

Scooters. Authors/Art.Motorcycles

September 2024

Issue 04

SAM

MAGAZINE

*Art,
character
interviews
and mental
health*

**Hannah Mary McKinnon
Winona Kent
Anastasia Zadeik
Kathryn Huse
Elissa Anthony**

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guest editorial



Joanna's creative endeavors jostle for her time. It's a great dilemma to have, really, and that's why you have me, Eleanor Sweater, as your guest editor.

Joanna is proud of the authors and artists she's featured, and the exposure she's provided; however, this issue of SAM Magazine will be her last. Her work on a graphic novel, and her own writing has risen above other endeavors. Yes, my graphic novel has even been put on hold. Over the next few months, Joanna will be figuring out how to convert the magazine into a blog with guest bloggers. She still wants to promote authors, and she wants the SAM Magazine blog to look like a magazine. She has lots to think about during her morning walks with the dogs. She will still be podcasting, and yesterday she dropped episode 184. She read the personal essay written by C.J. Papoutsis, titled "They Didn't Come With Instructions," which was published in the *Dropped Threads 2* anthology. C.J. wrote an honest and witty story about motherhood. That episode can be listened to at <https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-tqauk-16e59ac>.

As Joanna concludes the magazine and clears her plate for the 200-page graphic novel, she's surprised to discover the similarities between creating illustrations and creative writing. As an author of three thriller

novels, Joanna knows that some scenes write themselves, while others are subject to numerous rewrites. The same is true for drawing characters. Gosh, I could have told her that. It's not a matter of drawing red boots, or a blue scarf, although Joanna loves illustrating boots (check out mine) it's drawing a character and capturing that character's innocence, or torment. A few characters came to her easily, like me, while others took many sketches, but when she got it, **she got it**.

In this issue, Joanna again noticed parallels. Both authors Winona Kent and Hannah Mary McKinnon talk about character interviews. In Winona's article, she and her character Jason Davey, have a conversation which is fun to read. This conversation was the inspiration for Joanna letting me write this editorial.

Anastasia Zadeik shares her process of writing, telling herself to do five or ten minutes which expands to much longer. Both Hannah and Anastasia are very disciplined in their approach to writing. Anastasia's article resonated with Joanna, as Anastasia talks about mental health and the road trip she and her daughter took (mimicking her character's road trip) and their discoveries along the way.

We must talk about the beautiful art in this issue. The front cover is a photo of Kathryn Huse's painting, *The Hermit Trail*, which is a trail in Chemainus. Joanna's husband Ed has told her many stories about the legendary Hermit, as Ed grew up in Chemainus. He remembers how the Hermit created and maintained a number of the trails.

Kathryn works with oil paints, and Joanna is lucky to have her as a neighbour. Joanna also had the privilege of meeting Elissa Anthony. Elissa also paints in oils, using bright colours and textures. Joanna's exposure to oil paintings has been limited. As a child she remembers a friend of the family painting what she considered gothic nudes. Kathryn and Elissa's art pieces are refreshing, free and beautiful.

Keep growing in your art and writing as we forever strive for balance. Thank you for your support, and if you would like to be a guest blogger, please let Joanna know. Who knows, you might see me there.

Signing off, the formidable, Eleanor Sweater



The formidable Eleanor Sweater

(c) Joanna Vander Vlugt
From her work-in-progress graphic novel, featuring Eleanor Sweater

“That way I’m not spending hours on facts that don’t make the cut, or getting sidetracked by facts which are interesting, but potentially irrelevant to the story.”

**HANNAH MAR
MCKINNON**

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Internationally bestselling author Hannah Mary McKinnon was born in the UK, grew up in Switzerland and moved to Canada in 2010. While her debut, *Time After Time*, was a rom com, she transitioned to the dark side thereafter. Her seven suspense novels include *Never Coming Home*, *The Revenge List*, and *Only One Survives*, which has been optioned for the screen. It's rumored Hannah still has a softer side, because she also writes holiday romantic comedies as Holly Cassidy, the first of which was *The Christmas Wager*. Hannah lives in Oakville, Ontario, Canada with her husband and three sons.

Hannah didn't start writing creatively until her forties when she and her family came to Canada and her start-up HR company failed. She had a decision to make—keep working a corporate job or try something new. Hannah plumped for the latter. She loves her second career, and she can't imagine doing anything else.

Her latest novel, *Only One Survives* is a psychological thriller about the rise and violent demise of the all-female pop-rock group The Bittersweet. After a tragic car accident in the Catskills that leaves one person dead, and another severely injured, one of the surviving band members realizes the group may now be worth more dead than alive... But what price are they willing to pay for fame?

The first sliver of an idea for *Only One Survives* came from an abandoned house a few miles from Hannah's home. She drove past it one frigid afternoon, and saw the words *Come Play* written in red paint on the front door, which she found deliciously creepy. *"The image stuck with me, and I attempted to build a story featuring an abandoned lodge and work colleagues, but it didn't sit right."*



"I sent a short description of my idea to my friends, authors Jennifer Hillier and Samantha M. Bailey, asking what they thought. They both liked it, and Sam suggested I make the group of people a band. The idea gave me an immediate ooh moment followed by one of them thinking the band's worth more dead than alive. I knew I was onto something because writing a thriller featuring a band felt fresh and cool. The story shifted quite significantly compared to my initial idea, but the abandoned house remained a constant."

