

Once Upon a Crime owners Gary and Pat are being honored with a Raven Award at this year's MWA Edgar Awards. We've been fans since they started running the store. They are among the best hand-selling book sellers in the business.

Jeremy: How did the idea of becoming a bookstore owner first come about?

Gary: It was Pat's idea, though she might blame me. Okay, it was mutual. She had been helping out at the store for a few years, rumors were abuzz about it being available, one thing led to another, and I approached Steve.

Jeremy: Did either of you need any convincing?

Gary: Not at all. I was, to put it delicately, pretty annoyed at the direction my job was going. I'd happily supply you with details of just why, and whom, but that 's' water over the dam and I try not to burn bridges, or to mix metaphors. Needless to say, I was all ears when Pat told me that she'd like to buy the store, but that she couldn't do it on her own. Thus was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Jeremy: How long have you two known each other and how did you meet?

Gary: I would see Pat often in any of several used bookstores around town - this was easily 15 years ago. When she later started working at OUAC, I gradually changed my buying trips to coincide with the days she was there. Eventually, she asked me on a date to the Guthrie. Afterwards, we went the more economical route of long walks around Lake Harriet, followed by - I kid you not - each of us grabbing a couch (Pat had two) and reading. The initial fondness grew, Pat popped the question about buying the store, and we decided to make an honest man out of me by moving in together. In doing so, we found out that we had, between us, roughly 10,000 books.

Jeremy: What was the date of your first official day open?

Gary: We bought Once Upon a Crime on August 1, 2002 from Steve Stilwell. We believe that Mary Trone first opened OUAC on April 1st, 1987. This would make the store's 25th anniversary April Fool's Day, 2012. We're working on some plans to make that a big deal. On our 5th anniversary of buying the store, Pat and I got married, at the store, almost to the minute of the 35W bridge collapse.

Jeremy: Do you remember who your first signing, after purchasing the store, was?

Gary: Alex Kava, for "Soul Catcher", on August 6, 2002. She has since appeared at our store every year but one.

Jeremy: Any nerves for that first event?

Gary: No - we were pretty damn excited.

Jeremy: How was the turn-out? Any snags or problems, or did you guys act like seasoned veterans?

Gary: We had maybe 30 people show up. No problems that I can recall - Alex, the seasoned pro that she is, laid all of our fears to rest and put on a great show. She's a treasure, and we always welcome her return.

Jeremy: Can you tell me about a couple of your more memorable events?

Gary: Probably the most memorable, at least the first that comes to mind, was actually before we owned the store. Shortly after Christmas of 2001, Scott Phillips came to sign "Ice Harvest", and appropriately enough, we were in the middle of a blizzard. Pat, myself, Steve, Scott, and his driver Tim were the only ones there. Just saw Scott recently, and he still remembers it as one of his most enjoyable events.

Along the same lines, earlier this year, Chris Kuzneski came for "The Prophecy". Pat was home sick; we still had Tim, our wonderful author escort. Besides myself and the author, we had a 14 year old boy (who had discovered Chris when his dad brought home one of his books he'd found on an airplane) and his mom. He is an exceptionally bright and engaging boy, and was absolutely thrilled to have a private audience with his favorite author. Chris was equally pleased. We later got a wonderful thank you note from the boy.

And last, a full house event: Kinky Friedman. This was the year he was running for Governor of Texas. We

sold out of books, had a line going down the sidewalk. Whole families came. Kinky being, well, kinky, looked out at the crowd, took a hit off his cigar and said "y'all should know that I'm quite outspoken, but one thing I'll never do is say 'fuck' in front of a C-H-I-L-D."

Jeremy: Has working in the book business changed your reading habits?

Gary: It's changed the quantity of what we read. We actually read fewer books now than we were able to read before. And we're quicker to put down a book that doesn't work. As one of our mottoes goes: "We read the crappy books so you don't have to".

Jeremy: How has your life, in general, changed since buying the store.

Gary: What life? The store, and walking Shamus (our aptly named rescue dog we moved in with last spring) pretty much consumes all our time.

Jeremy: You have a dog? What kind and how did he come into your lives?

Gary: We have what we refer to as a "perfect" dog. He's probably about 2 1/2 years old, and is 50 pounds of well-toned puppy. Most likely, Shamus is part Border Collie, with Dalmatian, Lab, and German Shepherd thrown in - only the best parts. He's become totally comfortable as a store dog and greeter. We'd been thinking of getting a dog for some time, and decided to wait until after last year's Write of Spring. I checked out a rescue outfit on the web, and his was the only picture we looked at. He's white with spots - most notably a large one around his eye, just like from the "Little Rascals". He came up here from Missouri and loves the snow.

Jeremy: Looking back, what was the biggest misconception you had about being a store owner?

Gary: That we'd still have a life.

Jeremy: What is your least favorite part of being an owner?

Gary: Damaged books. Except for some independent presses, don't any of these people know how to package books?

