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Interview with Anne Holt

THE INTERVIEW

Anne Holt

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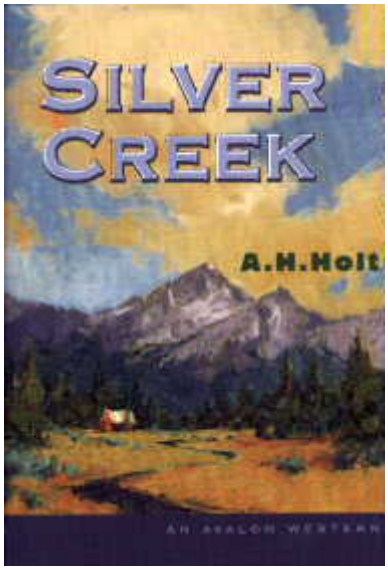
(*Anne Holt belongs to that rare breed of authors who write their first piece of work in late sixties. At 68, she wrote the first book of her life - a Western - and it became an instant hit.*

Her book Silver Creek (Avalon Books, 2003) won rave reviews from our expert reviewers. Naturally we couldn't contain our desire to know more about her. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached her for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by Sukanya Datta. Some excerpts.. ..)

The book by Ms. Holt. Click on the book to go to the main page of its reviews



Qu.1. Why did you wait so long before writing a novel?

Ans. Silver Creek is not my first novel---it is my first published novel. I have written all my life, everything from poetry to articles, short-stories, plays, grant proposals, and longer non-fiction.

Qu.2. Was it difficult to cross over from writing poetry to writing prose?

Ans. No. I believe writing poetry is the best preparation for writing prose. It taught me to be direct---to find the right word rather than relying on several to make my meaning clear.

Qu.3. What influenced your decision to write a western as a first novel...why not say, a Mills and Boon romance instead?

Ans. Western stories and history are my favorite read. A Western is only a story set in the west in a certain time period--and I love stories.

Qu.4. Is there a real-life model behind the hero?

Ans. My heroes, male and female, are composites of people known, dreamed or met in reading.

Qu.5. Do you think that the cowboy way of life takes us back to a simple lifestyle --now sadly lost in the maze of modern living-- and that this is its USP or universal appeal? Otherwise why do you think a lifestyle so American frontier should enthrall readers across the world even in places (as in India) where such a lifestyle is totally alien?

Anne Holt



Anne Holt belongs to that rare breed of authors who write their work in late sixties. At 68, she wrote the first book of her life - a Western - and it became an instant hit. Her *Silver Creek* won rave reviews from our expert reviewers. Naturally we could't contain our desire to talk to her. Sukanya Datta, our star interviewer conducted an e-interview with her. Some excerpts...

Ans. I disagree that the lifestyle is totally alien or even simple. I've enjoyed many books set in India--Louis Bromfield's the most---the land was a character in all of them, just as it is in a Western. The characters in Westerns and the characters in the books set in India responded to place and situation in universal ways. "Westerns" simply focus on particular cultural myths and ideals, most of them quite human and surprisingly universal.

Qu.6. In today's politically-correct, gender sensitive times do you think Westerns reinforce gender stereotyping?

Ans. Some westerns may, but I strive to create women of strong character in my writing. Whether acknowledged by historians or not, all women, particularly those involved in pioneer enterprise, joined men in acting on their environment.

If their stories are told honestly it is obvious that women were and are useful contributors to the lives of their families and to their civilization.

Qu.7. Westerns as a genre is fading--do you think this is because today's readers can no longer identify with the lifestyle? Or is it because of the absence of actors such as John Wayne to act the part and authors such as Loius L'Amour? Also Hollywood has apparently graduated to super-effects stunts. Or is it related more to the general decline in reading habits?

Ans. Cops and robbers, defense lawyers vs. the system and science fiction (particularly Hollywood style) keep trying to hi-jack the "Western," but I believe that a good Western that sticks to the genre will always find an audience.

There are also publishers and writers of "western romance" and violent "westerns" usually filled with overt sex. These writers and publishers are not really writing Westerns, they simply place their stories in the western locale and borrow the name.



" ..... My advice to aspiring writers? Well, keep reading and keep writing. Also study history - it's a much more rigorous discipline than English and much more useful to a writer. Don't worry about the genre--just learn to tell a good story. ...."

Was "Monte Walsh" shown in India? Try to see it. You'll surely forget about John Wayne, or Louis L'Amour or the demise of the Western.

Is there a decline in reading? I don't know--I have a large family and know a lot of people--most of them are readers.

Qu.8. What would be your advice to aspiring writers, particularly to those who wish to write westerns?

Ans. Keep reading and keep writing. Study history--it's a much more rigorous discipline than English and much more useful to a writer. Don't worry about the genre--just learn to tell a good story. That's what readers want. Louis L'Amour and Zane Grey are dead. We need some new Western writers.

Qu.9. Are there publishers who specialize in westerns?

Ans. There are a few. My publisher, Avalon Books, publishes six westerns every year and has done it since the 1950s.



" ..... I believe writing poetry is the best preparation for writing prose. It taught me to be direct---to find the right word rather than relying on several to make my meaning clear. ...."

Qu.10. The Cowboy Code encapsulates many human values but the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill," is grossly violated in western novels/movies. Comment.

Ans. In a "real" Western the hero only kills in self-defense or in defense of others, and he does that reluctantly. That's the "Cowboy Code."

Qu.11. Who would you say has inspired you the most?

Ans. My father, who taught me to depend on myself.

Qu.12. Who influenced your writing the most?

Ans. All the great storytellers I've enjoyed reading certainly influence my writing. It's impossible to choose one. Surely I absorbed images and ideas from history, literature, etc. --- everything I've read.

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Interview appearing in next issue (Volume 3, Number 1, July - December 2004)

Interview with Melanie Johns Cupp, in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology (sister publication)* (Volume 4, Number 2, July - December 2003)

-Editor-in-Chief

of Volume 2, No. 2 (July - December 2003)

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