

## **DYING TO TELL ME – an interview with author, Sherryl Clark**

### **Where did the idea come from to write this book?**

I had always wanted to write a crime novel for young readers, one with twists and turns that kept you guessing. I love reading crime and mystery fiction myself – I started back in Year 7 with books by Dick Francis, Mickey Spillane and Agatha Christie. I also wanted to write a novel about a police dog, and when I was researching police dogs for an article, I got the first part of the idea – an anecdote about a police dog that had gone all the way through training and then failed the gunshot test. The novel developed from there.

### **Why set it in the country, in Manna Creek?**

When a policeman takes up a posting in a one-person police station, they become everything police-related, but they also have to be involved in the community. I come from the country myself (a place too small for a police station) and I know it takes a long time to become a “local”. I like the idea of the outsider in fiction, the person who never fits in, and so it seemed a good idea to put both Sasha and her dad in this small, isolated town. Plus, it’s a common setting in crime fiction – to have your characters in some place they can’t get out of, to add to the tension.

I made up Manna Creek because I wanted to use lots of bits of different small towns I’ve been to and stayed in – the best and worst bits – and not have it identified as a real place.

### **Was Sasha always going to have her gift of seeing people about to die?**

Yes. There are a lot of people on TV who solve crimes through “seeing” the crime or finding the victim’s body, but I wanted her to have the chance of saving people. Again, it adds to the tension. Will she get there in time? Of course, because she’s not an adult who can jump in a car, sometimes she won’t be able to do anything.

### **So where did King’s telepathic power come from?**

Good question! I brought him into the story, I liked the idea that he would have a real personality, just like the human characters and ... he started talking! It was very weird, but I liked his voice so much that I just thought I would totally go with it and see what came out. He continued to grow as a character, and I hear his voice really clearly. Not that there’s anything so spooky about that. I hear most of my characters’ voices! I’ve tried to work out how old he is in human years, and I think he’s about 33, but of course in dog years that’s about 5.

### **The story is set in the middle of winter. How does setting and weather etc play a part in a story?**

It can affect everything. Storms and snow and horrible weather can disrupt all the events in the story and make things hard for the characters, as they do in this novel. Even a really hot day can change the moods of characters, or lead people to lose their tempers with bad consequences. A hot day at the beach can create one kind of story; a stormy, cold day will create another.

Even the difference between day and night can change mood. If someone is chasing you in daylight, it's a very different experience from being chased at night. It makes it more scary, but it also makes it easier sometimes for the victim to hide.

**You don't show anything gory in the story, even though Mrs Alsopp is murdered. Sasha's dad won't let her see the board with all the photos and evidence on it either.**

For a start, I think young readers see enough of that on TV to imagine it if they want to. I don't need Sasha to go to the house and see a dead body for her to feel deeply about what happened. However, I do describe the man in the old police cell because it's integral to the plot for her to see what really happened to him and help him restore his good name.

Also, it might sound feasible for Sasha to look at the board in the police station, but as a policeman I don't think her father would let her. It's not realistic – they are very protective of police business and I decided that he would not want her to be involved at all, if he could help it.

**Is there going to be another book about Sasha and King?**

Yes, I think so. I was hoping that it sold well enough in the US for the publisher there to ask for another (and they were interested) but that didn't happen, for several reasons, although it got a lot of good reviews. Now I am publishing the Australian edition myself, it does open it up for a sequel, and I have had one outlined for quite some time. Working title is *Whispers in the Dark*.

The next one could be an e-book, or there might be a publisher willing to take it on. Fingers crossed!