Jeremy: And your most favorite?

Gary: Hand selling. Putting books into the hands of appreciative customers - books they've never heard of - and having them come back for more. It's so much fun, it'll never feel like work.

Jeremy: I think my favorite discovery from you is *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan. I would not have given it a second glance had Gary not insisted it was P.I. novel hidden in the realm of Sci-fi.

Who are some of the authors you have really championed over the years? I imagine you have seen a lot of writers evolve and go from fledgling authors to established pros.

Gary: Pat has always been a champion of, and a second "mom" to, Vince Flynn. We're thrilled that he has had such phenomenal success, and Pat's been there to watch and cheer him on from the beginning. A favorite of ours, and proof that the world needs independent bookstores, is Reed Farrel Coleman. We discovered him only because he was scheduled at OUAC for his second book, "Redemption Street". Upon reading both that book and the first Moe Prager book, "Walking the perfect Square", we were blown over. Nobody had ever shown us his first book before, and being from a small press, it never got much distribution. We've been promoting his books ever since, and pleased to see that he's gone on to receiving some major awards and nominations.

Barry Eisler would be another. He's come here for every book, and his popularity grows each year. Another great author who we can't claim, but the store can, is Michael Connelly. Michael has been incredibly supportive of the store, and independents in general. There are only a few sad cases of authors who've gotten "too big" for us, but we can't just fault the authors - the publishers and publicists share the blame. There are countless authors who began with Steve, and continue to support the store. John Sandford first started coming here when Mary Trone owned the store, and makes a point of starting his tours at OUAC.

Jeremy: Are there any changes or plans in store for OUAC?

Gary: Oh yeah.

Last year, Gary Bush and Chris Everheart put together the "Once upon a Crime" anthology, as a fund raiser to cover some of my medical bills after I came down with a nasty strain of leukemia. We turned that incredible gift around, and to date we've donated over \$5,000 to the Memorial Blood Centers. We're so thrilled at its success that I'm doing, against Pat's "are you out of your freakin' mind!!" reaction, a "Writes of Spring" anthology to celebrate both the 10th annual "Write of Spring" and the 25th anniversary of Once Upon a Crime in 2012.

Beyond that, we enjoy what we're doing and how we're doing it. It works for us.

Jeremy: How far are you in the planning process for that?

Gary: We have about 30 stories so far. I invited over 90 alums of WOS numbers 1-8 to donate a story, royalties again go to the Memorial Blood Center. Almost all local so far, but I have been promised some from "honorary Locals". Libby Hellmann sent one, we'll wait and see on the rest. I set a Dec. 31 deadline for submissions. One high-point, I will include an unpublished story by Harold Adams. He was the Guest of Honor at our 1st WOS. I'm also dedicating the new anthology to him.

Don't know if I'll be able to include all of the stories - I truly hope so. The publisher might have a problem if the book gets too big. Fortunately, many of the authors took my suggestion to try their hands at "flash fiction". I'm giving myself about 6 months to get everything put together.

Jeremy: I remember when it became known that you were sick, many, myself included, volunteered to help out at the store. And, as you said, many authors donated stories for Gary and Chris' anthology. Did the outpouring of support surprise either of you?

Gary: Not so much surprise us, as totally overwhelm us.

Jeremy: While you have obviously met and befriended many because of the store, are there any close friendships that have come because of it?

Gary: We've been blessed with a host of friends, be they authors, publishers, sales reps, or of course customers, many of whom we see socially on a regular basis. People who we otherwise wouldn't have met. And more often than not, we don't talk about books! So, in answer to the question "What life?", we'd have to seriously say that our lives have been enriched in countless and special ways since buying the store.

Jeremy: I would be remiss if I did not extend my congratulations on your upcoming Raven Award. For those that do not know, the Raven is given out by the Mystery Writers of America and recognizes outstanding achievement in the mystery field outside the realm of creative writing. How did it feel to hear you would be getting recognized by the very authors you read and promote?

Pat: Just incredibly honored. We absolutely never expected it.

Jeremy: Will the two of you be making the trip to accept it in person?

Pat: We're planning on the trip. I've never been to New York City, and we're both looking forward to it. So many book stores, and so little time. Plus I'm sure I'll strain my neck by looking up at all the buildings! Gary's thinking about renting a tux, and said he's sorry he tossed out his all-black Converse All-Stars. The ladies at our monthly book club are planning to outfit me. Laura Childs thinks I should wear a tux too!

Jeremy: I want to thank both of you for all of the time and energy you have put into both Once Upon A Crime and the genre in general. I honestly can't count the number of amazing authors I have discovered because of both the store and you suggestions.

It never feels like I am going to a store, but rather a warm, friendly...I don't know, clubhouse is not quite right, but sort of an oasis. It is as though it has soaked up all of the love you have put into it over the years.

Pat: Thank you for your kind words, Jeremy. Gary and I are honored.