



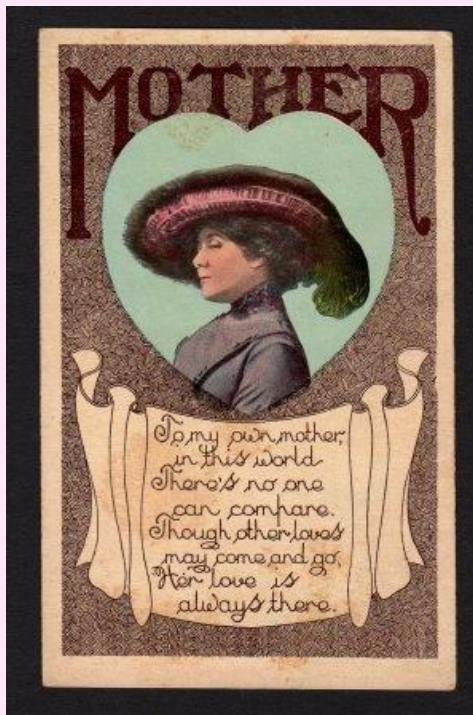
Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 3, No. 19, May 7, 2021

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- Keeping the Memories Alive
- Author Spotlight: JJ Toner

From the Editor



Happy Friday to all of our historical fiction lovers and Happy Mother's Day to the mothers in the group.

This week we're pulling an article out of our archives from 2019 that talks about how our writing keeps family memories alive. The rest of the world may think are stories are simply fantastical creations of our imaginations. But I'm surprised by how many authors are able to use snippets of the real live past to include in their stories and keep family memories alive.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Clare Flynn, Ellie Midwood, Alec Schulz, Sharon Bradshaw, Jeff Salter, Rebecca Dharlingue, Gail Ward Olmsted, and lots more!

Trisha

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New Releases!

In a Far-Off Land

Stephanie Landsem



A story about the price of fame, the truth sacrificed on its altar, and the love that brings a prodigal daughter home.

As the Great Depression hits the Midwest, Minerva Sinclair runs away to Hollywood, determined to make it big and save the family farm. But beauty and moxie don't pay the bills in Tinseltown, and she's caught in a downward spiral of poverty, desperation, and compromise. Finally, she's about to sign with a major studio and make up for it all. Instead, she wakes up next to a dead film star and is on the run for a murder she didn't commit.

Only two unwilling men—Oscar, a Mexican gardener in danger of deportation, and Max, a too-handsome agent battling his own demons—can help Mina escape corrupt police on the take and the studio big shots trying to frame her. But even her quick thinking and grit can't protect her from herself. Alone, penniless, and carrying a shameful secret, Mina faces the consequences of the heartbreaking choices that brought her to ruin . . . and just might bring her back to where she belongs.

Keeping the Memories Alive

It's always fun as an author when we can use elements of our family history as part of our writing. It feels like you're keeping a small memory of your beloved ancestors alive – at least in a small fragment. Others may not realize that they've read something that was inspired by a family member past, but you as the author know.

I'm finding out that I'm not the only one that enjoys this small tribute to our loved ones. Earlier, in a guest post – [Mom and Dad May Be Gone but They Live on in My Series](#) - author Lindsay Downs shared about how characteristics of his parents live on in his Upson PI mysteries.

You'd think that writing further back in time, say in the time of Mary Queen of Scots, it wouldn't be possible to include family snippets. Not true. Author Emily-Jane Hills Orford, in writing *Queen Mary's Daughter*, was able to use characteristics of her beloved grandmother as the grandmother in the tale. In the debut issue of [Pages of the Past](#), Emily-Jane shared how her grandmother was a factor in her historical interests. In her author spotlight, she shares:

"I have always been fascinated with the life and times of Mary Queen of Scots and Queen Elizabeth I. Once again, this was a shared interest with my grandmother."

In my own writing, pieces of family history and characters have been used here and there. One of my Vintage Daze Short Stories I was working on ended up being the most fun when Grandpa Jones (deceased since 1976) pushed his way into the story.

