

# Edmonton Woman

January/February 2012

M A G A Z I N E

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**CanWIT  
E-Mentorships**

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**Relationship  
Smarts**

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**2012 Skin  
Resolutions**

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Face-to-face with  
the Mystery Lady:  
**Janice MacDonald**

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Vol. 18 Issue 1

January/February 2012



## Editorial notes:

So we're in 2012. Some think the world is going to end this year. Well, if it is, we should guard our health in order to enjoy this last year to the utmost. If it isn't, all the more reason to take good care of ourselves, so as to celebrate the many years to come. Either way, keeping healthy, working hard and enjoying meaningful activities should be part of not only our resolutions, but our menu for life.

In this first issue of 2012 we feature useful articles on healthy living, and include some ideas for your leisure and entertainment.

Many of us escape to another world as a pastime – for some it's Narnia; for others it's Middle Earth; yet others prefer lands inhabited by vampires and warlocks. But what if the fiction world coincides with our city, except that events mysterious, rather than mundane, are taking place? This is the world of Randy Craig, an amateur detective who seems unable to shed her deadly affinity with dead bodies. Our cover story unravels the mysterious parallels between this fictional character and Edmonton author Janice MacDonald. MacDonald shares with us choice bits about herself – both fact and fiction.

Our health morsels include six skin resolutions for 2012 brought to you by Sharon Mayr, advice on coping with Type II diabetes by Anne Stropel, tips on hearing protection and ideas on how to be physically active. In tune with Valentine's Day, we share with you Jane Atkinson's advice: to snag your guy, stop playing small and start showing your best foot forward – brains and all.

Incidentally, for those brainy women in advanced technology fields, CanWIT (Canadian Women in Technology) has launched a national eMentorship program to support them in their career by matching them to mentors in their field. We bring you the details of this program.

Can you believe we've suffered very few frostbites and the winter is – hopefully – almost over? It's been a good year (winter-wise). Cheers to more good years!

– Jeannie Chua for the Editorial Committee

Image by Raja R.



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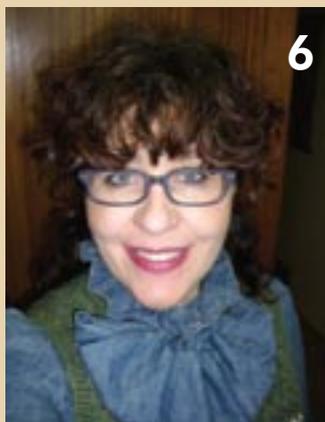
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Janice MacDonald

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On The Cover

# Killer fictionista

## Janice MacDonald weaves her tale in and around town

By Jeannie Chua



You wouldn't suspect Janice MacDonald of any mischief if you spot her on a weekday: a bespectacled, responsible-looking government employee maintaining a regular eight-to-four-thirty schedule, writing and editing "ordinary" material.

Come weekends and let the fun begin – the author of the Randy Craig mystery novels puts on her detective cap and stirs up an inordinate amount of trouble. Already, MacDonald has entangled her protagonist Miranda (Randy) Craig in a number of murder cases, including three recent ones in connection with the Edmonton Folk Festival.

Set in our very own city, MacDonald's mystery series has attracted ardent followers both here and far beyond the prairies. Her latest novel *Hang Down Your Head*, released last November, had been on the *Edmonton Journal's* Top 10 bestsellers list for weeks before it was sold out at local booksellers around Christmas last year.

The author follows the maxim "Write what you know," so it's no surprise that her heroine is always placed in territories familiar to herself. And Alberta readers, especially Edmontonians, appreciate that

feeling of closeness. Many have expressed delight at being able to follow along as the mysteries unravel around familiar landmarks and places.

### Uncanny parallels?

For those who know MacDonald personally, the familiar elements linking fact and fiction in her novels extend beyond mere location. Now why does Randy the amateur detective seem to walk the same paths MacDonald has trod?

In MacDonald's debut novel, *The Next Margaret* (1994), Randy goes back to the University of Alberta for her Master's degree and suspects that her advisor has murdered the writer that she is working on. In the second, *Sticks and Stones* (2001), the heroine becomes a sessional lecturer at the U of A and ends up having one of her star students murdered in the midst of a maelstrom of poison-pen letters, graffiti and misogyny.

In the third book, *The Monitor* (2003), Randy teaches distance learning courses at Grant MacEwan, and while moonlighting as a monitor on a chatroom, discovers there is a possible killer for hire in that cyberspace.

The latest volume *Hang Down Your Head* (2011) sees Randy working for the Folkways Collection Library at the U of A Canadian Centre for EthnoMusicology, having landed the job because of her online experience and her banjo playing skills.

Randy's job is dependent on the bequest made by a folk music philanthropist, so when the heirs of the deceased contest the will and one of them is found stabbed and hanged in the LRT tunnel under Belgravia Road, Randy, caught without an alibi, becomes a prime suspect for the murder.

