



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor

Hello and Happy Friday my historical fiction lover friends!

Tim keeps marching on. The days pass. We are all still here and involved in the day-today aspects of living in a modern world. Yet...our minds – at least a portion of them – belong to the past. The days from before our birth on this planet. Days that no longer exist. We read about those times. We think about them. We wonder about them. And we research and spend countless hours of ‘now’ time looking into these days long gone.

Is it the times of long ago that call us back? Or is it the cast of characters that sing their siren song and lure us into the past?

Whatever it is that draws us back, we’re not alone. There’s certainly a large club of us that love to read and write about times we never lived in.

Join us this week as we chat with author Riana Everly whose books take us to a Jane Austin time of life. Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Heather Osborne, Sophie Schiller, Hannah Byron, Lindsay Downs, James Conroyd Martin, Janet Oakley, and a lot more!

Trisha

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Early Automobiles



The parking lot at a Yale-Iowa Football game

I was working in the yard a few weeks ago and one of our city workers that we know slightly, stopped in the front to chat. I ignored him when he first pulled up. I saw a city truck stopping & thought it was maybe for one of the neighbors. Until he honked. When I walked over, I realized who it was, and I told him that I didn't recognize that it was him.

He said, "Oh, it's easy. If it's a Dodge, then it's me. If it's a Chevy, it's someone else."

Really? My initial response was just a blank stare. I finally explained. "I'm a girl. Unless I can see the emblem, I can't tell you what kind of truck it is. It's a white truck, a black truck, a blue truck...that's about the extent of my truck identification knowledge." And all our city trucks are white trucks, so that doesn't help much.

Which explains why when I insert a vehicle in the story, I think I'm doing pretty good to just get the detail of a black Model T in there. I know if it's before 1928 not to make it a Model A. If it's earlier than 1913 the Model T can't be black – the earliest colors available were gray, blue, green or red. During the years 1913-1925, it was only available as black. That's about the extent of my early vehicle tidbits that I have to drop into a story.

But then I was reading *Sold on a Monday*, which showed me how lacking my too basic information is. The main character, Ellis, wanders around taking photographs while his overheated Model T cools down. When he returns to the car, this is what Kristina McMorris wrote:

"As soon as he reached his old clunker, he tossed the camera inside, a little harder than he should have, and retrieved his jug of water. He refilled the radiator and prepared the motor by adjusting the levers and turning the key. Back at the hood, he gripped the fender for leverage and gave the crank a hearty jerk. Thankfully, a second attempt revived the sedan."

Wow! What a difference this makes. No wonder she's on the *New York Times Bestseller* list. Of course, in her acknowledgements she gave credit to Terry Smoke and Neil Handy "for such great input on Model T's, radiators, and all that jazz". Writing a book is sometimes the accomplishment of an entire tribe, not one sole writer pecking away at the keyboard.

But these are the tiny little snippets of details that make a huge impact on our stories. I'm still learning. There's so much to learn. But bit by bit, piece by piece, I'm learning more every day and every week. If you have any early vehicles in your manuscript and want a little more information to enrich your storytelling, here's some links and sources for you.

Old Car Pictures: If you want to see some terrific early car and truck pictures, check out this site: <http://oldcarandtruckpictures.com/earlycarpictures/>

How to start and drive a Model T, with 17-minute video

<https://www.hemmings.com/blog/2013/03/01/tech-101-how-to-start-and-drive-a-ford-model-t/>

Steps how to drive a Model T, with pictures. Here's the caption on one of the photos. I didn't realize that a broken arm was a serious threat in crank starting Model T's.

3. Return to the front of the car. Use your left hand to crank the lever (if the engine backfires and the lever swings counterclockwise, the left arm is less likely to be broken). Give it a vigorous half-crank, and the engine should start.

<https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15142307/how-to-drive-a-ford-model-t/>

How to start a Model A

<http://www.model-a.org/starting.html>

Ford and The American Dream, One-hour video with LOTS of actual footage. A great video to watch to get you in the mood.

<https://youtu.be/ZrOikS5B2gs>



Motor traffic on Fifth Ave. North of 42nd New York

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Author Spotlight: Riana Everly



Hello Riana Everly! Welcome to Pages of the Past. We're excited that you stopped by today to chat with us. Tell us, what was it that inspired you to write your first novel, *Teaching Eliza*?

I love the theatre, and we often indulge in the summer at some of the world-class theatre festivals near the city. A few years ago, we saw a production of Shaw's *Pygmalion* at the Shaw Festival. This production set the action in modern-day London, with grumpy Professor Higgins jotting down his observations on an iPad and having his study equipped with the latest in computer and audio gadgetry, and it worked. It worked brilliantly. The story transcends the time in which it was written. And it got me thinking. You see, Jane Austen's stories also transcend their times. Take away the Regency manners and socio-economic realities of the early 1800s and you still have rocking good tales that people relate to today.

