing the Peace* just came to me naturally as the story was largely set in Peace River, Alberta.

And *Ten Stories That Worried My Mother* (my short story collection) just seemed to be the best title, because, honestly...they did.

All of the others have been suggested by friends or by my publishing partner, Brian Richmond. Twitter friends suggested *Cold Play* and *In Loving Memory*. I arrived at *Marianne's Memory*, my time travel novel, while I was sitting with a real-life friend at the Waterfront Skytrain Station in Vancouver, literally spitballing ideas.



Notes on a Missing G-String started out as a joke between me and Brian Richmond. I was chatting with him, trying to come up with a storyline for the next mystery I was going to write after *Disturbing the Peace*, and, if I recall correctly, he suggested something to do with Soho, where Jason works at a jazz club.

I threw out the idea of the gentlemen's clubs that used to populate the area (only a handful are left now) and from there the conversation progressed to g-strings and G Strings (the kind you find on guitars). I wrote the novel around the title.

Brian also came up with *Lost Time*, *Ticket to Ride* (very obviously a take on the Beatles' song, as well as a popular phone game) and *Bad Boy*.



What was the most challenging part to write in *Bad Boy*?

I think it was probably the Train-Time-and-Distance problem Jason encounters in Chapter 19.

*Train A leaves London at 5.30 am. Its speed is 80 km/hr
 Train B leaves London at 7.30 am. Its speed is 105 km/hr
 The trains are travelling in opposite directions
 How far will the two trains be from each other at 11.30 am?*

I have never ever EVER been able to solve these things, so I share Jason's utter annoyance and frustration, because he doesn't know how to solve it either. The process he goes through in order to get the answer (from his sister, Angie!) reflects the dogged research I conducted, in order for me to allow Angie to explain to Jason how it's done. And if I ever encounter a question like that again...I still probably won't be able to solve it, because I've already forgotten all of the steps, as well as the all-important magic formula.

Your Jason Davey books are all set in England and are detailed, indicating you spend a lot of time on research. How do you balance research with writing and editing time to meet deadline, considering you have ongoing CWC and Sisters in Crime Canada West responsibilities?

Well, to be honest, I've always had to balance my writing life with my working life. I've always held down full-time jobs—I was a travel agent, and then I worked at Telus in a variety of jobs, and then at UBC at the School of Population and Public Health. I managed to write nearly all of my books while I was working full-time. *Lost Time*, novel #9, was all researched and outlined and its first few drafts were written before I retired from UBC in 2019. All but two of the short stories in *Ten Stories That Worried My Mother* were written while I was working. The latest two books in the series, *Ticket*

to Ride, and *Bad Boy*, are both products of my newly-minted status of “full time writer”.

I found being involved with CWC and SinC-CW extremely rewarding, and the work I’ve done as the BC Rep, the Vice-Chair and now as Chair of CWC is largely administrative anyway—which isn’t a lot different to what I was doing in any of my past jobs. I have to say it has been a bit of a challenge over the past two years or so. But I’m good at organizing my time and using calendars and Excel spreadsheets to keep track of what I’m doing while I wear my three hats – Ordinary Life, CWC Life and Writing Life.

I use plotting software to plan out my writing (I’m very definitely a plotter, not a pantsler) and to keep track of where I am in my novels.

And I’m a great believer in naps. I relied on them extensively when I was working at Telus and UBC—I used to have a nap at lunch time and another, longer one when I came home from work. Those naps rebooted my brain, just like a computer, and allowed me to refresh my memory and work on my writing for a couple of hours every night. I highly recommend the process. And while I do spend a lot of time on research, I’d say about 99% of it is online. Google is my friend. So is Google Street View.

Your marketing and promotion is extensive. You’ve just done a USA blog tour, podcasts and media interviews. You’ve attended conferences and you’ve used social media extensively to promote your latest book. Have I missed anything? Explain how you manage this juggling act.

In the past, I never really applied myself to an organized PR program. It was all very hit and miss. And then, when *Ticket to Ride* came out in 2022, I decided to get serious, to observe what my colleagues were doing to promote themselves and their books, and to try and emulate them.

I attended a couple of webinars about marketing fiction. I decided what my comfort level was (which is very important). I decided on a budget (quite small, actually). And I decided that I would stick to a handful of manageable platforms. And I paid a small amount of money for a virtual book tour.

I copied that strategy for *Bad Boy*, using what I’d learned two years earlier, and building on that knowledge, which included contacting independent bloggers I’d built a prior relationship with. I’d kept track of all of my marketing for *Ticket to Ride* on a spreadsheet, and I just followed through with everyone again for *Bad Boy*. I had all the PR and marketing in place three months before the book’s release date.

So I guess it comes down to just being very organized, and having a schedule, having a calendar and a list of Things to Do – not only To Do, but To Follow Up On, Deadlines to Be Aware Of, and What To Do When This Post/Blog/Review/News Story Goes Live.

It does get a bit hairy at times. In 2022 I had a horrendous virus that knocked me off my feet for three weeks, exactly at the same time that I was launching *Ticket to Ride*. And exactly at the same time that I was needed for some work on two committees I was helping out on (both launching anthologies), and exactly at the same time as I was helping to organize involvement in two writing festivals. Everything came home to roost at once.

This year, I got a mild case of COVID in June, and I discovered, to my horror, that I was suffering from COVID-related brain fog at precisely the time I was releasing *Bad Boy*. I couldn't focus, I couldn't concentrate, and worst of all, I couldn't multi-task. And I needed my brain to work so I could share all of the marketing on social media. Fortunately I got through it...and the brain fog has gone. My neurons are all firing at 100% again.

