

THE LUCKY SEVEN INTERVIEW, WITH SUZANNE ALYSSA ANDREW

Submitted by Grace on March 24, 2015 - 12:26pm

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Art student Nik is searching for his mysteriously vanished girlfriend in **Suzanne Alyssa Andrew's** *Circle of Stones* (Dundurn Press). The story however, belongs to a much larger cast of characters, who intersect with both Nik and his girlfriend, Jennifer, in surprising and revealing ways. As the tale of Jennifer's disappearance emerges, so too does a much wider story about grief, love and the disorienting process of dealing with loss.

Today we're talking with Suzanne as part of our *Lucky Seven* series, a seven-question Q&A that gives readers a chance to hear about the writing processes of talented Canadian authors and gives authors a space to speak in depth about the thematic concerns of their newest books.

She tells us about how her characters kept her coming back, one character's very unusual hobby and how Google Maps can be a writing tool.

You can also [check out the book trailer for *Circle of Stones* on Open Book](#), courtesy of Dundurn Press!



Open Book:

Tell us about your new book.

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew:

Circle of Stones is an action adventure love story that races across Canada and back again. It centres on two characters: Nik, a painter, and Jennifer, his dancer girlfriend. What's unique about their story is that it's told from the point of view of the people they meet along the way, and each of those characters has their own story. As a whole, the book is about struggle, relationships, risk and the choices we make around our careers and ambition.

This novel was a passion project for a long time, and like many writers these days I had to find time and space for it amidst full-time paying work, other commitments and life, generally. The characters themselves kept me coming back to the page. I wanted to see what they'd do! I'm excited to finally be sharing them with readers.

OB:

Is there a question that is central to your book, thematically? And if so, did you know the question when you started writing or did it emerge from the writing process?

SAA:

When I first started writing *Circle of Stones* what united all the characters was the idea of capturing a moment in which each of them had to make a decision to shift something in their lives. I think that's something we've all experienced – a time when we recognize something's not working, or we're craving something new, or things just aren't turning out the way we expected and we have to find ways to adjust.

You see this in Nik and Jennifer throughout the book, as they chase after their own dreams, and in the secondary characters – aging punks trying to figure out how to maintain some semblance of the punk ethic in their adult lives, for instance. In a civil servant who's racked up more consumer debt than he can handle. Or in a bored office worker who takes up extreme ironing to add a sense of adventure to her life.

OB:

Did the book change significantly from when you first starting working on it to the final version? How long did the project take from start to finish?

SAA:

It felt like forever. Five years of writing and revising. I started out with a beginning and an end, and ideas for characters, and the first thing I did was figure out how they were all connected, where they all lived and how to transport the characters from one place to the next. Anne, an English professor gets us from Toronto to Ottawa, for example, by driving there on the 401 to go see her ailing mom – even though highway driving makes her anxious. Mapping out the characters and places was the inspiration behind [the annotated Google map](#) I made for the book, because establishing a sense of place in each chapter was such an important part of my writing process.

OB:

What do you need in order to write – in terms of space, food, rituals, writing instruments?

SAA:

When I first started writing I used to think I needed inspiration – those storied, magic moments you read about. But what I learned along the way is that what a novelist needs most is routine. That's difficult to achieve as a full-time freelancer, so for me sometimes my routine turns to mayhem, but I just have to constantly find ways to come back to the story. Ultimately you just have to keep going

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CIRCLE OF STONES

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew (Dundurn Press)

From Dundurn Press: Nik is an eccentric art student obsessed with painting his dancer girlfriend, Jennifer. When one day she inexplicably disappears, Nik's world is shattered. Determined to find her, he embarks on a cross-country journey following a scant trail of clues. He doesn't anticipate how far he'll have to travel, what he'll do when he runs out of money, or the fact that an intimidating stranger is looking for Jennifer, too.

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OB:

What do you do if you're feeling discouraged during the writing process? Do you have a method of coping with the difficult points in your projects?

SAA:

I think every writer has "why am I doing this?" moments when it seems really difficult, or times when we get stuck. For me the best way to break through these blocks is to talk it out. I get together regularly with other writers to chat and sometimes we even scribble in notebooks together and it really helps. It makes what we're doing feel real. I think we're all trying to figure out how to do this, and keep doing it, and the writing community in Toronto is incredibly supportive. We're really lucky.

OB:

What defines a great book, in your opinion? Tell us about one or two books you consider to be truly great books.

SAA:

I adore books that mess with our assumptions and expectations. I'm a big fan of Etgar Keret, Haruki Murakami and Rivka Galchen for their mastery at surprise and sliding realities. At the same time I also love the clarity of storytelling Jeanette Winterson employs in her work, while still asking big picture questions about restlessness and the inexplicable.

My favourite works by these authors are *Suddenly, A Knock at the Door* by Etgar Keret, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami, *American Innovations* by Rivka Galchen and *Lighthousekeeping* by Jeanette Winterson.

OB:

What are you working on now?

SAA:

I'm very excited about a new novel I'm working on, as well as some new digital storytelling projects. Over the summer I'll be Story Director for an episodic video game about dating. I'm also working on some new songs for my band and a couple of other new book ideas.

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew is the author of the novel *Circle of Stones* (Dundurn Press, March 2015). She also writes for digital media, including games, interactive documentaries and cross-platform TV projects. She is a guest associate editor for *Taddle Creek* magazine and plays bass in an indie rock band. She grew up on Vancouver Island, went to Carleton University in Ottawa for a Bachelor of Journalism and a Master's of English and now lives and writes in Toronto. Visit her online at <http://www.suzanneandrew.com>

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The (Spooky) Dirty Dozen, with Corey Redekop

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Corey Redekop's *Husk* (ECW Press) is a perfect book to post about on Halloween. But the witty prose and fantastic storytelling in *Husk* – a book which follows poor Sheldon Funk, whose life was already going pretty badly before he woke up as a zombie – will have you in stitches all year around.

Today in the Dirty Dozen, an interview series that asks authors to share twelve unexpected facts about themselves, Corey tells us about creepy crawlies, shark-infested waters and raisins for Halloween. Read on for the tricks and treats!



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