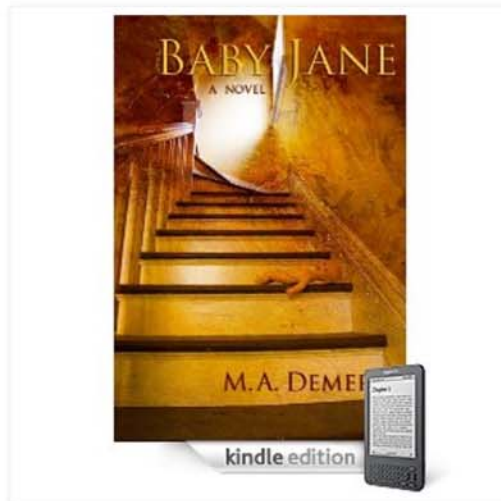


WEDNESDAY, JUNE 29, 2011

Kindle Author Interview: M.A. Demers



M.A. Demers, author of *Baby Jane*, discusses her book, her journey as a writer, and self-publishing on Kindle.

DAVID WISEHART: What can you tell us about *Baby Jane*?

M.A. DEMERS: It's a murder mystery with a Native paranormal twist, set here in Vancouver. It's about the relationship between this world and the spirit world, and about a half-Native detective who's trying to bridge his traditional Native culture with the larger culture, all the while trying to solve a murder. But it's his

Native roots, and his Native grandmother, who turn out to be instrumental in solving the mystery.

DAVID WISEHART: How do you develop and differentiate your characters?

M.A. DEMERS: I just let them be themselves. My characters tend to arrive in my imagination fully formed; my job is to make sure that I'm describing them properly. Because I know what my characters are thinking and feeling, there is a tendency to assume that what I am writing is an accurate representation of those thoughts and feelings. But sometimes it's not. For example, in the early drafts of *Baby Jane*, Claire was quicker to anger: this is a woman who was hurt deeply and she had become very isolated, and so she's having to learn all over again how to be a social being. Her anger stems from her insecurities and her embarrassment for past transgressions. But reader feedback was that, until they got to know her, Claire appeared cold so it was hard for them to connect with her; they couldn't see the pain behind the anger. That wasn't my intention, so I had to change how Claire responded to others and her situation. I removed some of her anger and expressed more of her vulnerability.

DAVID WISEHART: Who do you imagine is your ideal reader?

M.A. DEMERS: Open-minded and willing to go on a journey with me. I'm asking them to accept that these characters and their world exists, so cynicism will just get in the way.

DAVID WISEHART: What was your journey as a writer?

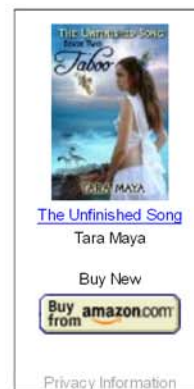
M.A. DEMERS: I was born a bookworm—rumour has it I left a paperback behind in my mother's womb—and I've been writing since I was about fifteen. But I'm also a visual artist and after university the latter won out and I became a professional photographer. But then fate intervened back a few years later and I started writing again. This led me to the film industry, for which I've been writing since 1995. Film seemed like the perfect marriage between my literary and visual sides. I remember the thrill of seeing for the first time a scene that I wrote—for *A Cooler Climate*, starring Sally Fields and Judy Davis—played out on the screen; it was such a rush. So it's no surprise that my readers tell me I'm a very visual writer, and that *Baby Jane* would make a great movie.

DAVID WISEHART: What is your writing process?

M.A. DEMERS: When I start a story, I always have the beginning and the end firmly in my head. Then I have to get my characters from one to the other. That's the hard part.

