

The 7 Question Interview with Karen Campbell



Karen Campbell was born and brought up in Glasgow. She went to Glasgow University and joined the Strathclyde Police in 1987 where she met her husband, who joined the same day. She initially worked as a uniformed constable in Glasgow city centre, before going into Community Involvement, where she specialized in women's safety issues. She was then attached to CID at Police Headquarters, where she operated the Crimestoppers confidential intelligence system.

After a career break to have her family – she has two daughters – she worked for Glasgow City Council until 2005. Once her children were at school, Karen applied to Glasgow University's Creative Writing programme whose graduates include the Booker nominated Rachel Seiffert and thriller writer Louise Welsh. In 2003, Karen was awarded a Scottish Arts Council New Writer's Bursary. Her debut novel, *The Twilight Time*, was published in 2008 to great acclaim and her follow-up, *After The Fire*, is released in paperback in February 2010. Her third novel, *Shadowplay*, will be published in hardback in May 2010.

Some of her novels are:

- *The Twilight Time*
- *After The Fire*

Her official website can be accessed here: <http://www.karencampbell.co.uk>

The WritingRaw.com 7 Question Interview

Please let us know who you are and how we might know you:

I'm Karen Campbell, and I'm a Scottish writer, based in Glasgow. I graduated with Distinction from Glasgow University's Creative Writing Masters in 2003, and have since published two novels: *The Twilight Time* (Hodder 2008) and *After the Fire* (Hodder 2009) with my third book *Shadowplay* due out this May. Last year, I won Best New Scottish Writer at the inaugural Scottish Variety Awards, and my first two novels have recently been optioned for TV development. You can find out more about me at: www.karencampbell.co.uk



Any news you would like to share concerning upcoming projects:

After the Fire is just coming out in paperback this month, so I'm excited about that. The book received a lot of good coverage when it came out in hardback, and I'm hoping it'll now reach a wider audience. It really asks the question: *should the police be armed?* It's a subject I find intriguing, as I'm an ex-police officer myself, and, while many countries routinely arm all their police officers, only about 3% of cops in Scotland volunteer to carry firearms. The novel looks at why someone whose role is essentially to protect life would choose to be armed, and also explores what happens when it all goes wrong. The book's been described as: 'Both a gripping thriller and a moving psychological study' by the Daily Express, who went on to suggest that I was: 'a writer of immense talent and emotional power, and on the brink of huge success', so I'm pretty chuffed about that!

Thoughts concerning the current state of the literary world:

I actually think the literary world is very healthy, in terms of talented writers. By that, I mean writers with a true love of language, who can be experimental, but never arch, and who can weave character, plot, the personal and the universal together in such a way that you're totally immersed in this world you didn't even know existed before you picked up the book. My bedside table has a pile of books like that, but I never get to the bottom of my must-reads as I'm always adding more. So I don't think raw talent is an issue. What does worry me is the amount of publishing and retail opportunities open to writers. With publishers tightening their belts, literary reviewers being culled from the broadsheet pages and major chains like Borders Books folding, I'm concerned that the book industry might not continue to have the space, money or inclination to take a punt on anything other than the mainstream. That's where innovative outlets and media like WritingRaw.com come in!

Who is your favorite author and why?

I have several - James Kelman for his integrity and absolute mastery of language. No other writer can take you so deeply into the head of another human being, where you actually begin to sense the thought and speech patterns of the protagonist as separate from the prose. AL Kennedy for her poetry, Janice Galloway for her pin-sharp precision. I also love AS Byatt - such an erudite, thoughtful writer, and I recently finished *The Given Day* by Denis Lehane, which I thought was excellent. I hadn't read his work before, but it came with a recommendation from Kate Atkinson, whom I also love, and what appealed was the fact that his police characters were real people, not gum-chewing stereotypes. Plus it covered the Boston police strike, which was a fascinating piece of history I knew nothing about.



Have you written a book you love that you have not been able to publish?

Yes and no. I wrote a book when I was on the Creative Writing degree that I haven't tried to publish yet. It was a real labour of love, necessitating several research trips to Kilmartin in Argyll. I received a Scottish New Writers' Bursary to help with the research, so that's another strong motivator for finishing it, but the actual story's not quite there yet. I'm currently working on my fourth book, due out in 2011, but when I've finished that, I definitely want to revisit *Kilmartin* - both the novel and the place, which is truly beautiful.

Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

One review, which I thought summed me up very well, began with:

Karen Campbell is not a crime novelist. There are no carefully hidden clues to follow in her fiction, no red herrings, no implausibly complicated murders to be solved and no all-seeing sleuth to do the solving. But criminality seeps through the pages of her work like recurring damp - it creeps in from the margins to stain sentences as unflinching as prison bars.

Because I write about the police, I've been slotted into thriller/crime - which is no bad thing of course! But, as I writer, I think labels and genres risk being limiting, both in terms of attracting new readership, and in putting constraints on creativity. My work is very much about people, who, to be honest, could have any full-on job that impacts on their lives. It just so happens that mine are police officers. I was a uniformed cop; I never worked in CID and haven't got a clue about post-mortems and forensics and criminal profiling! What I am interested in is people - how we define ourselves, how we protect and present ourselves to the world, and how we react to what life throws at us. Luckily, I have a brilliant editor at Hodder, who's happy to let me write in that way, and I think that's crucial for any author. You just have to write what you write, not what you think the market wants.

How do you feel about what WritingRaw.com and other literary sharing sites are attempting to do for new writers?

See question three above! I believe that any platform where new and inspiring pieces of creative art can be viewed and shared is a good thing. One of the main benefits for me in doing the Creative Writing Masters was that sense of being part of a community of writers and fellow readers, where you could both share work and be inspired. WritingRaw.com is definitely another welcome forum in that community.

WritingRaw.com would like to thank Karen Campbell for taking the time out of her busy schedule for this interview.