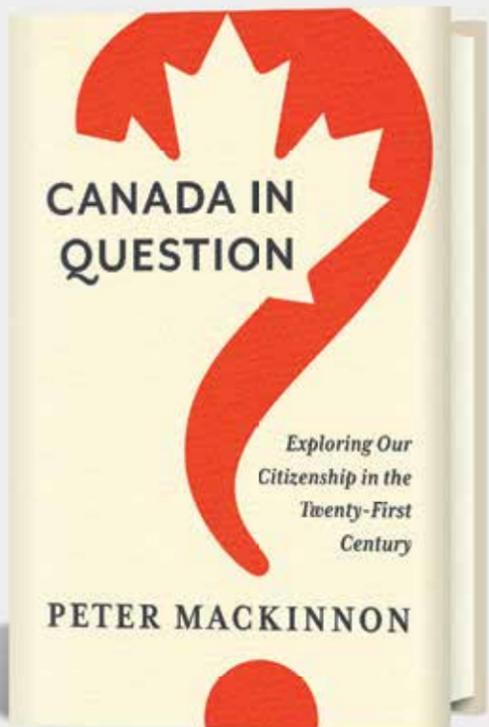


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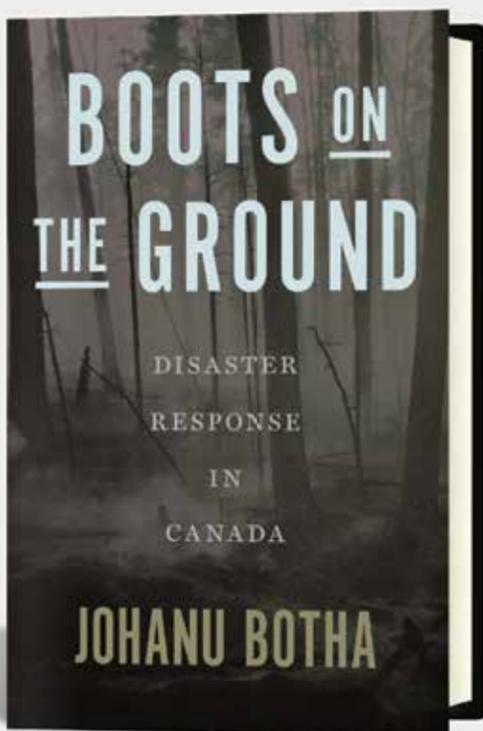
Prudence Emery talks about the origins of her murder mystery series set in London's Savoy Hotel during the "swinging" Sixties.



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Death at the Savoy:
A Priscilla Tempest Mystery, Book 1
by Prudence Emery and Ron Base
(D&M \$18.95)

Prudence Emery, co-author of *Death at the Savoy*, worked at the Savoy Hotel from 1968–1973 before returning to Canada where she was a publicist on over one hundred movie productions. She met stars such as Sophia Loren, Peter O’Toole, Angie Dickinson, Robin Williams and David Cronenberg. In the field of literature, Emery’s longtime friendship with Krystyne and Scott Griffin is noteworthy, leading to her involvement with the launch of Canada’s lucrative Griffin Prize.

BC BookWorld: Your first book was a memoir, *Nanaimo Girl*. What gave you the idea to write a murder mystery?

Prudence Emery: I must confess that the idea to write a murder mystery did not occur to me. But it did occur to an old friend, **Ron Base**, retired film critic, showbiz journalist and novelist. I knew Ron from the years I worked as a film publicist and invited him to visit my sets. Many years later in 2020, Ron read my memoir and was intrigued

