

## **THE AUTHORS SHOW – Authors of Fiction**

### **Author: S. H. Montgomery**

Clowns may have sawdust in their veins, but I have words. Mother filled my head with them, as a babe in arms, when she read her adult novels to me in order to subdue my crying. Therefore, I'm certain my mind absorbed those words and ideas, and from that moment on, my brain was saturated with all kinds of stories---wild stories that have been swirling and tumbling around in my brain ever since. I've been told more than once that I have a vivid imagination, and for that I'm sure I have mother to thank.

I started writing my own imaginary visions and fanciful words, in the form of poems and stories revolving around girls in pretty clothes, almost from the time I was old enough to hold a pen. Later in high school, my writings zoomed to earth when I became editor of the school newspaper, and as a senior, won first place in the state's VFW essay contest. Following my mother, regional editor of a daily newspaper and gossip columnist, and my grandfather who published a political paper, I studied journalism at Texas Tech University. Not being satisfied with just the newspaper aspect, I decided, while living in Chicago, to take creative writing courses both at Northwestern University and Columbia College where my imagination sprang back to life. It was while at Columbia that I began my first book, *Whisper in the Blood*, a work of historical fiction set in Chicago, telling of the Irish and Italian immigrants and their prejudices against each other, in the early 20th century.

It is said one should write about what one knows, but since I'm neither Irish, Italian, nor Catholic, it's obvious I took the road with the ruts and weeds on my first endeavor into the world of authoring a novel. Still, I wasn't stumbling totally blind. The seed for my story was planted by my many Irish and Italian friends whose stories I heard while living thirty years in Chicago. At the same time, I learned that despite intermarrying, the two cultures didn't, and maybe still don't, get along. Since I was unaware of this, I decided others might be too, and that it would make an interesting novel.

Twenty-five years ago, when I set out to tackle this story, Google and the Internet didn't exist. So my research was done the old fashioned way. I visited the Chicago Historical Society, both the Irish and Italian cultural centers, and read old newspapers and books on the subject of the two cultures and what Chicago was like during the time period of my novel. The layout of the city needed to be accurate, as did the clothes of my characters, their expressions, and the people and events of the era. Everything had to be as authentic as possible since I wanted to weave actual personalities and places into my story. Today, I find the Internet a big asset in researching, yet I am also aware that facts found there aren't always correct. Legwork of interviewing people and digging through archives is often still necessary for my stories.

After beginning my novel, life got in the way. The research material and six chapters I had finished in my creative classes got pushed to the back of the file cabinet. While those chapters slept, I worked for a philosopher who wrote over forty books. I composed bibliographies and edited for him. At the same time, I was also penning freelance travel articles for national publications, plus weekly travel features for a Chicago neighborhood newspaper.

In 2002, when I moved to Las Vegas, the fiction writing bug bit me again. I formed a critique group and dug out my old Chicago manuscript and blew off the dust. I was appalled in rereading it because I discovered that I needed to start from the beginning and rewrite it. From that moment on, I became a disciplined writer, sitting at my computer every morning at least a couple of hours bringing my characters and their adventures to life. This time I finished the novel. But, yet again, I put it aside, and being from Texas began a story set in The Lone Star State, which obviously I was more familiar. However, a member of my critique group encouraged me to get my finished novel published.

I wrote a few query letters and got good feedback, but no takers. That's when I realized more and more indie publishing was being done. So being the impatient sort, I decided to go that route. I found a small publisher in Las Vegas, and presto, my manuscript became the book, *Whisper in the Blood*. It was well received with five star reviews, and my readers clamored to know more about my characters and their lives. Hence, I wrote a sequel, *Honor in the Blood*.

Unlike my first book that took twenty-five years from start to finish, the sequel took only two years to write since most of the research had already been done.

Honor in the Blood was published in March of 2017 and continues from where the first book leaves off with the story of the Vito Savio and Michael Callahan families. The time period is the mid-1940s, and still there is no love lost between the Irish and Italians. The Savio sons continue to live on the edge, becoming more involved in the Chicago Outfit. Michael Callahan, disillusioned with his marriage to cold and devious Meghan, courts disaster when he decides to renew his friendship with Ireland Coogan. But the pulse of the story is centered around Vito Savio and his nemesis, Meghan Callahan. They are once again in conflict, this time over their grandson, Kane, son of Francesca and Fin. Before Kane can walk or talk they are vying to mold him into the way they wanted his life to go---Vito's life of crime or that of Meghan's Druidism. Torn between the grandparents he loves, living in a household of dissension, and growing up on the streets of Chicago, Kane struggles. When he finally makes a decision of the life he wants to lead, he is forced to make a totally different one.

Words and ideas are forever swimming in my head, and I'm considering a third book in the Savio and Callahan saga. At present, however, my writing has veered down a different path. I am now collaborating with a friend on a series of children's picture books for three to five year olds, about Red Sky, an Apache boy, and Itchy the goat. The first book is due out the fall of 2017.