Hannah's editor, Dina Davis, was a fantastic help in pulling the plot together, *"We brainstormed Vienna and the Bittersweet's trajectories, and our collaboration was brilliant. I'm immensely proud of how the novel turned out."*

When it comes to Hannah's writing process, she is very structured in her approach to outlining and following a combination of *Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder, and the *Plotstormers* course she took with www.WritersHQ.co.uk *"Essentially, I break my story into small steps, from beginning to end. While I don't come up with every single plot point or twist, I have the basics, which help me move from one chapter to the next."* Hannah also *"interviews"* her characters. *She has a photo gallery, and builds a map of the area. "This process takes me around a month, depending on the book."*

Hannah doesn't do a lot of research before she writes but she tends to put placeholders for areas that need fleshing out, and then goes back when she's finished her first draft.

“That way I’m not spending hours on facts that don’t make the cut, or getting sidetracked by facts which are interesting, but potentially irrelevant to the story.”

When writing her thrillers, Hannah enjoys a combination of action and character. *“I want readers to understand my antagonist’s and protagonist’s motivations, and work very hard to make them feel like real, rounded people. After all, nobody is exclusively good or bad. We’re all a mix (hopefully with more good than bad!).”*

Because of her plotting process, Hannah always has a clear idea of her characters, digging into their psyche, and ensuring her characters don’t have the same motivations, traits, needs and wants.

When I asked Hannah about staying motivated during the writing process, she referred to her work ethic. *“My corporate life taught me undeniable persistence and organizational skills – and a love of beating deadlines. Writing is fun – but not always. Some days are harder than others, but no butt in the chair = no words on the page, and knowing this alone helps me get the job done. For me, the least favorite part is the very first draft, but I can’t edit a blank page so I’ve just got to get on with it.”*

Ever since Hannah wrote her first novel, she acknowledges that she writes to entertain. *“I hope readers close the book and think, “I enjoyed that. It was time well spent!”*

Of course, Hannah is already onto her next thriller, a story about a missing man and his sister’s desperate attempts to find him. *“It’s a little early to share more about the plot. Let’s just say it may have my most twisted antagonist yet.”*

Another fun fact about Hannah is that she writes holiday romantic comedies under the pseudonym Holly Cassidy. The next romantic comedy, *The Christmas Countdown*, publishes in October 2024.

“It’s a grumpy-sunshine story about a recently heartbroken woman who’s given up on love and the holidays, until she’s tasked by her sister to complete Advent calendar challenges. A charming



baker might be the spoonful of sugar she needs to reignite her belief in herself, love, and Christmas again. It was inspired by the Advent calendars I used to make for my kids.”

When not writing, Hannah reads a lot. Hiking or walking around her neighborhood is a firm favorite, and she’s a huge fan of the movies. Hannah has a home gym with a water rower that’s, *“a great workout and incredibly peaceful. Baking is fun too (hence the gym sessions). I make a mean lemon curd cheesecake.”*

With regards to *Only One Survives*, Hannah would like to thank the wonderful HarperCollins team. Hannah and HarperCollins put together downloadable, free bonus material that includes a Dear Reader letter, discussion questions, a Spotify playlist, and lyrics Hannah wrote for six of the Bittersweet songs mentioned in the book, as well as an extended conversation with Hannah about the novel.

“The bonus material looks gorgeous and is a way for the reader to extend and enhance their experience with Only One Survives. Visit <https://hannahmarymckinnon.com/book-short-stories/only-one-survives/> for the download.”

To learn more about Hannah, check out her website at www.hannahmarymckinnon.com 🌸

“I went into a long period of writer’s block—and if anyone tells you writer’s block doesn’t exist, they’ve never really suffered from it.”



Photo by Jim Goddard

Winona Kent’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 debut novel *Skywatcher* was a finalist in the Seal Books First Novel Award and was published by Bantam Books 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 Winona returned to mysteries with *Disturbing the Peace*, a 2017 novella, followed up by her novel *Notes on a Missing G-String* in 2019, both featuring the character she first introduced in *Cold Play*, Jason Davey, a professional jazz musician/amateur sleuth.

The third and fourth books in Winona’s Jason Davey Mystery series, *Lost Time* and *Ticket to Ride*, were published in 2020 and 2022.

Winona also writes short fiction. Her story “Salty Dog Blues” appeared in Sisters in Crime-Canada West’s anthology *Crime Wave* in October 2020 and was nominated as a finalist in Crime Writers of Canada’s Awards of Excellence for Best Crime Novella in April 2021. “Blue Devil Blues” was one of the four entries in the anthology *Last Shot*, published in June 2021, and “Terminal Lucidity” appeared in the Sisters in Crime-Canada West anthology, *Women of a Certain Age* (October 2022). “On the Internet, Nobody Knows You’re a Dog”, will appear in the upcoming Sisters in Crime-Canada West anthology, *Dangerous Games* (October 2024). A collection of Winona’s short stories, *Ten Stories That Worried My Mother*, was published in 2023.