Reflecting on your journey as fiction author/screenwriter, who and what influenced you the most and why?

I think I have to go right back to my formative years in high school and university. Back then, in the 1960s and 70s, writers tended to succeed in spite of what we were (or were not) taught in school, rather than because of it. There were very few opportunities in the curriculum where we were encouraged to express ourselves creatively. It was the era of the space race and the Cold War and schools were instructed to focus on Math and Science, not the Arts.

Fortunately I went to a somewhat progressive high school where thinking outside the box was encouraged. I had a Grade 10 Lit teacher, Sam Robinson, who recognized that I wanted to be a writer when I was 14 and actively encouraged me. He actually called to congratulate me in 1989 when my first novel was published. I'll always remember that. The last time I'd seen him or heard from him was in 1971, when I'd graduated from high school.

Another great influence was my Grade 12 Lit teacher, Mr. Williamson—I never did know his first name!—who actually let me write a novel for my major class project instead of an essay—and gave me an A+ for it when I handed it in.

Later on, when I was at university working on my BA in English, one of my instructors was Canadian writer Ken Mitchell. He took me under his wing and worked out an "apprenticeship" for me so I could learn the nuts and bolts of writing. He taught me the basics of fiction and I'm still using a lot of his early wisdom. I also remember his favourite pet peeve: "There is no such word as gotten!"

When did you join Crime Writers of Canada and what prompted you to sign up?

I actually first joined CWC back in 1989, when my debut novel, *Skywatcher*, was published. *Skywatcher* was a finalist in the last-ever Seal Books First Novel Award. It was a tongue-in-cheek spy story, and one of the very first CWC events I attended was a talk given by a real-life Canadian CSIS agent. I was beside myself with excitement.

One of the other fascinating things I remember is that several of the members back then had jobs with the government, and at one of our meetings (we held meetings in peoples' living rooms!) they were discussing something called "e-mail". I had never heard of "e-mail" (this was roundabout 1992). So I asked them what it was...and they told me...and I was absolutely fascinated. Three years later, the internet arrived in Canada in a big way...and I was one of its early adopters—all because of what I'd learned at a CWC meeting.

I left the CWC after a couple of years (it was a long time before my next novel was published)...but I returned in 2017. In the interim, I'd written six more books. The last of these was the novella, *Disturbing the Peace*, which was my first Jason Davey Mystery. I remember I had my own table at a writers festival at VPL (it may even have been WORD), and I was approached by two lovely ladies who introduced themselves as the BC Reps for Crime Writers of Canada, and would I like to join? I'd actually forgotten all about CWC after twenty years...and I was excited to sign up all over again.

How have your positions of BC/Yukon Regional Representative, Director and Vice-Chair, and Board of Directors Chair benefitted your career as a writer and contributed to your writing style?

Very soon after I rejoined, I was approached by one of the nice ladies who'd signed me up, to ask if I would like to be CWC's regional representative. Both of the reps were nearing the end of their terms, and I think Merrilee Robson was absolutely floored when I said Yes. I remember asking her, what

can I expect, taking on this role? And she looked at me and said, "You're going to meet a LOT of writers."

She wasn't kidding. And that's been one of the best things about being the BC Rep - the opportunity to get to know so many wonderful authors. I've learned something valuable from all of them, and from their writing and also their marketing strategies.

When I moved into the Vice-Chair position - and now that I'm the Chair - I find that I'm somewhat more high-profile than I used to be...and that's opened a few doors that probably wouldn't have opened for me before. As for my writing style...that probably hasn't changed much, but, after five Jason Davey Mysteries, I have got a lot more confidence in myself than I had back in 2017.

Thank you for this interview, Winona. I've enjoyed working with you during the past several years.

It has been a pleasure working with you too, Bob. And long may it continue.

To wrap up our conversation, kindly give me flash answers to:

Your favourite beverage. SodaStream sparkling water.

Your favourite food. Sushi.

A memorable childhood book.

The Ship That Flew by Hilda Lewis. It fascinated me and captured my imagination when I was 7 or 8 years old.

Your favourite New Westminster landmark.

The Patullo Bridge. My friend Janet Kvammen from Royal City Literary Arts Society is a published poet and mixed media and lens-based artist who has done a series of paintings of the bridge. I have eight of them on my living room wall.

A thrilling moment at Seattle's 2024 Left Coast Crime conference.

Joining three very eminent American writers on the Musical Mysteries panel.



Winona's and award-winning CWC author **A.J. Devlin** at his ***Bronco Billy*** book launch on October 12, 2024 at Parkside Brewery in Port Moody, BC.



In 2022, we had a blast with CWC author **Rick Alexander (Jr.) - *i HIT*** (FriesenPress) at Chapters Coquitlam and four Metro Vancouver Indigo bookstores.



Winona reading at the CWC's Vancouver Public Library **Writers Showcase** on August 22, 2023. A full house event in the Montalbano Family Theatre.



Winona with CWC's **Meredith Hambrock (*Other People's Secrets*)** and **S.M. "Shoshona" Freedman (*Blood Atonement*)** at Book Warehouse on Broadway at a signing I set up with super saleslady **Debbie Penner** in Vancouver on February 11, 2023.



Winona with her Vancouver Island friend, CWC author **Joanna Vander Vlugt**, at a signing I arranged with Maddie Ng, CEM / P&L at Chapters in Nanaimo. We had a lot of fun and book sales were good!

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