

**An Interview with Sharon Rowse, author of THE SILK TRAIN MURDER
May, 2009**

INT: What led you to write about this time frame? This location?

SR: I've always been fascinated by the end of the Victorian era and the dawn of the modern age – so many things that we now take for granted were being introduced so quickly. And the Klondike gold rush and parts of west coast were really the last frontier. What drove people to explore it, and who were they? Then of course the role and expectations of women were on the verge of a major change with the suffrage movement. Time frame and setting give me an opportunity to explore a clash of cultures and personalities.

INT: What was your process in writing this book?

SR: Well, I started by being intrigued with the men who had gone to the Klondike and wondered what had happened to the ones who had not found gold. Then I started my research and came across the silk trains, which I hadn't known about, and which I found fascinating. So I put my failed gold-seeker together with the silk trains, in a very new town at the edge of the wilderness, and started doing research.

I probably researched for a couple of months before I began writing (it's a period I'd done a lot of research and reading about before I ever thought of the book). The writing itself – I have a small computer and I take it to one of my favorite coffee shops and sit and write for a couple of hours. Then I may go for a long walk, come back and write for another couple of hours. During all this I'm still researching, and often the things I learn will end up changing the direction of the plot.

INT: Do you outline, plan out your book before you write it?

SR: No, I'll start with an idea or two, a "what if" scenario, if you will, and then I just start writing. Often the direction the book goes, the plot twists, are as much a surprise to me as they are to the reader. I write the first draft using this method, then I rewrite, and rewrite again in my study, with my reference books at hand.

INT: Does this mean you don't know who-done-it until the end of the book?

SR: Usually. Sometimes I have an idea of who it may be fairly early on, but usually the plot twists as I'm writing it and I end up being wrong. It can be very disconcerting to be nearly to the end of the book and still not know who the killer is.

INT: How did you come up with your characters? And are they based on real people or modeled after anyone you know?

SR: My characters seem to come to life as I write the story – I will have a fair sense of the main characters as I begin writing, but they often develop surprising characteristics or do things I don't expect as the book unfolds. None of my characters, with the exception of the one-armed jailor, whom I just couldn't resist, are modeled on anyone I know or have researched. Characters might have a combination of traits from different people I know, but I'm never thinking about anyone in particular when I develop characters.

INT: What about historical characters? Do you use them?

SR: In *The SILK TRAIN MURDER*, the only real life figure I used was the one armed jailor, because I couldn't resist using him. In the sequel I'm writing now, however, there are several real personalities that seem to need to be included. We'll see what happens as I keep writing the book.

INT: Who are the authors you most admire, who have most influenced you?

SR: I love reading, so there are so many, I don't quite know where to start. In the mystery world, Marcia Muller, Anne Perry and Sue Grafton were early influences, then Laurie King, Caleb Carr and Laura Lippman. But there are so many good writers out there, it's hard to name just a few. It's been a true privilege in the last year to meet so many of them, and even to be on panels with some of them.

INT: What was the toughest thing about writing this book?

SR: Finishing it! But I did enjoy the research and even the re-writing. Keeping the story as accurate to the time period as I could was probably the biggest challenge.

INT: Is there another book in this series?

SR: Yes, I've just completed the second book featuring John Lansdowne Granville, with the working title of THE LOST MINE MURDERS. I've been having a wonderful time researching lost gold mines and the local First Nations tribes as they were in 1900. Emily, of course, has gone on to study typewriting, but she doesn't stay in class for long.

INT: We're hearing rumors of another series. Can you tell us about that?

SR: You've been reading my blog! Yes, as a change of pace, I'm working on a contemporary PI series, but still set in Vancouver. My protagonist is Barbara O'Grady, an artist-turned PI, who is handed a seemingly straight-forward case with a cheating husband that turns into murder. Barbara ends up investigating both that murder and another that occurred nearly forty years ago.

INT: Why a second series?

SR: I love my SILK TRAIN MURDER characters, and the historical research I get to do for the series, but contemporary Vancouver is a pretty dynamic place, and writing Plus Barbara is a character that has been in my head for awhile; she's got a strong presence and a bit of an attitude, which makes her fun to write.

INT: Don't you find it confusing to be writing about Vancouver in 1899, then switching to present day, and, by the sounds of it, 1970?

I have the 1950's in there too. No, actually I find that the contrast keeps me fresh. While I'm writing the Barbara books, I'll be researching the Granville and Emily books. In fact, right now I'm writing Barbara while I'm reading more about the Chinese immigration to BC for the third book in the Granville and Emily series.