Winona has been a temporary secretary, a travel agent, a screenwriter and the Managing Editor of a literary magazine. Winona’s currently the national Vice-Chair and the regional BC/YT rep for the Crime Writers of Canada, and is also an active member of Sisters in Crime – Canada West. After many decades working in jobs completely unrelated to writing, Winona is now happily embracing life as a full-time author. She lives in New Westminster, BC with her husband, and a concerning number of disobedient houseplants, many of which were rescued from her apartment building’s compost bin after being abandoned by previous owners.

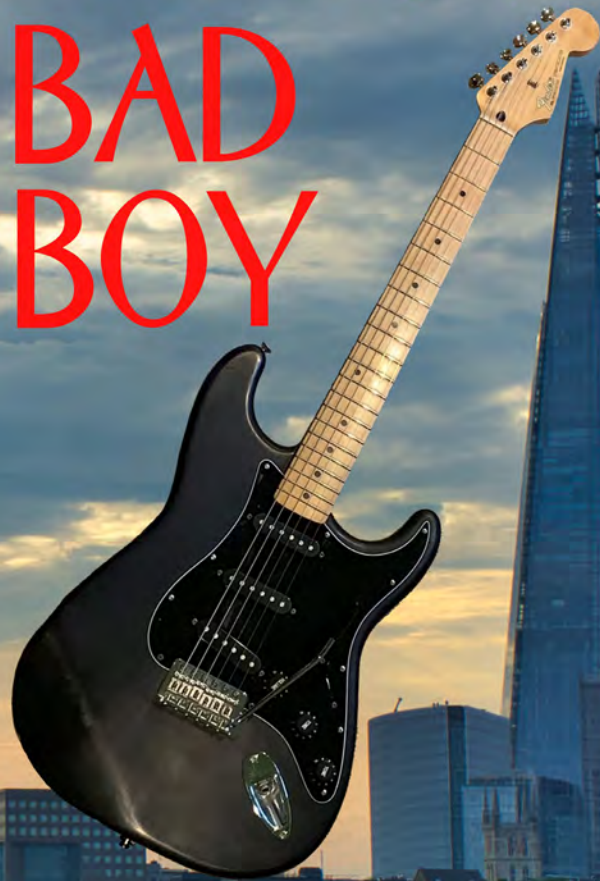
Since a child, Winona has always been a storyteller. She used to illustrate the stories she told herself. Later, when she was about 12, she tackled her first novel. She typed the chapters and handed them around to her fellow students during school recess. That story was an adventure story about a young lad named Lawrence Jenkins-Hennessy who was kidnapped and stashed into the hold of a cargo ship bound for England. “*I guess that might qualify it as a mystery...though in the years following that, I tended to wander more towards attempts at literary fiction.*”

Winona continued to write all through high school and university, and in her spare time, while she was working in a variety of full-time jobs that had nothing to do with writing.

WINONA KENT

A Jason Davey Mystery

**BAD
BOY**



WINONA KENT

Her first published short stories didn't really fall into any particular genre, and her first novel, *Skywatcher*, was actually a tongue-in-cheek spy story, as was its sequel, *The Cilla Rose Affair*. And her third novel, *Cold Play*, wasn't really written as a crime or mystery story, but that's the genre it most closely aligns with. Her next three novels were what she calls "accidental time travel romances". Her seventh book, *Disturbing the Peace*, was very deliberately crafted as a mystery—first, to see if she could write one and second, to see if she was comfortable with the genre. And that's what officially marked the start of her Jason Davey Mysteries—although the character of Jason actually made his debut years earlier in *Cold Play*.

In *Bad Boy*, when a priceless collection of scores by English composer Sir Edward Elgar goes missing from a Soho crime lord's private vault, professional musician and amateur sleuth Jason Davey is tasked to get it back. With the help of a series of clues seemingly lifted from Elgar's own Enigma Variations, Jason sets out to track down both the thief and the collection. The chase leads him from London to Derbyshire and then back to London again, and ultimately to a heartbreaking discovery in a long-abandoned recording studio in the heart of Soho's Tin Pan Alley, Denmark Street.

"There were a couple of events that inspired the Bad Boy novel. First, my husband had a friend named John, who was, himself, a bit of a mystery. John was also our handyman, but he ended up homeless and living in his car. Then, sadly, he died of cancer. We were invited to a celebration of his life, and it was there we discovered he'd had an entire family we didn't know about—an ex-wife and adult children. They, in turn, had no idea about the life he'd been leading for about ten years before he died, as they'd fallen out of touch with him. The contrast between what his family remembered about him, and what we knew about him, was astounding.