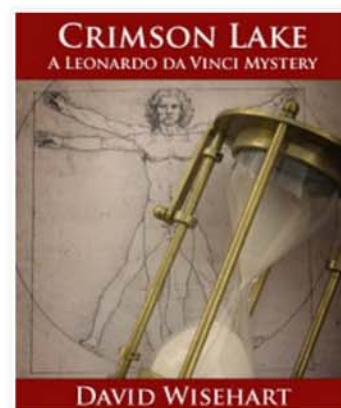
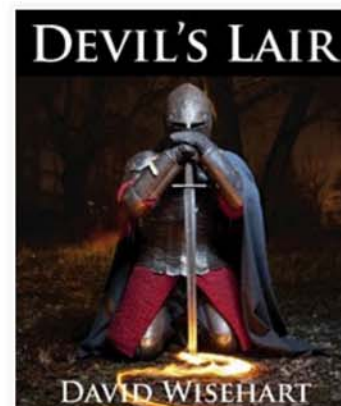
I start each writing session by reading the last part from the day before and making any necessary revisions to the text. This gets the movie in my head rolling and then I begin transcribing again what I see. Sometimes I think I'm no more than a stenographer for the

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cosmos. I don't write with an outline but I do keep detailed notes of characters' biographical details and plot points so that the story remains logical. If I get stuck, I lie down on the couch and watch the movie as I've written it so far, and then the next scenes eventually emerge. Then it's back to the computer.

I also do a lot of research both before and during the writing process. I make extensive use of library and Internet resources, and seek out industry experts. For *Baby Jane* that meant contacting forensic anthropologists and pathologists, a DNA expert, the head of Vancouver's fire investigations unit, a Coast Salish medicine man, a sergeant in the military, and detectives from the Vancouver police and the R.C.M.P. And through it all I had my dear friend Constable Lindsey Houghton of the VPD, who was an amazing resource for all things cops from procedure to lingo. He was invaluable both as a resource and for providing moral support. *Baby Jane's* Constable Charles Brown, media relations, is an homage to Lindsey.

DAVID WISEHART: What authors most inspire you?

M.A. DEMERS: Hands down, Gabriel García Márquez.

DAVID WISEHART: What one book, written by someone else, do you wish you'd written yourself?

M.A. DEMERS: *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

DAVID WISEHART: How have you marketed and promoted your work?

M.A. DEMERS: At first it was accidental: I was having technical difficulties with the Kindle formatting and I sought out help on the Kindle forums. I connected with a guy in the States; he has a Kindle so he can make use of the free@Kindle service. I sent him the first part of the book to convert because I was trying to confirm the cover, TOC, and start links were working; he loved the cover, read and loved the first three chapters I had sent, bought the book the minute it was released, and went on to write a 5-star review. It was a huge surprise. I was on cloud nine for days.

Then, wanting to pay the kindness forward, I wrote and posted on the forum a Word for Kindle formatting guide with all the stuff I had worked through; one of the recipients of my help checked out my novel out of curiosity, loved it and wrote a 4-star review. She contacted me to suggest I sign up as an author at Goodreads, which I didn't then know about. So my readers have been hugely helpful.

Those two reviews got the ball rolling. So now that I'm approaching indie reviewers and bloggers like yourself, I'm finding that I rise faster in the slush pile. And the reviews have helped me overcome prejudice and get my book into four local independent bookstores; I bought copies of *Baby Jane* and have been selling directly to the stores. I'm doing a book signing next month with one of them, Blackberry Books. I approached my local library and next week I'm giving a talk about self-publishing. I've also approached the Vancouver police department's benevolent society who run a shop that sells police sweatshirts and the like; I'm awaiting the return of the society chair from holiday to see if they'll carry *Baby Jane*.

Vancouver is also a tourist destination, and I was told by the owner of a mystery bookstore that bibliophiles like to buy books set in the locale they are visiting as an alternate souvenir. So it's on my list to approach the souvenir shops around Vancouver. It's also on my list to contact local book reviewers with the hope that the novelty of a book set in Vancouver will overcome prejudice about a self-published work, and maybe they will at least read it.

