



P.C. James, acclaimed author of the Miss Riddell Cozy Mysteries, photographed near his home in Toronto, Canada.

P.C. James discusses his inspirations, character development, historical research, and the balance of humour and suspense in his beloved cozy mystery series.

Master of Cozy Mysteries

P.C. JAMES

CRAFTING CHARACTERS WITH COMPASSION AND HUMOUR

AS TOLD TO BEN ALAN

P.C. James, a master of the cozy mystery genre, has captivated readers with his charming and intricately plotted series, including the Miss Riddell Cozy Mysteries, the One Man and His Dog Cozy Mysteries, and the Royal Duchess and Sassy Senior Sleuths cozy mysteries, co-authored with Kathryn Mykel. Residing near Toronto, Canada, James balances his passion for wildlife photography with his dedication to crafting engaging narratives, often drawing inspiration from his own experiences and memories.

In this exclusive interview for Reader's House Magazine, James delves into the inspirations behind his beloved characters and series, the meticulous research that brings historical settings to life, and the delicate art of weaving humour into suspenseful plots. He also shares insights into his collaborative writing process and the personal anecdotes that enrich his storytelling. Join us as we explore the mind of P.C. James, a writer whose love for both the natural world and the written word continues to enchant and entertain readers around the globe.

You have created several beloved series, including the Miss Riddell Cozy Mysteries and One Man and His Dog Cozy Mysteries. What inspired you to write cozy mysteries, and how do you differentiate between the series in terms of tone and storytelling?

As a child and young man, I began reading my aunts' Christie, Sayer, and Heyer mysteries during wet summer holidays at their house in Ravenscar facing the North Sea.

P.C. James masterfully blends humor, historical accuracy, and engaging storytelling, making him a standout in the cozy mystery genre.

Northern English weather being what it is, I had ample time for reading their books.

The defining moment, however, came with Joan Hickson playing Miss Marple. Because we'd moved to Canada in 1979, I didn't see Joan's interpretation until well into the 21st Century, long after my aunts were gone. Joan Hickson was so like my aunts, watching her Miss Marple was like being back at Ravenscar in the Fifties and Sixties and, along with the memories of my aunts and their mystery books, it made Miss Riddell's stories spring almost naturally from the page.

Your protagonist in the One Man and His Dog series, Tom Ramsay, is a retired inspector with a loyal border collie. What drew you to create a character who has retired from law enforcement, and how does Ramsay's background influence his approach to solving mysteries?

Inspector Ramsay in my Miss Riddell series was modeled on the men in my family when I was growing up. They were steady, serious people not given to emotional outbursts, whatever happened.

Ramsay had been a bit too unorthodox for his day, which didn't endear him to his superiors. I often had that feeling of 'differentness' during my career. What his personal history and unusual character bring to his investigations is compassion and an ability to see the many sides of people, without being overly judgemental.

And now I know how it feels to be retired so, again, it felt natural for me to write some stories with him as the central character.

Historical settings play a significant role in your books, such as England in the 1950s and 1960s. What research do you conduct to ensure the accuracy of these periods, and how do you weave historical details into your stories to enhance the narrative?

It's said older people can remember the distant past better than the near past and that's very true for me. I remember clearly events from my childhood and teenage years so setting the

books in those years gives me an advantage over a younger author. That said, I do check my recollections to ensure I have them at the right time and place.

I also research songs and movies of the time because we lived out in the country then and didn't have much exposure to cultural events. No television or cinema in those days, for my family anyway.

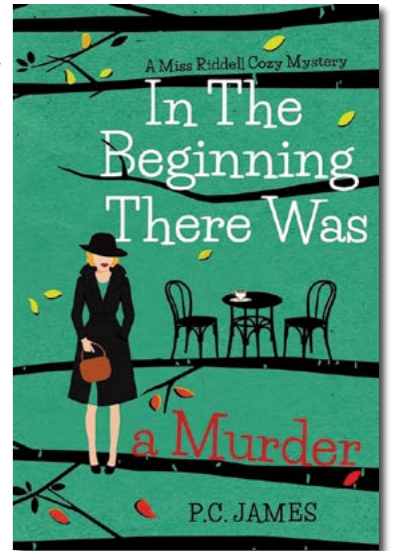
In your new series co-authored with Kathryn Mykel, The Duchess of Snodsbury Amateur Detective Series, you introduce a duchess as a sleuth. What challenges and opportunities does this aristocratic setting provide for creating engaging mysteries and character dynamics?

Kathryn and I were in an online writing group together when we decided to co-author a cozy mystery series. Kathryn writes quilting craft-based cozy mysteries, and we thought a cozy mystery set in England in the Fifties when crafts were still everyday skills would be fun to do. I have a background and an understanding of how people behaved in the social structure of the time. These two different approaches make for difficult plotting sometimes, but the stories are well-received so we get there in the end.

Humour is a notable element in your Miss Riddell Cozy Mysteries. How do you balance humor with the suspense and intrigue of a mystery plot, and what role does humour play in developing your characters and their relationships?

To answer this, I'm going to shift inspiring authors from mysteries to my other favourite author, Jane Austen. I love the way Jane wrote her stories. There's humour in almost every sentence. I try to emulate her style because it keeps me reading and I hope it does the same for readers of my books.

As an author who loves photographing wildlife but spends much of your time writing, how do these two passions influence each other? Have your experiences with nature photography provided inspiration for any scenes or characters in your



A captivating historical cozy mystery with a smart heroine, intriguing twists, and vivid 1950s setting. A must-read for mystery lovers!

books?

The best example of my love of wildlife photography appearing in a book, is when Miss Riddell takes a cruise with her sister around the Galapagos Islands. Our own Galapagos cruise was a retirement present we gave ourselves, and we loved every minute of it. One scene in Murder on a Galapagos Cruise is of a fellow cruise guest, upon landing on another island and being told how we'd see even more iguanas, groaning, 'not another '@!' iguana.' I liked that so much, I put it in my story. I also used my wildlife photography experience in the two books set in Australia.