"The second thing that inspired this story was my friend, Brian Richmond, who's the person behind the imprint, Blue Devil Books. We were tossing ideas around for the next novel and he came up with an idea about an art thief who jumped (or was he pushed?) off the top of The Shard in London. I thought a music-related theft would make more sense, particularly when it came to Jason's involvement.

"And then, finally, I remembered seeing an episode of the British version of Antiques Roadshow, where a score by Sir Edward Elgar was presented for sale. It turned out the score had been missing from the research archive at the Elgar Birthplace Museum for some 25 years but, following its discovery (via the appearance on the Antiques Roadshow), it was returned to the Elgar Foundation, who in turn presented it to the British Library in 2018. And that was what triggered my creative mind: What if there was another collection of Elgar scores that had gone missing...?"

Winona's books and stories have always been character-driven, even going back to her childhood. *"I've always created the main character first, and filled out their details in my creative imagination. Once I've got a handle on who they are, and what "drives" them—which characteristics they share with me, and which characteristics are completely beyond my own experiences—I invent the situation they have to deal with."*

Winona admits that her characters (so far) have had far more courage and confidence than her, *"so perhaps you could say that they're extensions of what I would be if I wasn't quite so introverted and timid."*

"Jason, particularly, has quite a lot of confidence—something I still don't have, even now, as I'm approaching my 70th birthday! I delight in setting up storylines that require Jason to take some sort of risky action, or deal with a particularly difficult individual, or do some investigative work that might require him to ask a lot of direct and perhaps intrusive questions."

Whenever I read Winona's stories, I'm always taken by Winona's wit. Having said, that, I'm allowing Winona to take over this part of the interview.

Winona Kent: *"I, personally, will walk a mile out of my way to avoid any kind of confrontation or uncomfortable situation. But I have to keep reminding myself that conflict is at the heart of all good storylines. So when I initially set up those conflicts in my Jason stories, I actually end up having conversations in my mind with him that go something like this:*

Me: *"OK, so now you're looking out of the window and you see Arthur Braskey's car parked on the road outside and you know his driver is watching you..."*

Jason: *"It's three in the morning, ffs!"*

Me: *"But you can't sleep, you know you've been awake all night, and that driver is really bothering you. If it was me, I'd just ignore her and do some word puzzles..."*

Jason: *"You're going to make me go outside and confront her, aren't you."*

Me: *"If you wouldn't mind. We have to move the story forward..."*

Jason: *"I'll take her by surprise and climb into the front passenger seat. And offer her some chocolate digestive biscuits. And then she can call Arthur Braskey and I can be quite belligerent with him when he shows up. And please let me tell her everything that she's doing wrong from a surveillance point of view..."*



“I, personally, will walk a mile out of my way to avoid any kind of confrontation or uncomfortable situation. But I have to keep reminding myself that conflict is at the heart of all good storylines.”

- Winona Kent

Me: (relieved): *“Yes please. I’ll just email one of my colleagues who used to be a PI to ask her what you need to know in order to have that conversation. As I said, if it was me, I’d be doing word puzzles.”*

Jason: *“And this is precisely why I am the hero of this novel and you are not.”*

Winona has never really had any difficulty writing her novels, with one exception: *The Cilla Rose Affair*. *“My first novel, Skywatcher, had come out in 1989, but it hadn’t done very well, largely because it was a spy story, and the bottom fell out of the spy story market around that time. The Berlin Wall came down and we were finished with the Cold War, and we were all now apparently good friends with the Russians!”*

“I went into a long period of writer’s block—and if anyone tells you writer’s block doesn’t exist, they’ve never really suffered from it. I wanted to write about the Harris family again—same characters, different part of the world. At the time, I was quite obsessed with the London Underground. And I wanted to work the London Underground into the plot, which involved sound waves that the baddie was going to use to destroy London. Completely silly and totally influenced by my other obsession at the time, the old Man from the UNCLE tv series.

“And I just couldn’t get past the first couple of chapters. This

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UMBRELLASQUARED
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was a few years before the internet, so my research was all old-school, but very detailed. I wanted to use all of the really quirky information I’d learned about the Underground, but I just couldn’t work out a way to include it in the narrative.

*And then I saw the movie, Field of Dreams. And I asked myself, what is Field of Dreams about? Why does it work? The answer was: it’s about an obsession. And who had the obsession about building the baseball diamond in the middle of a cornfield? The farmer, Ray Kinsella. And then, it struck me. Let one of the characters in *The Cilla Rose Affair* share the same obsession with the London Underground that you have.”*

Winona acknowledges that she was a young writer, and it was only her second novel. She still had a lot to learn about craft and technique, but it worked. *“I gave my obsession to one of the*

three Harris brothers—Anthony, an actor. By doing that, I allowed him to have some very quirky and fascinating bits of knowledge that ended up being crucial to the plot. And it solved my writer’s block, too.”

When it comes to next projects, Winona has been thinking about bringing Jason back to Canada for his next adventure. He’s familiar with Vancouver—in *Cold Play*. He was working as an entertainer on board a cruise ship that sailed weekly between Vancouver and Alaska, and he has a newly-discovered daughter who was born and raised here.

