

From Far and Wide

By Janice MacDonald

My mystery series, like my life, is set in Edmonton. I try to do for my home town what Tony Hillerman did for Navajo country, what Colin Dexter did for Oxford, what Denise Mina does for Glasgow, and what Laura Lippman does for Baltimore: immortalize it in the amber of crime fiction and introduce it to a wonderful demographic of the world's population ó the mystery reader.

Many of my readers will never walk the slightly mean streets of Old Strathcona or cross the High Level Bridge while contemplating dropping someone over the side. Instead of drinking Java Jive on the University of Alberta campus, they will pour themselves a lesser cuppa and visit my world only through the pages of a Randy Craig mystery.

As a result, I feel an enormous obligation to show them a good time. I polish up the aspens along the river valley, gluing their golden leaves up a few weeks longer than our windy Octobers allow. I tidy up the panhandlers and get them to seem more oracle than psychotic. I rarely venture out into the creep of suburbs, unless Randy absolutely has to get to Ikea, and for someone who has lived in Edmonton for more than twenty years, she seems to have only been to the mega mall twice.

For local readers, I turn the window onto the world they know, when they have become acclimatized to reading the language of away. They admit to being amazed, and some even seem gratified to see their city in print. They ask, a bit timidly, if people outside our area read my

books. They send copies to folks who have moved away, knowing they'll enjoy a glimpse of home. Sometimes, I feel like the safe-mailable equivalent to a jar of Saskatoon-berry jam.

I absolutely adore hearing from readers from far away, who report that they love the sound of Edmonton and want to visit. So far, I've met and toured around readers from Washington, California, Melbourne, Alabama, Aberdeen, and Caledonia, Ontario. In the small hours, I dream of helping make Edmonton's beautiful skyline recognizable on a weekly TV series. (I also dream about talking Thompson's gazelles, just to put things into perspective.)

On the whole, though, what really makes me smile is hearing that a local reader has taken a stroll through the river valley or gone to eat at the High Level Diner or decided to visit Fort Edmonton again, because they'd been reading my books and come across a reference or description. I love my city, with all its glories and shortcomings and I delight in knowing others are getting out to enjoy it and open their eyes to it once more, because of me. Because that's what it's all about: cities are like the Velveteen Rabbit, they're not real till they're well-used.

Janice MacDonald is the writer of the Randy Craig Mysteries. For more information, visit her website at: www.janicemacdonald.net