

Inside Story



Novelist juggles two separate lives

Like Peter Parker and his alter-ego Spiderman, Rosemary Aubert leads two distinctly different lives. By day, she is a Court Services Officer for the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. But during the summer, on weekends and in spare moments, she is the author of two book-length poetry collections, five very successful romance novels, and an elegant mystery series featuring a former judge, Ellis Portal, who is homeless.

"From the very beginning," says Rosemary, "I wanted to be a novelist." But knowing novelists don't make much money, she decided she would "never take a job that wasn't exciting. There had to be something in it that would either teach me about life or give me something I could use in writing."

So far, it's working quite nicely.

Love of writing

Born in Niagara Falls, New York, Rosemary began writing while still a child. She soon discovered that "novels are very, very long, and they need a grand idea." She tried poetry, and her first published work was a poem published in her school newspaper when she was 18.

Rosemary and her siblings attended a private Catholic school. "We didn't have money for other things," she recalls, "but we had to have a good Catholic education." Her mother was a teacher and a painter. All of the children were encouraged to read and write.

She won a scholarship to the prestigious St. Bonaventure University in New York, where she was taught by "Franciscan monks who were very like St. Francis," Rosemary says. Despite the university's high-quality journalism course, she chose to study literature.

With her long-term goal in mind, she found entry-level positions with several New York publishing houses.

Then came the war in Vietnam.

As a teenager, Rosemary had begun to feel that the organized religion she knew didn't line up with what she read in the New Testament. Now she looked at the war her country was engaged in, and decided it was immoral. She moved to Canada in protest.

In Toronto, she continued to pursue her dream of becoming a novelist. As she puts it, she really had no choice. "I was raised to think that my writing was my God-given talent, and it would be a sin not to use it.

She worked in the library system of the community colleges in Ontario while earning a master's degree in literature from York University. After graduation, she became an editor at McGraw Hill, then a senior editor at Harlequin. She also managed to write five very successful novels for Harlequin.

New challenges



Needing a new challenge, Rosemary decided to write mysteries. She began night classes in criminology at the University of Toronto. During this time, she worked with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto; did some consulting on parole, halfway houses and neighbourhood safety; and was a Contract Security Officer with the U.S. consulate.

In 1995, after a 30-year search to find a church that fulfilled her idea of what a New Testament church should look like, Rosemary found Yorkminster Park Baptist Church in downtown Toronto.

When Rosemary sat down to write her first mystery, she decided to combine the first-hand knowledge she had gained about ex-offenders, street children, drugs, gangs, homeless people and other tough issues with her belief about the primary role of a Christian writer. "In my writing, I try to portray real characters and I try not to be judgmental, but to emphasize Christian love," she says. "It's easy to like nice people, but I don't think that's what Christianity is about."

Because she writes for the general public, there is always a bit of tension. "I'm very strong on taking your own viewpoint and reflecting it in your writing no matter what the market is. But difficult situations arise and I may have to present something I don't believe in. However, I would never advocate something I don't believe in."

Award winner

The final book of Rosemary's Ellis Portal series will be released in July, 2005. Other books in the series, which are best read in order, are *Free Reign*, *The Feast of Stephen* (Winner of the Crime Writers of Canada 2000 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel), *The Ferryman Will Be There*, and *Leave Me By Dying*. These books are available in many libraries and general bookstores.

Rosemary also won the 1995 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Short Story for "The Midnight Boat of Palermo." Ready for a new challenge, her next project will be *The Judge of Orphans*, a historical mystery set in New York and Toronto at the turn of the 20th century.

Visit Rosemary's website at www.doortosummer.com/aubert/aubbio.htm

N.J. Lindquist is the executive director of The Word Guild (www.thewordguild.com). Her new mystery, Shaded Light, will be on store shelves in October.

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