

Inspiration, *Still Missing*

When I was in my early thirties, I was working as real estate agent in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, and doing well, but I wasn't happy with my job. I didn't feel like I was living my true passion. One day I sent an email to my aunt that said, "I think I was supposed to be a writer." She responded, "It's never too late."

I started writing essays for myself, getting in touch with my creative side (usually when I was supposed to be making cold calls). Then, after a bad breakup, I stayed in a cabin on one of the gulf islands with my dog, Annie, and began working on a memoir. I loved sitting at my keyboard with rain coming down on the roof, a cup of tea by my side. I decided that's what I wanted to do with my life. However, when I arrived home I discovered that my basement had flooded and real life intervened. I put the idea of being a writer to the side and focused back on real estate, but I felt as though I was still getting messages from the universe. That sounds very "hippy-dippy," I know, but it's true. Every book I picked up seemed to have an author as a main character—same with movies. I would even dream in prose. I could see words landing on a blank page. What did it all mean?

While I was working at an open house one afternoon in a vacant home, I was nervous and started wondering what might happen if I didn't come home. Who would notice first? What would happen to my dog? Then I began to wonder what might happen if I was held captive for a long time—maybe even a year. It would be so difficult to fit back into normal society after such an extreme event.

For a couple of months I thought about the story constantly—when I was driving, walking my dog, cleaning my house. It was coming to me in bits and pieces, snapshots of images. Then one day I heard my character in my mind telling her story to a therapist. She was very angry, with a sarcastic voice, and she had a lot to say. I walked upstairs to my office and began to write Annie's first session.

I became so obsessed with Annie's story that I decided to sell my house and quit my job so I could pursue my dream. I knew it was a bad time to leave real estate—the market was booming—and very few writers make it in publishing, but it was something I had to do. It wasn't a choice; it was a compulsion.

For the next couple of years I learned everything I could about the writing craft and revised countless drafts. When the book was finally finished my agent submitted it to St. Martin's Press. It's rare for a first-time Canadian author to be picked up by a big US publisher, so I was over the moon when they offered me a three book contract. Since then the book has sold to over thirty countries and won the International Thriller of the Year Award for Best First novel. I'm currently working on my seventh novel and I'm grateful that I get to spend my days doing what I love. Even when it's hard, there's nothing else I'd rather be doing.