In April, Winona went down to Left Coast Crime in Seattle. It was her first in-person writers’ conference, and, “I was quite inspired by what I saw and experienced there. Coincidentally, Jason has a sister who writes cozy mysteries under the pseudonym Taylor Feldspar...and I thought, wouldn’t it be fun to have Jason fly to Vancouver with his sister, in order to attend a mystery writers’ convention? And while he’s here, he can be hot on the trail of a stolen—and very expensive—guitar.”

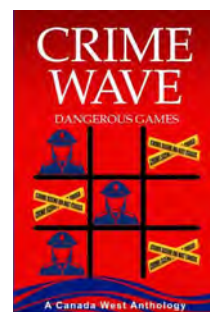
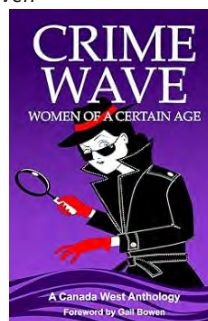
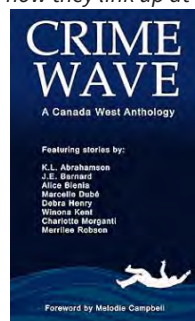
When Winona is not writing, she has a real passion for family tree research—which sometimes shows up in Jason, too. “I have a fascinating family history. On my dad’s side, they’re all from small towns in Hungary and Moravia, going back centuries, and all of the cousins and brothers and sisters from about half a dozen families ended up marrying one another, so I’ve got relationships like “Wife of grandnephew of wife of 2nd cousin 3x removed” and “Father-in-law of 2nd cousin 5x removed” and then it turns out they’re actually brother and sister and both of them are actually my 4th cousins.

“On my mother’s side, they’re all from England and Ireland. But I’ve got a mysterious great-grandfather who only really showed up officially when he married my great-grandmother... and he may have been a bit untruthful about his birth year and his father. I can’t find any record at all of his birth under his surname, and only occasional mentions of his schooling. To make matters worse, I’ve got hundreds of DNA-relations showing up on my maternal side, and no idea how they link up at all, even

though they’ve provided quite concise family trees. Which really makes me wonder how my intriguing great-grandfather came by his last name—was he born with it? Was he a foundling? Was his birth somehow not registered in 1877? Did his mother (my great-great-grandmother) marry someone with that surname and my great-grandfather adopted the name? I’m not sure I’ll ever solve it, but in the meantime, when I feel stressed or I need to take a break from my writing, I delve into my family tree and hunt down census reports, birth and christening records, marriage banns and obituaries, and attach it all to some of the 52,000 4th to 6th cousins I seem to be related to. It’s surprisingly relaxing – mostly because I love imposing order on things that are otherwise wildly chaotic.”

In closing, Winona would like to say, “Thank you so much for featuring me! I think it’s so important for indie authors to have this kind of showcase available to them. It’s becoming more and more difficult to get noticed, because we’re all part of a hugely crowded arena, and we’re all jumping up and down, waving our arms, crying out, “Please! Please! Have a look at my new book!”. We don’t typically have the reach that traditionally published authors have. Our books are typically sold online and at tables at markets and festivals, rather than in brick-and-mortar bookstores (unless they’re on consignment). I applaud you for having the time and the commitment to make this all work—on top of your own writing and graphic arts career! So, thank you from the bottom of my heart...and I hope your readers enjoy reading all about me and my mysteries!” 🐾

To find out more information about Winona Kent and her novels, Winona’s website is <http://www.winonakent.com>



Crime Wave, A Canada West Anthology: www.amazon.ca/gp/product/B08HL85TX8?tag=books2read02-20

Crime Wave, Women of a Certain Age: www.amazon.ca/gp/product/B0B11BT45N?notRedirectToSDP=1&ref=dbs_mng_calw_1&storeType=ebooks

THE E & K TAKEOVER



Photo by Joanna Vander Vlugt

Art lovers from Oregon and Vancouver Island are praising the Water's Edge Guest Artist Exhibition at the Ladysmith Art Gallery, with words such as "gorgeous," "amazing," "the best show exhibited in the gallery." I volunteered at the gallery during this exhibition, featuring artists Elissa Anthony and Kathryn Huse and I heard the praise. I'm lucky because Kathryn is my neighbour. I have enjoyed many trips across the street and up the steps to her deck for a glass of wine on a Thursday or Friday afternoon while discussing art, politics and family. Elissa and Kathryn work in oils. I've learned through Kathryn that the added stress of working with oils is the drying time. My appreciation of oil paintings was limited until I saw Kathryn's and Elissa's art.

During my volunteer shift, I met Elissa Anthony. We talked about everything from American politics with a couple from Oregon, to art, paint, colours, brush strokes, winter colours vs. warm colours. I learned a lot.

I'm a huge fan of both artists. Their styles are similar yet different. Instead of sending birthday cards to family, I send art cards. I can write "happy birthday" inside and add a personal note. By doing this, I'm supporting artists.