Two small 1928 cookbooks were the original inspiration for 'Best Thing Since Sliced Bread.' One I'd purchased in an antique store and one I'd inherited from one of the elderly women that lived next door to us when I was a child. That's all I knew about the story – is that it would be set in 1928.

I researched events in 1928 to see if there was anything I could work into the story. I saw that in Chillicothe Missouri, the first loaf of sliced bread came out that year. My Grandpa Jones grew up in a small town, Dawn, outside of Chillicothe and his brother, Uncle Scott, had a farm outside Chillicothe where my mom and Aunt Ida were born. Voila! I had the place. The vague outline of a young flapper girl and her quest for cooking began to form.

I also saw that Chillicothe held a popular Chevrolet Day that year. And I read that that's the year the Hall Brothers Company, in Kansas City, changed their name to their trademarked Hallmark, and started using the new Hallmark logo on their cards. Since I work part-time for Hallmark, I knew I wanted to include this part, so the young flapper, Luetta, instantly got herself a boyfriend that just happened to work for Hall Brothers.

The story had been 'brewing' for several weeks and I was a few scenes into it when I happened to be talking to my mom one afternoon. I was telling her about the new story idea and where it was set. "Grandpa would have been a young boy in 1928 though?" I asked.

"Oh, no. He was born in 1908, so he would have been twenty years old."

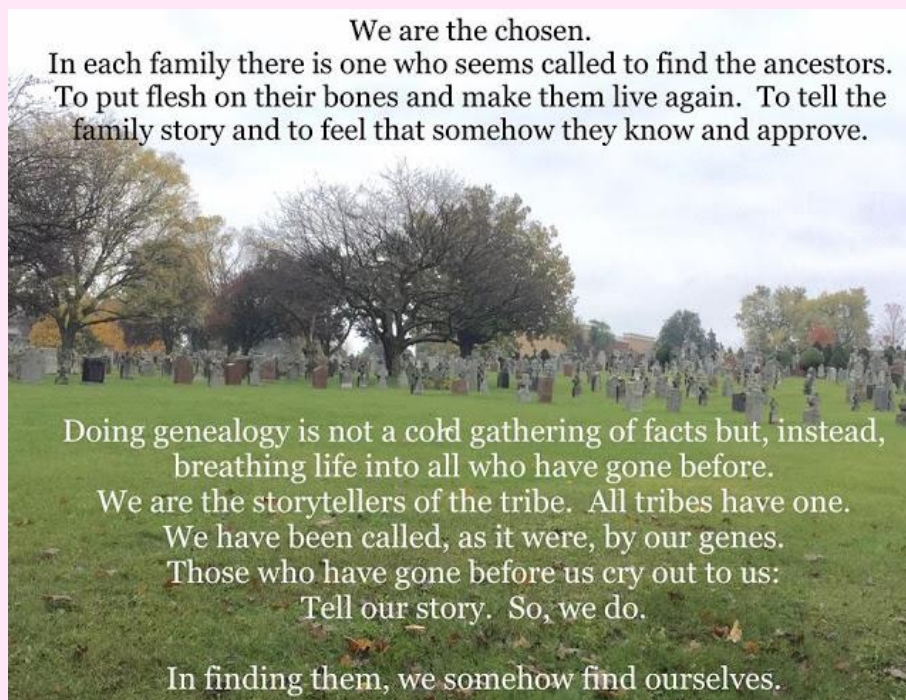
"Twenty years old? So if Chillicothe had a Chevrolet Day, he would have been there then?"

“Absolutely,” she replied. “He was a Chevy man his whole life. That’s all he ever drove. I’m sure he would have been there.” Mom continued to tell me a family story that Grandpa had repeated many times throughout his later years. He was driving through town – in a Chevy – and had one arm around the girl in the car. (Pre-Grandma Jones’ days) The constable pulled him over and said, “Casey, you need to use both hands.” Grandpa, the smart-alecky young man that he was, responded, “But, officer, I need one hand to drive with.”

Well, Luetta already had a boyfriend, but now – how to work a young Grandpa Jones into the tale? Luetta’s best friend, Amanda, had to meet Casey so I could work this family story in.

