

Inspiration for Murder

Author Ron Lovell takes clues from his surroundings.

BY CHRISTINE MATHIAS

Sitting in a popular Corvallis pub, Ron Lovell leaned forward trying to talk over the clamor of a shattering dish. "It's a good site for a murder because its ominous nature is spooky at night," he said referring to the Oregon Coast lighthouse that set the scene for his first published murder mystery, *Murder at Yaquina Head*.

Before writing murder mysteries, Lovell worked in almost every field of journalism and traveled all over the country. He figures a murder mystery novel is the best way to combine all the sleuthing skills he learned as a reporter with the fun of imaginative fiction writing. He's spent his whole life engaged in serious business writing, but now the wrinkles on his face surround a devious grin when he says, "I'd just rather get to the thrills and chills part."

Lovell got his first taste of journalism as editor of his high school newspaper in Santa Monica, Calif. He eventually graduated with a BS in political science and a MA in journalism from UCLA. His first job was at the Los Angeles bureau of McGraw Hill, one of the largest publishers of trade magazines. Working there he traveled coast to coast and covered beats from electronics to medicine. By his 30s, Lovell had accomplished his dream of working in New York City and eventually his love of the West Coast brought him home to Oregon. His days in the big city as a serious business writer were over.

Back in the West, Lovell taught technical journalism at OSU for 24 years. Now he writes his murder mysteries in Glen Eden, a small town on the Oregon Coast.

His experience in journalism gives him plenty of inspiration for his novels. He says he bases his books on types of situations that happen in everyday life — except in this "everyday life," scandals are taking place, morals are being threatened and people are dying.

Tom Martindale, the protagonist of Lovell's novels, bears a strong resemblance to Lovell himself. "Some people say when he is talking they can hear me," he said. "In a lot of ways, it is me." But in many ways it isn't. In the most recent book, Martindale drives a hot yellow sports car, but Lovell says his silver Volkswagen is "hot enough for me." His button-down shirt and loose khaki pants are clean and casual, but cer-

tainly not as loud as the funky ties worn by his character, which have little icons showing each ironic situation in Tom Martindale's life.

Lovell named the character after his great-grandfather. Martindale is a professor at a school similar to OSU and has a history of doing some investigative reporting. That gets him caught up in all sorts of mysterious situations: from the death of a cheerleader on campus (*Lights! Camera! Action!*), to a lighthouse mystery dating back to World War II (*Murder at Yaquina Head*), to stumbling across a murdered scientist in the mouth of a beach whale (*Dead Whales Tell No Tales*).

PHOTO BY DENNIS WOLVERTON



Lovell's ideas for two more books in the Martindale series are already in action. *Murder Below Zero* (May 2005) will take place in the Arctic. It will be the first of Lovell's books set away from the Oregon Coast. But don't worry, Martindale will be back to the Oregon campus to solve scandals in the election of a university president when *Searching for Murder* hits the shelves.

Lovell says he didn't mean for all of his books to be based on the coast, but his characters and personal background keep leading him there. "Besides," Lovell said, "it's therapeutic to walk along the ocean. There are people from a lot of places. It's beautiful — and of course there is the matter of the lighthouses." ★

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