What is my biggest dilemma with these artists? I don't want to give away the art cards I've purchased! I stocked up on one particular card of Kathryn's because when I look at it, the commercial, "*Calgon take me away, plays in my head.*" *You'll experience that too.*"

Starting with Elissa, Elissa Anthony was born in Toronto, Ontario; however, she grew up in North Vancouver. She studied Graphic Art at George Brown College in Ontario. She worked as a graphic artist for many years in Toronto, until she took a position as a Sales Manager for a Display Company. In Elissa's bio on her website, Elissa says, "*This job was fulfilling on many levels.*" She was able to be a liaison, and convey ideas between the artists creating the work, and the corporations who were buying it. This experience became the building block for her eventually having her own art based business.

In 1991 Elissa moved to England where she was exposed to the galleries and museums of Europe. She enthusiastically began taking fine art courses at the MAC in Birmingham, West Midlands, England.

Her move to Vancouver Island proved inspirational, and she has been painting in oils ever since. One of her students claimed,

“we think about art, but Elissa IS art”. Her life has become a whirlwind of creativity—oil painting, pottery, jewellery making, and teaching art consumes her days. Elissa’s art takes her on a slightly native/spiritual journey which is no surprise considering Elissa is one-quarter Mohawk. This is an area she is pursuing.

Elissa’s art is collected across Canada and she shows in several galleries on Vancouver Island as well as the Gust Gallery in Waterton national park. Two of Elissa’s paintings were chosen by Roger’s Chocolates of Victoria to grace their Collectors Tins. Her “Botanical Beach” tin and “Canoes on Central Lake” tin is now available online.

Kathryn Huse grew up in a military family. She was fortunate to have experienced the beauty of nature, art and architecture across the ocean, and in Canada, from coast to coast.

With one-quarter Montagnais blood in her soul, (from her mother’s French Canadian side,) Kathryn tries to express her appreciation of all that lives in her art, which at the moment, is through oil painting.



Cape Caution by Artist Elissa Anthony

Kathryn studied Fine Arts, Graphic Design & Illustration in Kingston and Toronto, which lead to a diversified career in marketing, advertising and publishing.

On Kathryn’s website, she says, “Living by the ocean, surrounded by the beauty of the mountains and mystical rain forests makes Vancouver Island a truly inspirational place for me to bring the oil paints out from hibernation! Whether sailing or skiing, in sun, rain or snow, the Salish Sea is always rich with life!”

Kathryn’s website is <https://www.sirusstudio.ca/the-forest> and Elissa’s is <https://elissa-anthony.pixels.com/>



Driftwood Beach by Kathryn Huse



Stocking Creek by Kathryn Huse

Elissa Anthony Kathryn Huse
Invite you to explore the surreal beauty of Vancouver Island on canvas...

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ANASTASIA ZADEIK

Anastasia Zadeik is a writer, editor, and narrative nonfiction storyteller. After graduating from Smith College, she had a career in international neuropsychological research while raising her children. Her debut novel, *Blurred Fates*, won the 2023 Sarton Award for Contemporary Fiction and the 2023 National Indie Excellence Award in Contemporary Fiction. Her second novel, *The Other Side of Nothing*, which Kirkus called “a stunning story about mental illness and its challenges,” was released May 28. Anastasia serves as Director of Communications for the San Diego Writers Festival, on the board of the International Memoir Association, and as a mentor and performer for the literary nonprofit So Say We All.

In Anastasia’s book *The Other Side of Nothing*, one day after turning eighteen, Julia Reeves checks herself into a psychiatric facility, longing for relief from the grief and guilt that have engulfed her since her father’s untimely death. There, she falls for fellow suicide attempt survivor Sam Lorenzo, a brilliant twenty-three-year-old photographer struggling with bipolar disorder.

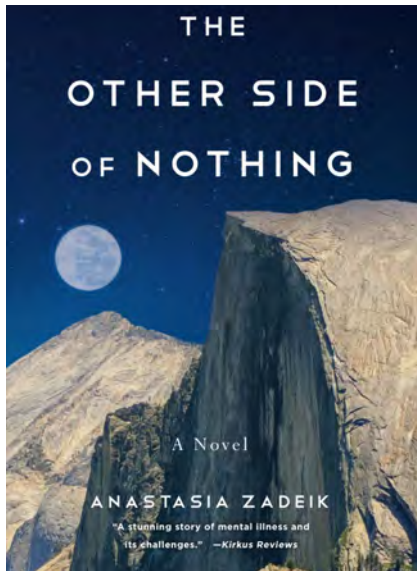
When Sam and Julia escape and disappear on a cross-country odyssey, Julia’s mother, Laura, forms an uneasy alliance with Sam’s mother, Arabella, and armed with only a handful of clues, the two mothers embark on a journey of their own, desperately hoping to save their children before they are lost forever.

For as long as Anastasia could remember, she has used writing to process her world. She started with a puffy, pink diary with a lock and key, moved on to fabric-colored journals, spiral-bound notebooks, and finally black moleskins. But most of that time, she didn’t have the intention to write “something” or be “a writer.” Not until her children went off to college did she begin to take writing seriously. She started taking creative writing classes in the evening, joined a Read & Critique group, and eventually hired a writing coach to help her hone what she wanted to write. Writing continues to be



a way for Anastasia to process life, but now she shares that process and its results with others.