And then I thought some more. Witty, headstrong Eliza... Eliza Doolittle or Eliza Bennet? Grumpy Henry Higgins... or is that Grumpy Fitzwilliam Darcy? The two tales just cried out to be blended, and so I sat down to see what I could do. To my surprise and delight, they meshed beautifully, and my first published novel came into being.

Your second book, *The Assistant: Before Pride and Prejudice* won a Jane Austin award by the Jane Austin Reader's Awards. As an author, how does getting awards such as these affect your life or your writing?

I am sure there are writers who are completely confident in what they write and in their skills. I am not one of those. Being recognized by organizations like the Jane Austen Readers Awards is a thrill and a shot in the arm, and it inspires me to keep writing, because perhaps it's not a waste of time after all!

Two of your latest books are 'Miss Mary Investigates' books, labeled as a *Pride and Prejudice* Mystery. Yet your books also contain elements of romance. As a writer, how is it juggling the elements of love, mystery, and the historical aspects?

My *Miss Mary* series will all take place within Jane Austen's novels. My sleuths – Mary Bennet and Alexander Lyons – will be the consistent characters, travelling from place to place, or book to book, solving mysteries as they go. But since Jane Austen's novels revolved around romances, so too will my mysteries. Emma Woodhouse will still lose her heart to Mr. Knightley, even if there are people dying all around her, and Elinor Dashwood still loves Edward Ferrars, no matter that he's a suspect in his brother's death.

Likewise, the history and the world of Regency-era England is intrinsic in Ms. Austen's novels, and I hope to have captured that in my own mysteries.

For the historical content, I have approached it very much as I have in my romances, using the time as the context for my novels. It does make a bit of a difference in a mystery, though, because policing has changed very much since the early 1800s, as have detection and investigation methods. My sleuths cannot use fingerprints to identify their suspects because this was just not something done. In fact, the first detective to rely on fingerprints was the fictional Sherlock Holmes in 1890 in *The Sign of the Four*. Scotland Yard took another 11 years before they began to use fingerprints! Likewise, blood spatter patterns and DNA typing cannot exist at all in my stories, although some rather sophisticated poisons and chemical detection methods can. So, in this way, history does inform my plots.

With your books taking place in the early 1800s, what kind of research do you draw upon to set the tone and take your readers back in time with you?

Research... so much research! But I love every minute of it. Because I write so much early 19th-century material, I have a fairly broad knowledge of the era. I've read fiction from the time, non-fiction from and about the time, newspaper articles, legal texts, etc, and I scour images and other sources for general scene-setting. But there is always something particular I do not know, but which I want to help fill in those little areas or to provide the details that bring an era to life.

For one work-in-progress, I needed my character to buy his sister a present. Suddenly I found myself researching Napoleonic-era cribbage boards. What did they look like? Where were they made? What materials were used? (Spoiler – they looked like modern cribbage boards and were made of a variety of materials; some were made by French prisoners-of-war to help earn money while they were imprisoned in England.) Sometimes I'll research recipes, so my characters can snack on suitable foods. Strawberries in November? No, that would not happen. But cinnamon buns or take-out curry were very much a possibility in the early 1800s.

I hope that this combination of broad strokes and snips of detail and colour help bring the reader into the era so the tale just settles into its historical context without it seeming forced or artificial.

You shared that you have a master's degree in Medieval Studies. Medieval times come long before the 1800s you write about, but has your academic background been a help in your research and writing?

There is no such thing as a wasted education. I remind myself of that every time I remember my student loans! But seriously, while I do not write about the era I did my grad work in, the skills I developed apply to all times. I learned how to find and read primary sources and how to assess secondary sources. And reading modern English, even if it's 200 years old, is much easier than battling through Medieval Latin! Even the English, which might seem a bit twee and convoluted to some modern eyes, is easy after having worked my way through Anglo Saxon and Middle English.

I think it also helps me see my characters as living in the modern world. Because to them, it is the modern world – the world of science and reason and discovery. Looking backwards, we see everything they did not have, such as fast transportation or communication, or such medical mainstays as anesthetics and antibiotics, but when you start a century or two earlier, we can see what they did have that was new and exciting and very, very modern.

During 2020, many writers have struggled to put words on paper as we are jostled in a world full of Covid-19, death and illness, wearing masks, trying to find all the items on our shopping lists, maintaining social distancing and all the other nuances that fill our lives at the moment. Yet, you've managed to publish three books this year! *The Bennet Affair* (March 2020), *The Mystery of the Missing Heiress* (August 2020) and *Death of a Clergyman* (September 2020). How have you been able to be so productive this past year, while others of us flounder to hit bare minimum word counts?

You want to know my secrets, do you? Promise not to tell? Okay.

I don't actually write that fast. What I do is let things sit for a very, very long time. And I, like so many people, have been socially distanced by my muse over these past few months.