A short time later, my cousin – not knowing I was working on this story- texted me one morning about another Grandpa Jones story. Uncle Alvin had shared about when Grandpa was running a trunk load of moonshine up from Arkansas to Missouri, stowed in the trunk and covered with armloads of hay. He was stopped and the officer said his lights were out. Grandpa played dumb like he didn’t know. The officer opened the trunk asked, “What’s with all the hay?” Grandpa replied, “Why, officer, you feed animals with it.” And the officer closed the trunk and Grandpa went on his way.

Yes, that was written into the short story too. In real life, the Grandpa I knew was such a quiet, unassuming man. Yet here he is forty years later getting a little pushy from the afterlife, pushing his way into the story. No one else will know as the reader that these two parts are real-life tales, from a Grandpa’s younger days so long ago. But I’ll know and feel good about keeping a small part of his history alive.



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Author Spotlight: JJ Toner



Hello JJ Toner! From Texas USA across the ocean to Ireland, we send a warm welcome as we chat with you at Pages of the Past this week. Before becoming an author, you had quite an extensive background in mathematics, computers, and all sorts of technology that I won't even attempt to chat with you about. Yet, you pursued a writing life and have been writing full time for about the past fifteen years. Can you tell our readers a little bit about what drew you to writing?

I've always been writing, on and off, since about the age of 12. Life, and the pressures of making a living intervened along the way. I started again as soon as I'd left the rat race behind, in 1995.

You write in several genres, but since we're talking historical fiction in this group, can you share what led you to write *The Black Orchestra* and the books that followed it?

The idea for *The Black Orchestra* came to me when I read a book about German WW2 spies in Ireland. They were all incredibly poorly trained and were all caught by the Irish police pretty much as soon as they arrived. It occurred to me that perhaps German military intelligence wanted them to be caught.

What kind of research was necessary as you began writing these books?

I read dozens of books about Admiral Canaris and the British Double Cross System. These confirmed my suspicions.

How did *The Black Orchestra* lead into *The Red Orchestra*, and what are the differences between these two series?

The Red Orchestra was a communist resistance group, not at all connected to the Black Orchestra. The interesting thing about the Red Orchestra is the way the intelligence they sent to the Soviets was dismissed by Stalin. They predicted the precise day and battle plan for the Nazi invasion, but their warnings fell on deaf ears.

Tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books.

That has to be Kurt Müller, the Abwehr radio operator who found his way through the Nazi maze to his redemption. His story is not complete yet. Maybe I'll finish it one day soon.

What are your biggest sources of inspiration?

I have a lot of inspirational and supportive friends on Facebook who keep me honest. And my wife has grown to enjoy my work over the years. She's my number one fan.

What does your writing routine look like? What is essential for your writing process?

I don't have a routine, apart from writing only in the mornings. I write when I can and when the spirit moves me. I struggle to find time for my writing, especially when the ideas are not flowing. But when I hit a rich vein of ideas, nothing can stop me.

Besides your historical fiction, you also have some books in the Science Fiction genre (The Android War series) and an Irish detective series featuring Detective Inspector Jordan that is set in Dublin. What is it like juggling several different genres? And are any of them your favorite to write in?

Yes, I've also written a few books about a pre-war detective based in Munich, which I'm quite proud of. Writing in different genres is tough – especially the marketing challenge it presents – but nothing will stop me from writing Science Fiction, my first love.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?

Many thanks for this opportunity, Trisha. I'm very grateful.



You can find JJ Toner's books here:

My first pre-war detective story https://smarturl.it/JJT_ZZ

The Black Orchestra https://smarturl.it/JJT_SK

The Serpent's Egg (Red Orchestra novel) https://smarturl.it/JJT_SE



You can find JJ Toner here:

https://twitter.com/JJToner_YA

<https://www.facebook.com/JJTonerYA>

Website <https://www.jjtoner.com/>

BIO: I'm a writer. I also edit, read and (sometimes) review a lot of other people's books. I enjoy almost every kind of music. My father gave me a passion for golf. I live in Ireland with my wife and youngest son.

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