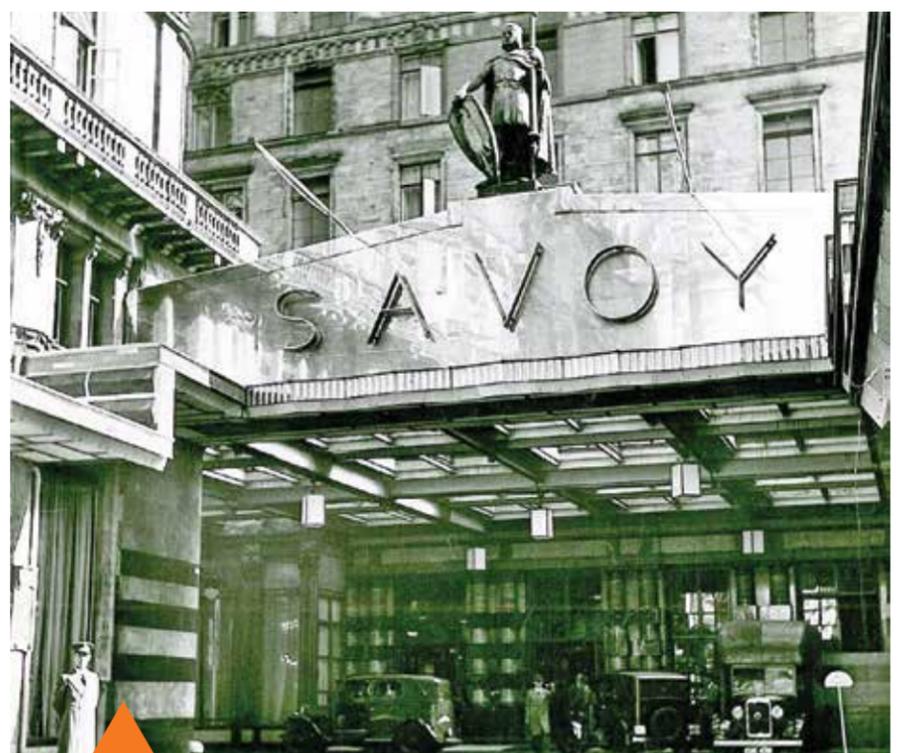
with the section at the Savoy, where I worked as press officer in London during the Sixties. He subsequently called me with an invitation to collaborate with him on a series of mystery novels based at the iconic hotel. The collaboration was launched, Ron working in the east in Milton outside Toronto and me in the west in Victoria.

BCBW: The Savoy is an historical luxury hotel, the kind of place that **Agatha Christie** would have chosen for one of her mysteries. Is that why you choose this backdrop?

PE: Thank goodness Agatha Christie didn’t base any of her books at the Savoy. It would have precluded Ron and I from basing *Death at the Savoy* there. It was chosen not only because I worked there, but for its rich history dating back to 1889, studded with royalty, celebrities and the odd scandal, set against the epitome of luxury, perfect background fodder for a mystery novel.

BCBW: Was the Savoy as sexist and tradition-bound during your time there as you describe in the novel?

PE: I guess you could say that the Savoy was sexist and tradition-bound. But by being tradition-bound, the hotel maintained its high standards. And as for sexist, it’s true that no women worked in the public areas of the hotel. It was all men. However, as



The Savoy Hotel, London (circa 1940s) has a history studded with royalty, celebrities and the odd scandal.



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RICHARD PARIS PHOTO

Prudence Emery: “Mixing fact with fiction is a delicious recipe; give it a stir and it creates a rich tapestry of a tale.”

Priscilla has in the book, I had carte blanche to entertain in both the Grill and the Restaurant. I could be found on occasion drinking Buck’s Fizzes in the American Bar. But I must say, operating in a predominately male world, like Priscilla, I did feel occasionally uncomfortable. Also, like Priscilla in the book, I sometimes had the feeling management wasn’t happy with me.

BCBW: You used your knowledge of 1960s London to expertly develop great settings for your novel. What were some of your favourite places in London and which of them ended up in your book?

