

Copperhead Author Enjoys Life In Rural Esqueing Township

FROM ACTON FREE PRESS
Author Jim Henderson looked for a country retreat for two years before he and his wife found a suitable home and land in Esqueing Township near Limehouse.

Now that they have lived there for over a year they found first impressions of the district were close to the mark.
Jim Henderson is the author of the fast moving spy thriller "Copperhead" which Canadian publishers were hesitant to print because it uses Canadian place names and scenario for the plot. They wanted Henderson to change Toronto and Montreal to more exotic names like Paris or Budapest and then, they might be interested in publishing the book.
But the author refused to bend to their wishes and decided instead to send his manuscript to New York, starting with the biggest, Alfred A. Knopf Inc. He intended to go on down the line until it was accepted. To his surprise, Knopf snapped it up. They sent a telegram asking him to come to New York.

They liked the book but wanted the 125,000 words chopped down to 85,000. That meant cutting out description and character but Jim Henderson did it. The book was published and distributed in Canada by Random House, a subsidiary of Knopf, in England by Collins.

SECOND PRINTING
Sale of the book, which reviewers generally agree is first of its kind with a Canadian setting, have been good. It is now in its second printing in the United States — 10,000 hard cover books. Dickering is also going on for foreign language rights.

Briefly, the tale centres around David Sohn, a Canadian intelligence agent, and his efforts to crack a ring of enemy agents, carrying in their bodies a deadly plague which they can release at any time as part of a co-ordinated biological attack. Inter-national intrigue centres in Montreal and Toronto, out West and in the Barbados, explodes in a sequence of suspense, blood, action and sex.

One reviewer said the mixture is so lively and contemporary he wonders if the Halton County Board of Education would allow the book into school libraries.

This writer talked with Henderson at his Acton home, which sits almost hidden by evergreens, and birches on a hillside above the Black Creek, which flows strongly but serenely through the Dolly Varden valley.

How do you go about writing a book?
Did you have the plot all worked out?

"It came out my subconscious," Jim Henderson answered matter-of-factly. He had always wanted to write a novel with a Canadian scenario, dealing with chemical or biological warfare. Encouraged by his wife, who hails from Northern Ontario, he finally sat down at the typewriter and began. It developed as he wrote.

MUCH RESEARCH
Henderson admits that he had to do a great deal of research on chemical and biological warfare to keep the plot authentic, and notes with relief that the facts about that type of warfare included in the book are true.

I suppressed a shudder. Any one who has read the book would know why.

Research on the book also included snooping around in classified areas where Henderson admits he really had no right to be. In a crack at Canadian security arrangements he said it was possible to walk into the classified areas he describes in the book and wander around indiscriminately.

Henderson was born in Iran, raised in England, and went to school in Wales. "I'm Welsh by temperament and inclination," he told this reporter which may account for the fact he picked out the Dolly Varden valley for his home, which from certain vistas resembles parts of Wales.

Disenchanted with opportunities in the United Kingdom he emigrated to Canada, his first post a teaching job in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

NOT SOBRY
"I'm not sorry for my half-year there," he says but from there he went to the provincial metropolis, Vancouver, "where the action is". There he was hired as a radio producer by the CBC, a job which started in a hotel beer parlor and terminated two years later by "mutual agreement".

During his tenure there he wrote radio and TV scripts and produced shows, experience which influenced the Department of Education to ask him to assist them with the groundwork for educational television after he came to Ontario—and Burlington. He taught school in Burlington for a year and then moved to Oakville where he took his present job co-ordinating language arts for the Halton County Board of Education.

"I was offered a good job with O.E.C.A. — the TV branch of the Department of Education," Henderson says, but the nagging desire to write a book was paramount and he knew the TV job would allow him little spare time to indulge his whimsy.

His first novel had to be a thriller—and Canadian, he says. It took about two years to write, mostly on evenings and weekends, but a major part was written last summer when he spent six weeks on a Caribbean island.

COMPETITIVE FIELD
Thrillers are the most competitive field of fiction writing, Henderson declares, although he notes there is some bad fiction in the field which is doing a "bit of a disservice".

Writers he admires?
Len Deighton who wrote The Ipcress File, "the most brilliant work in my field"; Ross Macdonald, a Canadian now living in California who turned down \$50,000 from Paramount Pictures for rights unseen to his next book. MacDonald's real name is Ken Miller and he has in-laws in Kitchener, Ontario, who he visits periodically. Jim Henderson met him there last year. Miller's another Canadian whose thrillers

(with Canadian scenarios) were turned down by publishers in Canada. He's now the top writer of thrillers in the States. Henderson declares.

The book Henderson most admires and would like to emulate is John LeCarre's "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold." Henderson has another thriller in the works now which he expects word back from New York on soon.

Why another thriller? Henderson is not taciturn. "Why not?" he says. "Thrillers are as good as any. Macbeth is a thriller."

Henderson admits that in order to write a novel one has to be a "bit strange". It is the loneliest job I can think of," he offers with no apologies.

He does his novel writing on a hillside cabin set in trees behind his house. There's no phone or other distractions — just heat and light, and a window looking out into the bush.

Henderson, a self-confessed introvert, admits he sometimes finds the discipline of writing novels "hard". He has to drag himself out to the cabin sometimes, and he admits it is discouraging to come back to the house with few results when the muse deserts him.

UNIVERSAL TASTES
But it is obvious this academic, who has a lively interest in his surroundings, people, ecology, writing, philosophy, art and theatre has catholic tastes which don't fit into any mold.

Although exposed to the sophistication of New York, he blandly asserts if the choice between a cocktail party on Madison Avenue or having a beer at the Station Hotel in Acton or the Charles Hotel in Milton ever appeared, he would take the beer anytime.

On the other side of the coin, he thinks nothing of flying to the Caribbean or attending a theatre or art show in New York. He has a lively appreciation of art.

Through his work he is well acquainted with Principal Dave Katz and teacher Ken Ellis at Acton district high school. "Acton is lucky to have them," he says, noting "I would give my eye teeth" to teach at the Acton school.

School standards? Some people feel standards are dropping but Jim Henderson says this is the most demanding period of time in education. People in Halton are more literate than ever before and they expect more from teachers, parents and students.

He rates the Acton high school very high, but at the same time is cognizant of the limitations a small school presents. "You can sense it when you visit schools" when there is a good rapport.

PART OF TRIANGLE

Henderson's interest in ecology has also made him a part of a triangle concerning the condition of the Black Creek. The other points in the isosceles are the OWRC and Beardmore. But this is another story.

Perhaps his interest in this part of Ontario and his determination to use Canadiana places and names may one day spark a novel about this part of the country.

Meanwhile, Jim Henderson—and his wife—enjoy living here and appreciate their home because it is central to his work and at the same time provides a retreat that is conducive to imaginative works of fiction.

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