And of course there is my Facebook page, the FB page of my company, Michelle A. Demers Creative Writing and Fine Art Photography—I know, it's a marquee killer—and my blog, Bad Egg. I also have an email list, though it's small and I'm certain most people just delete my emails.

As you can see, it's a time-consuming and lengthy process. As one blogger put it, book promotion for the indie writer is a marathon, not a sprint. So you have to be patient and stay positive. And it doesn't help that other writers like to boast about their sales figures—"sales this month are 1800 units!"—without putting them in perspective: that the author has been at it for almost a year, or that this is their second or third book and they've

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DAVID WISEHART: Why publish on Kindle?

M.A. DEMERS: For a number of reasons. First, Amazon have opened their doors not only to indie writers but to foreign indie writers. The other sites like B&N have adopted business policies that make it difficult for most foreigners to publish to Nook, so you're forced to sign up with an aggregate, which I refuse to do. Amazon have shown real leadership and foresight in its approach.

The second reason is that I think ebooks are amazing in the way they've made literature more affordable. Print books are expensive, and if you're a bookworm that's an impediment. I'd rather sell an ebook at \$2.99 to ten thousand readers than a print book at \$20 to a thousand. I still offer a print version, because there is still a market for it and because there's a real joy in seeing the physical representation of my hard work, but ebooks make my stories more accessible across a wider economic demographic.

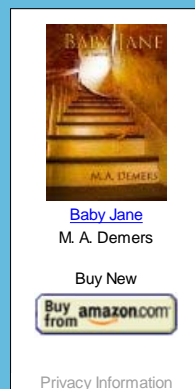
The third reason is instant global distribution. With my print version it's a complex, stressful process; with Kindle it's not.

DAVID WISEHART: What advice would you give to a first-time author thinking of self-publishing on Kindle?

M.A. DEMERS: First, get an editor or put together a team of beta readers. Kindle is a democracy, and like all democracies it welcomes both the gifted and the delusional, and as a result the number one reader complaint about Kindle is the sheer volume of mud one has to wade through to find the gems. If your book is full of grammatical and spelling errors, if the story is trite and derivative, if your characters and dialogue are wooden, then you do no one a service by publishing your book, least of all yourself. Take the time to make your manuscript all it can be, so that when it's released it will be worthy of your readers' time.

Second, be realistic about your odds of success. Publishing is a crap shoot no matter what, and with self-publishing the odds are stacked even higher. Be realistic about the commitment required to promote your work. It's not like YouTube where a video can go viral in days. Books require a much greater attention span of your audience and more than a three-minute or 140-character investment of their time, so don't expect the same quick results as a YouTube or Twitter phenomenon.

DAVID WISEHART: Thanks, and best of luck with your books.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. A. Demers is a freelance writer, editor, creative consultant and fine art photographer based near Vancouver, British Columbia.

Prior to publishing her first novel, *Baby Jane*, Demers wrote almost exclusively for the film industry, including the ghostwriting of production notes for over 30 major motion pictures. She is a screenwriter with, to date, six spec and four commissioned scripts, one optioned documentary project, and was the unaccredited story editor on the award-winning MOW *A Cooler Climate*, starring Sally Field and Judy Davis. Demers has many

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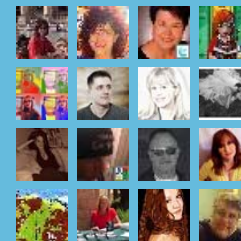


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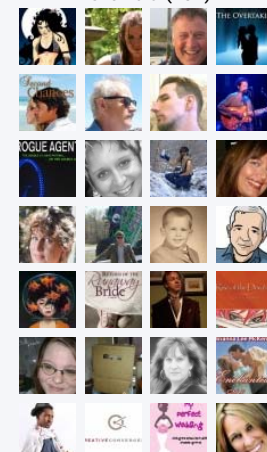
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