

True Crime and the Fiction Writer *by Eve Elliot*

“I think he staged his own death.”

“Yeah, but he was suffering from depression, so maybe he really did jump.”

“What about the car, though? They found it two weeks later, and someone had been living in it.”

“I think the record company bumped him off.”

“Nah, he’s living on a kibbutz in Israel, everyone knows that...”

I muted my microphone and listened, captivated by the voices emanating from the grid of faces on my laptop screen. This was my first meeting of the True Crime meet-up, on Zoom of course, like almost all of my social interactions these days.

I wasn’t exactly an interloper; I had revealed

that I am a crime fiction writer and that I wanted to get a feel for true crime aficionados and how they discuss cases. But I felt like a bit of an anthropologist studying a fascinating new tribe. This collection of strangers intrigued me, each of them interested in some aspect of true crime, each of them knowledgeable about history, law, policing and psychology. Their passion for discussing these topics was infectious, and before I knew it, I was chiming in with my own thoughts on this 26-year-old case.

Richey Edwards was the lyricist and *enfant terrible* of the Welsh band Manic Street Preachers. On Feb 1, 1995, the day the band was scheduled to leave Cardiff for a promotional tour of the US, Edwards vanished, and

hasn't been heard from since. He was declared dead in absentia in 2008, but his body has never been found.

Rumours and speculation have circulated for many years, but nothing approaching evidence has ever been discovered. Some say he was fascinated with disappearances and faking one's own death, and went to ground in a far flung place like India or Israel to start a new life. Some think he ended up overdosing like so many other anonymous members of society's fringes. Others believe that as a long-time self-harmer and possible sufferer of bipolar disorder, he very likely jumped from a bridge on the River Severn (on the border between England and Wales), after which his body was carried out to sea.

Every one of these theories has its 'yeah-but's'. Every one of them is equally plausible. Nobody truly knows, and likely never will. Unless Edwards surfaces again one day with an Instagram account and a "hello lads, did you miss me?", it's probable this cold case will remain just that.

I'm not sure why cold cases interest me so much, but I find myself drawn to stories of long-forgotten crimes. I prefer disappearances and heists to the gorier tales of serial killers or the criminally insane, but for me, the crimes themselves aren't even the most interesting part (in the case of Edwards, no foul play was ever suspected and so it's doubtful any crime was even involved). What's fascinating is the eerie stillness of that moment in time being examined from the distance of many years. What intrigues me is knowing, even as I read about the cases and try to reconstruct the events, that we will likely never know for sure what happened, and will be left to speculate without any hope of closure or resolution.

And maybe that's why cold cases are ultimately both frustrating and fascinating. As a mystery story lover, my enjoyment of the genre is entirely dependent on a satisfying ending. I enjoy being a fly on the parlour wall when Poirot assembles the suspects and explains everything, I like poring over the final explanations that wrap up most mystery stories and finally understanding how the crime was committed, and how the culprit was discovered. With true crime you get none of this satisfying denouement. Reading about cold cases quite literally leaves you cold.

Yet it's all the more intriguing because it isn't fiction. There's a mundanity in true crime, no matter how chilling the crime or how shocking the details, because it focuses on the everyday actions of regular people doing regular things before fate cast them into the spotlight. In reading about cryptic last messages, or witness reports of strange delivery vans or suspicious prowlers, we see glimpses of our own pedestrian lives. We see how easily this could have happened to us, and we imagine a future where online groups of strangers discuss our actions and movements with microscopic interest. Cold cases speak to that vague uneasiness we all experience living in the modern world; here be monsters. Proceed with care.

The Zoom call went on for two hours, and everyone offered every manner of theory and explanation imaginable. So many creative thinkers contributing ideas and speculation made the case seem at times both a clear-cut example of a depressed young man ending his life, or the story of a carefully planned escape from notoriety. We did not arrive at a consensus, but that wasn't the point. The idea was to talk about the case and to let our imaginations

go wild.

As a fiction writer, it was a goldmine. I may write a book about a true crime group that actually solves a case, being that they are the only ones still keenly interested in doing so. But until then, I plan to indulge in many more cases and weird occurrences. Just as long as they're served up cold

Cold Case in a Cold Land by R.E. Donald

Living in bush Alaska is not for the faint of heart. Cold temperatures, rustic dwellings and a dearth of amenities, along with having wolves and grizzly bears for neighbors, doesn't make for an easy life, especially during an extended winter of short days and long cold nights. What better setting for a mystifying cold case?

Former homicide investigator Hunter Rayne of the Highway Mysteries series is no longer employed by the Canadian Mounties, so solving cold cases isn't in his current job description. Back in 1998, however, while hauling a load of mining machinery to Alaska in his 18-wheeler, he ended up running head on into a 25-year-old cold case. In Eagle, Alaska, he spots a young woman the spitting image of a girl he'd long thought was dead.

As a rookie cop in Whitehorse, Yukon many years earlier (in 1972 before DNA evidence was a thing) he'd been the first RCMP officer on the scene of a suspicious disappearance. A young American draft dodger and his girlfriend had vanished just before the first snow of winter, when grizzlies are hungry and have been known to break into cabins looking for grub. A grizzly had left his or her finger-, er, paw prints all over the remote trapper's cabin, and there was blood on the floor, but no sign of a human being. With few other clues to go

Eve Elliot is a romance novelist, crime fiction writer and essayist. She wrote and produced a full-cast audio drama in the style of Agatha Christie, and had her first crime short story published in *Cemetery Plots of Northern California*, the 2021 Bouchercon anthology. She lives in Dublin, Ireland. eveelliot.com

on, the case had started cold and stayed cold. In case you're wondering, the unusual detective—essentially a Lone Ranger who drives a big rig up and down the highways of western North America—came about because I wanted to write about a world that was familiar to me. Well, I'd worked in the freight industry for over 20 years. I also wanted a sleuth who had experience in law enforcement and occasional access to law enforcement resources, hence a former cop with PTSD. And lastly, I didn't want to create a Cabot Cove situation, where there were enough murders in my hero's neighborhood to populate an entire crime series. (Thanks for the inspiration, Jessica Fletcher!) Thus was the concept of my semi-professional (pun intended) long-haul sleuth born.

The story of a cold case from the far north was a perfect opportunity to give fans of the series a glimpse at Hunter's past in the RCMP. His unofficial investigation calls his northernmost RCMP contacts into play, and I get to virtually revisit a part of North America that I've long been fascinated with. Although I've been to the Yukon on several occasions, and to Alaska more than once, my time in the north was generally spent in the communities of Whitehorse, Dawson, Fairbanks and Skagway. To make sure my descriptions were accurate, I