The Bennet Affair is something I started writing about three years ago. I then let it sit for months and months while I did something different. I was very ill last year and could not write a word, but eventually I found the mojo to edit, and so I brought it out of its dark little cubby somewhere on my computer and polished it up for beta readers and then editing.

Death of a Clergyman is also something quite old. I finished the first draft back in 2017. My goal was to write drafts of at least three *Miss Mary Investigates* novels before publishing the first one, so I could release them fairly quickly one after the other. The second in this series (*Death in Highbury*) is ready for beta readers now, and hopefully I will publish it later this year or in early 2021. But it, too, was written a couple of years ago.

Of the three books published in 2020, only *The Mystery of the Missing Heiress* was actually written this year!

Your latest book, *Death of a Clergyman*, just released three weeks ago. Can you tell us a little bit about your newest release?

I have been thinking about this for quite a while. I love historical fiction, I love romance, but I also love a good murder! Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, P.D. James – these ladies are my BFFs. I always wondered if I could write a mystery and started and stopped a few over the years. But Jane Austen is always hovering near the surface of my thoughts, and I began to contemplate a *Pride and Prejudice*-inspired mystery.

Now, I've seen a few such novels, some very well done indeed, featuring Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy as the sleuths, or in one case, Jane Austen herself. But I had another idea. Elizabeth's sister Mary is the forgotten Bennet sister, the one spouting platitudes from her sermons and playing elaborate concertos and wishing desperately to be noticed. But she is ignored. She is not as witty as Lizzy or as beautiful as Jane or as vivacious as her younger sisters. She is ignored. And who better to discover clues than someone who people just don't notice. She can come and go and people talk around her, and she picks up little details.

Coming up with the plot was a lot of fun. Instead of having Elizabeth as the hero, I cast her as the accused murderer! When their cousin Mr. Collins is killed, every piece of evidence points to Lizzy as the killer. And this starts Mary on her adventures as a detective, because she is determined to save her sister from the gallows.

But Mary cannot do it alone, and she needs someone to play off. When Mr. Darcy learns about Lizzy's predicament, he hires an investigator from London to solve the case, and thus my sleuth Alexander Lyons

was born. He has access to information Mary cannot find, and she ferrets out details he cannot discover, and between their arguments and disagreements and bickering, they piece together the clues to solve the murder.

Thank you for joining us today, Riana. We appreciate your time and look forward to catching up with some of your delightful tales. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books, and we'll go follow and friend you.

It was my pleasure to chat with you. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about my writing and my book.



You can find Riana Everly's books here

- Death of a Clergyman - <https://books2read.com/deathofaclergyman>
- The Assistant - <https://books2read.com/theassistant>
- Teaching Eliza - <https://books2read.com/teachingeliza>

You can find Riana Everly here:

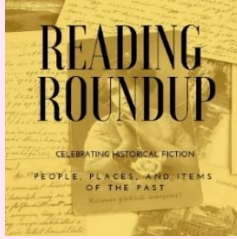
- Facebook – <http://facebook.com/RianaEverly>
- Blog and website – www.rianaeverly.com/blog

BIO: Riana Everly was born in South Africa but has called Canada home since she was eight years old. She has a master's degree in Medieval Studies and is trained as a classical musician, specialising in Baroque and early Classical music. She first encountered Jane Austen when her father handed her a copy of *Emma* at age 11 and has never looked back.

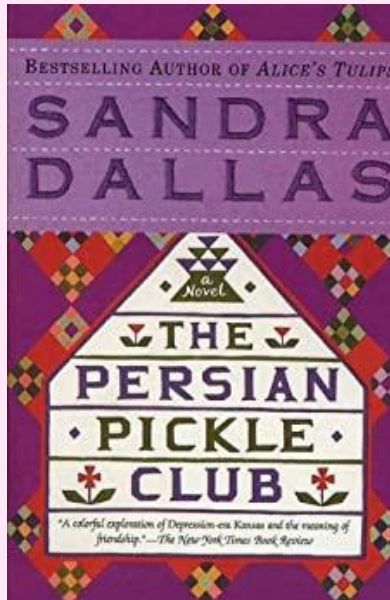
Riana now lives in Toronto with her family. When she is not writing, she can often be found playing string quartets with friends, biking around the beautiful province of Ontario with her husband, trying to improve her photography, thinking about what to make for dinner, and, of course, reading!

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The 1930s



The Persian Pickle Club

Sandra Dallas

In her magical, memorable novel, Sandra Dallas explores the ties of loyalty and friendship that unite the women in a quilting circle in Depression-era Kansas.

It is the 1930s, and hard times have hit Harveyville, Kansas, where the crops are burning up, and there's not a job to be found. For Queenie Bean, a young farm wife, a highlight of each week is the gathering of the Persian Pickle Club, a group of local ladies dedicated to improving their minds, exchanging gossip, and putting their quilting skills to good use. When a new member of the club stirs up a dark secret, the women must band together to support and protect one another.

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