

Who are the *Cupids Elves?*



How Go Plate Date
Can Make
"Home Time"
Special

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**Nancy
Spelsberg**
& 2013 Rising Star Award

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**SHAUNI
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Peggy Sue
Trucking
Trips
& Tips

Author
R.E. Donald
Highway Mysteries



R.E. Donald, Author

Highway Mysteries

(18WH) After almost 30 years in the Trucking industry, what made you leave it all behind and become a full-time writer?

My age! That's the simple answer, but life is more complicated than that. I worked for several trucking companies over the years up until the death of my husband, Jim Donald, in 1996, as did he. I had completed the first version of *Slow Curve on the Coquihalla* in 1995, before he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Jim was very supportive of my writing, and after he died, I gave myself a couple of years to see if I could sell my novels. I ended up having to go back to work, but in 2012 I felt ready for retirement and because digital publishing had opened doors that previously had been closed to independent authors, I decided to give writing another try.

(18WH) How many books have you published to date? Tell our readers where they can be found?

I've published three of the Highway Mysteries to date, and am at work on the fourth. They're available as ebooks or in print editions through

(18WH) What is the most important advice you can give to a woman in the trucking industry?

"Take pride in your work, take pride in being a woman, and respect the fact that men can rightfully take pride in their gender as well. As different as we all are as individuals, at the core, we're all God's children trying to get along in life the best we know how."

most online booksellers, and some regular bookstores. Most bookstores and libraries will order them for you if they don't have them in stock. There is information plus links to the major online retailers on my publisher website at <http://proudhorsepublishing.com>.

(18WH) Did you start Proud Horse Publishing Company just for your books or is it your goal to ink a book deal with a major publisher at any point? How did you come up with the name?

I started Proud Horse Publishing for my own novels, with the idea that I might take on select projects by other writers in the future. To date, I really haven't found time to publish anyone else's work, so haven't been open to it. I like the freedom and independence of publishing my own novels, and fortunately I have the computer skills to do it. I make all the decisions, work at my own speed, and never have to worry about my contract being cancelled. I would have to think long and hard before giving that up for the pressure and uncertainty of a traditional publishing deal.

I recently moved to a ranch in the Cariboo region of British Columbia with my partner of ten years, a French Canadian cowboy. We call our new home Proud Horse Ranch, in reference to the Canadian Horses (a rare breed) that we own, and my oldest mare in particular. It's her lovely head in my logo, and also how Proud Horse Publishing got its name.



(18WH) What was it like to see your work in print for the first time?

It's funny, but I expected it to be a bigger thrill than it was. Maybe it was because I'd been so intimately involved in creating the print edition, rather than having it done by an outside publisher. My biggest thrill was seeing all three books together on a shelf.

(18WH) As a woman Author, do you feel you faced challenges that male authors may not have?

Not as a mystery author. Many of the top mystery writers are women. However, given the nature of my characters and setting in the trucking industry, I did feel that it was a better choice to use my initials rather than my first name, as I felt many male readers would dismiss novels with a truck driver hero if they

knew the author was a woman. Some readers don't realize the books are written by a woman until they finish reading and see my photo at the back of the book. One reader commented on how well she thought the male author understood women, believing up until the end that I was a man!

(18WH) Who was and is your biggest supporter?

My two biggest supporters over the years have been my late husband, Jim, and my father, who passed away in 2012 at the age of 93. The faith they expressed in me still gives me comfort.

(18WH) What jobs did you previously hold in the transportation industry? Can we find references to those positions in the books?

My first job in transportation was right out of university. I went to work for Emery Air Freight at Vancouver airport in 1972 and worked there for fourteen years as an all around service agent, doing everything from checking in freight to preparing cargo and delivery manifests to taking customer calls and tracking shipments. I met and worked with many drivers during my years with Emery, especially those with Airline Cartage, who did our local deliveries. I also got to know many customs brokers, customs agents, shippers, receivers and dispatchers. I guess the closest that one of my characters comes to what I used to do is Elspeth Watson, Hunter's freight broker and dispatcher.

I then decided to give freight sales a try, and went to work for Comet Expedited, an LTL trucking company which was a division of Alltrans Express. By that time, it was a TNT company. Alltrans is where I met Jim, who was managing the Vancouver terminal. I didn't enjoy sales as much as I had the operations side, but it

gave me the opportunity to get out and meet a variety of customers at their own warehouses, including the Freightliner manufacturing plant in Burnaby. I went to night school for an industrial marketing diploma, and after Alltrans shut down, I freelanced in marketing for several companies, including Van Kam Freightways, Day & Ross, and Concord Transportation. I even did night billing for a while after I got my horses (a “someday” dream I made happen) and didn’t want to work nine to five.