PE: King’s Road in Chelsea was a favourite area of mine, mainly, because at that time, the trendy shops and restaurants as well as the “in” nightclub Aretusa (where **John Lennon** made his first public appearance with **Yoko Ono**) were to be found there. Although King’s Road didn’t make it into our first book, Priscilla wore outfits from King’s Road, in particular dresses by the fashion designer **Mary Quant** who popularized the mini-skirt.

A few London pubs which I frequented and which occur in the book include The Admiral Codrington in Chelsea and the Coal Hole next to the Savoy. I also liked hanging out with journalists on their territory, Fleet Street, scoffing beer in the The Wig and Pen. But my

favourite spot to recuperate from overdosing on beer or champagne was in my Savoy-owned flat at 37-39 Knightsbridge overlooking Hyde Park, where Priscilla also lives. We both loved it in the spring when the daffodils bloomed across the street.

BCBW: Are you Miss Priscilla Tempest?

PE: Maybe. All I can reply to this question is that Priscilla does things that I didn’t do and I did things that she didn’t do. But if one reads both *Nanaimo Girl* and *Death at the Savoy*, one can judge for themselves.

BCBW: You use real life characters like **Bob Hope**, **Richard Burton** and **Elizabeth Taylor**, **Noel Coward**, and **Princess Margaret**. But you also (I’m guessing) added fictitious names such as Amir Abraham and Daisee Banville. Why this mix?

PE: Mixing fact with fiction is a delicious recipe; give it a stir and it creates a rich tapestry of a tale. Having Priscilla interacting with celebrities gives the story veracity, lots of occasions for humour and probably supplies nostalgia for old “Savoyards.” There may be more fun than dropping famous names and dead bodies around a legendary luxury hotel, but I can’t imagine what it is. Also, who knew that collaborating on a book (with Ron Base) working four thousand miles apart could be such fun?

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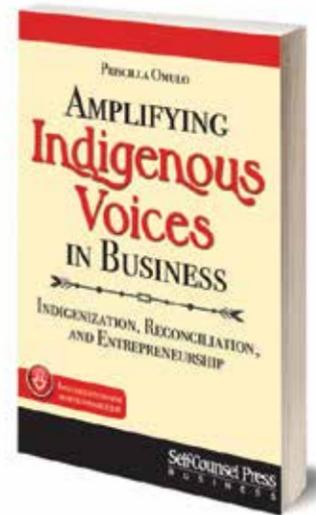
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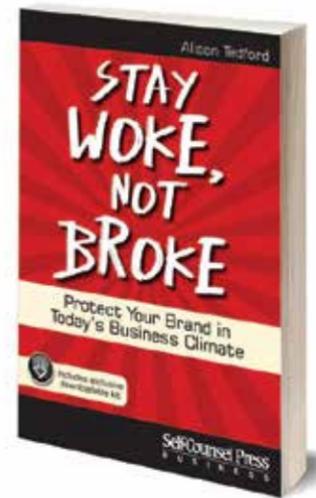


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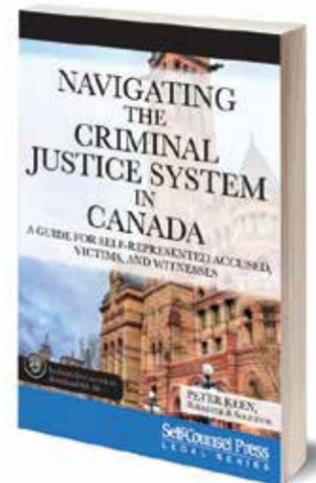


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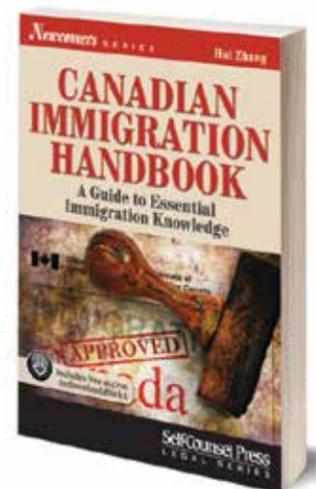


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