When asked what the original “what if” or inspiration for her book was, Anastasia responds, “My nephew attempted to end his own life in the fall of 2012, and afterward, my sister and I spent many hours talking about depression, suicide, and the impact of mental health challenges on individuals and their loved ones. One of the things that kept coming up was how silent people were about what had “happened,” unable in many cases even to call what happened by its real name, “a suicide attempt.” We discussed the reasons for this and why it is people don’t know what to say or how to be supportive after a suicide attempt, as opposed to, say, a diagnosis



of cancer or an accident. We also discussed how alone an individual who attempts to take their own life must feel, how alone their loved ones feel afterward—and how the silence of others only serves to compound this loneliness.

“In November 2015, when NaNoWriMo came along, I decided to write a novel about a woman named Laura and her daughter, Julia, who drift apart after the death of their husband/father until Laura feels she no longer knows her daughter. When Julia becomes suicidal, Laura is thrust into a world she doesn’t understand, and the two of them must find their way through.”

“Initially, it was going to be told from two perspectives—mother and daughter—but as the plot unfolded, I added the perspective of Arabella, the mother of the young man (Sam) with whom Julia falls in love and with whom she leaves care against medical advice. I intentionally do not tell any of the story from Sam’s perspective because I think it is important to acknowledge that we can never really know what goes on inside someone’s head.”

Anastasia admits she’s a pantsier that plots just a step or two ahead. She began writing her book with two main characters and the idea of telling a story through two perspectives that continually moved the story forward.

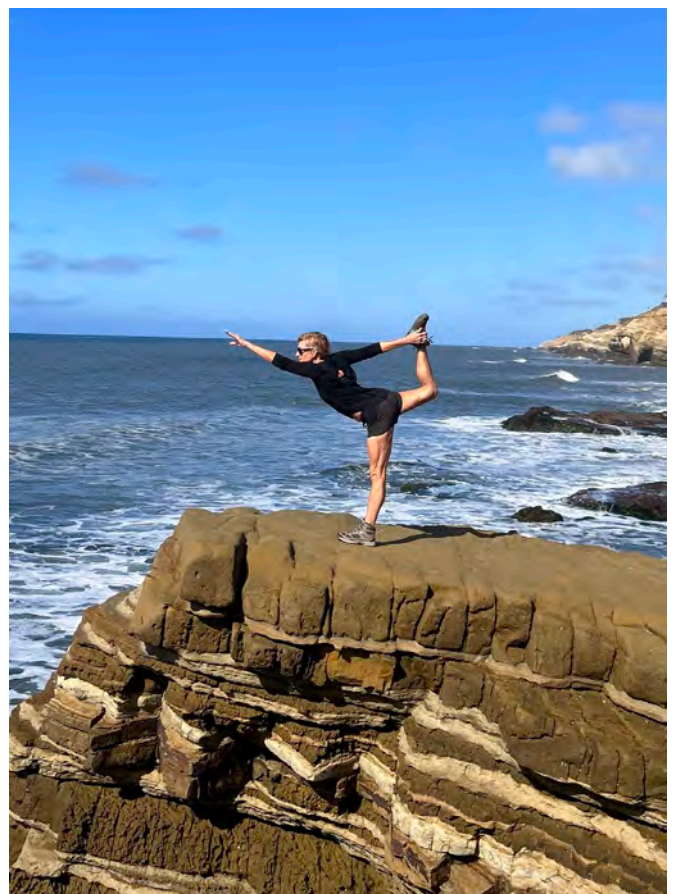
“As I began to write the first draft, I opened my mind and let the words flow without referential thinking. My fingers flew across the page in time with my brain, and then I went back to look at what my brain had decided to type next.”

“For example, I knew Julia would fall in love at the psychiatric facility because she would be vulnerable and longing to feel connected, but I didn’t know Sam would be her love interest until his empty chair loomed up during an

early group therapy session. Suddenly, I understood she would see him, feel his presence and energy in the room, and then register the hole that remained after he left.

*“During one of the first conversations, I wrote between Sam and Julia, Sam uses the word “Sisyphian,” which I knew was in relation to his struggle with bipolar disorder. I wondered how Sam would think about the world. Knowing he had tried to take his own life at least once before and that he would be deep into existential philosophy, I looked up Sisyphus and existentialism and found Camus. His book *The Myth of Sisyphus* checked all of the boxes, so I bought it, read it—and reread it. All the while, I imagined Julia trying to understand the words, themes, and concepts discussed in the book and realizing she is over her head.*”

“From there on out, the research informed the book even as the book informed the research. Because Sam is a photographer, I knew he would be a lover of Ansel Adams, who hung out with Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. I began researching Adams, Stieglitz, and O’Keeffe and decided that Sam would put all his hopes into recreating an Ansel Adams image to jumpstart his career. Moreover, he would view Julia as the muse he’d been waiting for, and upon meeting her, he would decide they needed to go to Yosemite, driving straight through from NYC with only a few short stops.”