MacDonald's résumé reads much like Randy's – she, too, went back to the U of A to do an MA in English, taught for a couple of years as a sessional lecturer at the university, was an English Literature and Creative Writing instructor at Grant MacEwan and yes, she even monitored an online chatroom. Even their interests in music coincide. MacDonald is a folk music enthusiast who has played the banjo for close to eight years now and has also taken up the fiddle.

And the murders and dead bodies? Thankfully those are just the condiments that MacDonald adds to spice up her protagonist's life. Her real life is not quite the rollercoaster ride she designs for her protagonist. As for character naming, she hints that Randy's dashing cop boyfriend Steve Browning may have been inspired by figure skater Kurt Browning while the fact that her husband is also named Randy is merely coincidental. ("I had already created the character before I met him," she explains.)

### Early mystery lover

MacDonald's early childhood environment was definitely conducive to her becoming a reader and a writer, especially of mysteries. Her mother, a teacher, had learnt to read and write at three and she

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## Andrew Flieder Photography

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## on the cover

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in turn taught MacDonald to read and write at that age. The precocious kid was sent to a French private school where, she says, “everything was done en français” so that she had no chance to be bored.

The first book that sent MacDonald in her quest for more mysteries was *Trixie Belden and the Mystery of the Emeralds*, given to her at a party. She recalls how she wished the party would end soon so she could dive into the mystery. What followed was a whole adventure into the Trixie Belden series, followed by Enid Blyton mystery stories and then the Agatha Christie series, of which her mother had a whole collection.

Over the years, she progressed gradually to read P. D. James, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham and other mystery writers.

So fascinated was MacDonald by detective fiction that she was determined to base her MA dissertation on this genre, even though she had to appear before a panel to defend her proposal that this “sub-literary” form of writing was worthy

of examination.

After the completion of her dissertation, someone said to her, “So I suppose you are going to write a detective novel now.”

“And I thought about it and I said, ‘Yeah, I suppose I am.’”

The first attempt was intercepted by MacDonald’s pregnancy with her elder daughter Madeleine; it would be five years later before it was published. That baby girl is now 24 and currently doing her PhD in forensic anthropology. Makes one wonder about the maternal-foetal influence. MacDonald’s younger daughter Jocelyn, studying for her BA in Economics, does not share the same penchant for dead bodies, but she is campaigning to show up as a murderer in a future story.

### Mystery with humour

The author to have influenced MacDonald’s writing style most strongly is Simon Brett. Brett has written three series of detective novels, entertaining the reader with humour, eccentric characters and intricate plot twists.

“When I read Simon Brett, I realized you could be funny at the same time that you are nerve-wreckingly exciting – that’s when it started to occur to me that maybe I could do this too. I don’t think I could

ever sit down and sustain something that didn’t have a joke on it,” she says with a laugh.

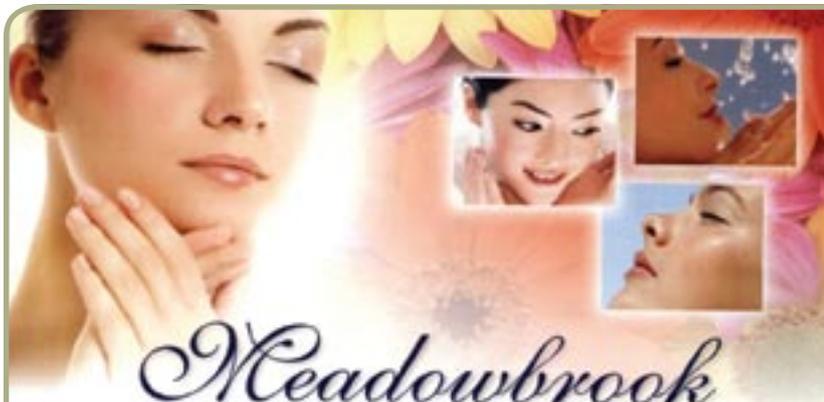
MacDonald has signed a contract for another two books in the series with Ravenstone Books, the publisher of her three latest novels. She is not divulging what Randy will be up to this time, but one can guess that the story is not going to move away from the city of champions.

Born in Banff and whisked to Edmonton before she was even one, MacDonald has spent her whole life here and identifies fully as an “Edmonton Woman.”

“I love this city. We deserve to have novels set here. We deserve to be read by people across the world, and considered an interesting place to live,” she declares.

The next time you go around town, try to see Edmonton through the eyes of Randy Craig. But watch out for those dead bodies. You never know where MacDonald decides to lay them next.

*Discuss the Randy Craig thrillers, read the latest updates on Janice MacDonald's personal appearances, and get the inside skinny on forthcoming books by following the series on Facebook (search for the "RandyCraigMysteries" page) and Twitter (@RandyCraigBooks).*



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