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Inter

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Returning to hometown through Fear is a Killer

Author Bankier uses Belleville as story settings

By Jack Evans
The Intelligencer

After an absence of many years, William (Bill) Bankier is staging a return to his home town of Belleville. But in this case it is a vicarious experience — thanks to a small Canadian publisher.

The Mosaic Press of Oakville has recently released a new collection of 16 stories of crime and punishment called "Fear Is a Killer."

And the Belleville (called the fictional name of Baytown) in Bankier's stories, will be like a time warp for many city residents, as it is based on Bankier's youth and young adult years here.

For Bankier, his characters and his settings, the old police station on the Market Square and the downtown Queen's Hotel continue to exist, along with probably recognizable characters who once frequented them, albeit with artificial names.

No doubt the question is now begging: Who is William Bankier?

A lot of long-time Belleville residents could answer that. His official chronicler and editor of this first ever collection of his voluminous short stories, Peter Sellers (no relation to the late movie star) puts it this way:

"William Bankier is one of the most important writers of crime-mystery short fiction today. He has been one of the most frequent contributors to Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine over the past two decades. He was an Edgar Award nominee in 1980. He has had three nominations for the Crime Writers of Canada Arthur Ellis Award. In 1992 he was awarded the Crime Writers of Canada Der-

rick Murdoch Award for his lifetime of achievement."

Sellers traces Bankier's writing career back to 1954 when he sold his first story to the then Liberty Magazine. Two horror stories later appeared in the Magazine of Fantasy, and Science Fiction. But it was his story: "What Happened in Act One" in the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine in 1962 that launched him on his successful career as a murder-mystery writer, Sellers notes, plus other ventures such as romantic nurse novellettes.



Bill Bankier

Bankier himself recalls childhood story writing with a brother and "killing off each other's characters."

In a family where music played a key role, Bankier's writing often inserts aspects of music. His father, the late James (Jimmy) Bankier, was a noted singer-soloist and active participant in many city choirs and ensembles, including the early recording group, 1920s period, Belleville Radio Four Male Quartet.

Bankier himself was an active chorister and glee club member at the former BCI where he graduated after attending public school in the former Queen Alexandra School.

In fact his love and knowledge of music and its insertion into his work prompted mystery writer dean Ellery Queen to state: "No one in the genre writes about music better than William Bankier."

Following school, Bankier spent several years as a bellhop in the former Queen's Hotel, he recalled in a telephone interview. Then he worked as an announcer for some time at the then-new radio station, CJBQ.

Both these locations and activities figure under artificial names in some of the stories.

Retired CJBQ advertising salesman Phil Flagler recalls Bankier's years at the radio station well and expects the collection will make interesting reading for many city residents.

Bankier later moved to Montreal where he spent another 25 years, then in 1974 he, his wife and two daughters moved to London, England where he says he was "semi-retired."

After the untimely death of his wife about 10 years ago, he moved to West Hollywood, Los Angeles, where he continues to live and has happily remarried.

"The last time I was in Belleville was in the early 1970s," he recalled.

Bankier puts his output at some "250 stories published in leading United States magazines." He also wrote some scripts for CBC radio plays, and continues to write actively. "I've got several stories in hand," he said.

Bankier also credits Sellers as an enthusiastic associate of most of the work in the book, which represents the first time top selections of his prolific writings have been compiled.

"I haven't even seen the book myself," Bankier chuckled.

Belleville is the locale for only a few of the book's stories, but they will serve as an introduction to the work of a well-known city native who has achieved international status as a writer.

Greenley Book Sellers report several copies are on order and should be available soon.