“I purchased books on Stieglitz’s art and learned of his goal to gain acceptance within the art world for photographs as an art form. I bought and devoured a book that compiled his early correspondence with O’Keeffe. I bought books on Adams’ early days as a young man and books on the composition of each of his iconic photos.

“I decided I needed to drive from NYC to Yosemite under similar circumstances to the ones Julia and Sam would find themselves. My daughter, who has struggled with depression, anxiety, and self-harm, wanted to go with me, so in November 2016, we rented a car in NYC and drove straight through to Yosemite. En route, we encountered things that surprised us, things that made us stop and stare in awe, and things that informed a character or the plot.

“The research and writing went back and forth—some days, I would go down a rabbit hole for hours, and, realizing I couldn’t put everything I’d learned into the book, I began to look for one element that would either drive the story forward or serve as a metaphor for one of the story’s threads or themes. On other days, research might result in an “aha” moment that impacted prominent themes or plot points, leading to rewriting or adding a new thread.”

Anastasia has learned to accept that creativity is mysterious. “I have long believed that every thought, emotion, and action is determined by neurotransmitters in the brain working in

concert with all of our bodily systems (nervous, limbic, endocrine, circulatory, respiratory, and so on). But I do not understand how these interactions result in my waking up in the middle of the night with a solution to one of the problems a character might be facing or how a plot twist comes into my head fully formed while I am walking my dog and listening to music on my earbuds. I often read something I’ve written and don’t remember writing it—as if my creativity comes from a place I do not control. It is baffling and marvelous at the same time.”

Anastasia admits that she’s “about as Type A as a person can be, and my experiences in college and as a neuropsych researcher confirmed my already-firm commitment to a strong work ethic.” However, she sometimes struggles with jumpstarting creative writing. “My best fix for this is telling myself I only need to write for ten or fifteen minutes. I set a timer, and more often than not, when it goes off, I want to keep going.”

In terms of life lessons, Anastasia acknowledges that she, “has struggled with depression, anxiety, and insomnia my whole life. I recall waking my mother in the middle of the night when I was about six or seven to tell her I could not fall asleep. Remarkably, I engaged in this behavior through college, with phone calls instead of trips down the hall to my parent’s bedroom. Though I knew my mother did not have a solution for me, talking to her helped me feel less alone, and, for decades, I managed my mental health challenges with

exercise, journal writing, chats with my mom, and occasional visits to a therapist. However, other than the insomnia (which didn't seem to carry a stigma), I rarely spoke of these challenges to anyone, sometimes not even therapists.

"I knew I was very fortunate. To admit that I was often overwhelmed by the darkness of the soul or debilitating panic attacks felt wrong—weak, indulgent, self-centered. But then, several years ago, my daughter admitted that she had been seriously depressed for years. Though I shouldn't have been surprised, I found it difficult to understand or accepting that she didn't want to talk about it. I wanted to know what was wrong so I could fix her. I wanted to love her "better," even though I knew from my experience that this was impossible.

*"Being on the other side of the patient/loved one equation was eye-opening. I hope that *The Other Side of Nothing* will create and increase empathy not only in those impacted by mental illness but also in those outside looking in."*

In terms of themes, Anastasia says, *"If I had to choose one theme or message, I would say, "Though your life will be impacted by the past and informed by your plans for the future, try hard to live fully in each moment, or as Camus would say, remain conscious of each day as a "succession of presents," (which I like to think of as holding both definitions of the word - present as in now and present as in a gift). Find what helps you stay mentally healthy and commit to doing it—and if your strategies stop working, commit yourself to finding new ones or combining old and new, with the goal of managing your mental health rather than struggling with it."*

Anastasia hopes readers come away with the feeling of having traveled with four unique people through a pivotal time in their lives and gained empathy for both those struggling with mental illness and their loved ones. She also hopes they may long to consider their own philosophy of life and whether they are living as fully as they might.

Anastasia is in the earliest stages of a literary mystery. She hopes to become more of a plotter this time around. She might even, *"create an outline and character sketches!"*

When Anastasia isn't writing her other passion is hiking and stopping to notice the small things she might overlook if she didn't make an effort to see them. *"I have become enamored with tiny flowers within flowers, patterns in bark, sand, and birdsong, and the sound of waves receding over rocks or insects' wings whirring. I have made a practice of taking time to acknowledge the messages in those moments about how small we are in the universe and how fleeting our time here is, but how our existence can still be meaningful and beautiful."*

When asked if Anastasia had any closing thoughts, she said it best. *"Though we have begun to break down the stigma associated with mental illness, we still have a long way to go in terms of understanding the root causes of mental health challenges, how and why treatments work (and don't work), how best to reach those that need help, and how to educate, train, and encourage friends, colleagues, and family members to be part of a web of support."* ❀

To learn more about Anastasia, check out her website, <https://www.anastasiazadeik.com>



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