(18WH) How was the character Hunter Rayne created as the star of the mysteries?

In spite of the usual disclaimer about the resemblance of any character to an actual person being entirely coincidental, Hunter Rayne was inspired by my husband, Jim. When he was a young man – long before I met him – he earned a black belt in ju-jitsu, ended up giving martial arts lessons to some police officers and was then recruited to do some undercover work for the police. His cover was being a truck driver, given that truck drivers can go almost anywhere without looking suspicious or out of place. (That’s how he got his start in trucking.) It occurred to me that driving truck would make a good vocation for a hero in a mystery novel, and I already had the contacts and industry experience to make the settings and situations believable.

Although I’ve never followed up on the desire, I’ve always admired big trucks and sometimes dreamed of taking to the road myself. I empathize with Hunter’s desire for the solitude and sense of freedom that his second chosen career brings him. Is he running away from something that happened when he was a homicide detective? Maybe he is, but being on the road is filling a need for him. Like all of us,

he wants to be happy in life and he’s doing what he can to get there.

(18WH) Now Joggers is a free ebook right? Tell us a little about the inspiration behind that quick read?

Every now and then, I like to write a short story. I love the character of Elspeth! She’s an amalgam of several women I knew many years ago, with a healthy dollop of imagination added to the mix. She’s a tough boss, but she isn’t ashamed of her soft side, even if she doesn’t let it show very often. She is a former driver who loves her work, and she has a typical dispatcher’s love-hate relationship with her drivers. Given that she’s such an important character in the series, I wanted to be able to introduce her to readers without them having to purchase a full length novel. One day I’d like to have a book of short stories featuring more of the Highway Mysteries characters.

(18WH) Did you choose to use initials on purpose (R.E. Donald) to appear non gender like JK Rowling with her pen name for Harry Potter books most notably?

Yes. As I mentioned earlier in the interview, I hoped that my novels would appeal to men as well as women, and didn’t want men to dismiss the books without giving them a try simply because they were written by a woman. This has turned into a double-edged sword. I love my big rig covers (designed by the very talented Steve Johnsen), but I suspect that by not making it clear that the author is a woman, many women assume the novels are written to appeal primarily to men. I encountered that same prejudice when querying female literary agents. I’m sure that many of them tossed my

letters onto the reject pile as soon as they saw that my main character was a truck driver.

Although a murder mystery is central to the plot of every Highway Mystery, my stories are really about the characters, their relationships, and their struggle to be happy in life. They are real people to me – and I hope to my readers – real people with deep feelings, insecurities and pain, all mixed up with joy and laughter and love. Although the series certainly has devoted male fans as well, I mostly hear from women who love my novels.

(18WH) Have you won any awards or received recognition for your work?

I've only entered one awards contest, and that was with my second novel, *Ice on the Grapevine*. It was a finalist for the 2012 Global Ebook Award in Mystery Fiction. That gave me a great excuse to spend a few days in Santa Barbara for the awards ceremony, visiting with my sister who lives in Southern California and meeting some interesting and influential people in ebook publishing. The recognition I love most is hearing from readers that they are eagerly looking forward to my next book.

(18WH) How long have you been writing or did it start off as a hobby?

I started writing my first novel when I was about twelve. I recall it involved a young girl who kept falling off her horse and getting a concussion, so I'm rather glad the manuscript didn't survive. My English teachers in high school always raved about my writing style and I always assumed I'd become a writer "someday", but for years I let life get in the way. Numerous personal

tragedies have taught me that you can't afford to wait for "someday" to happen. If there's something you truly want, it's up to you to make it happen before it's too late.

(18WH) What can we expect in 2014? Any new books in the horizon?

I'm well into the first draft of the fourth Highway Mystery, and plan to have it ready to publish in the summer of 2014. This one is set primarily in Alaska and the Yukon, which I've visited several times. As you may have noticed, the title of each one of my novels features the name of a highway. This one is *Sundown on Top of the World*. I have lots of ideas for future novels. After all, there is no shortage of highways in North America; I'm still trying to work Kamehameha into a title!

(18WH) Do you feel you would have followed this goal and been successful if it weren't for your experience in trucking?

You come up with some great questions! I don't know what turns my life would have taken if I hadn't accepted that first job in the transportation industry and gone on to work for a trucking company. I probably would have ended up writing eventually, but my hero could have been a very different character. I've always felt the lure of the open road, though. If I were young again, I could see myself becoming a long haul truck driver, so maybe I would have ended up right where I am. I envy your readers who have had the courage and opportunity to follow their dreams of a life on the road. ■