

Now playing on Quadra:

Mugging, mystery, and mayhem

QUADRA ISLAND HAS MADE GUEST APPEARANCES before in print media. From time to time we're mentioned across the water when something here rears a newsworthy head. Many an island fiction writer has embedded a story in island-inspired geography. And of course our home turf features prominently in the books of local raconteurs and shutterbugs who chart island history and document our coastal splendour.

Most recently the island has been awarded the role of literary host in *Never Hug a Mugger on Quadra Island*, third in a collaborative series from Gabriola writers Sandy Frances Duncan and George Szanto. *Never Hug a Mugger* tracks the sleuthing adventures of Noel Franklin and Kyra Rachel, the Islands Investigations International duo introduced in *Never Sleep with a Suspect on Gabriola Island* and *Always Kiss the Corpse on Whidbey Island*.

Readers with a penchant for irony appreciate the cross-border play of titles as the Triple I team hops north and south of the 49th parallel to decode the mystery *du jour*. Kyra has dual citizenship making it easy to work both sides of the fence.

Another wry gesture has the American tales beginning with the word 'Always...', the stories north of 49 with 'Never...' Before you open the book, you've got a smile tugging at the edges of your curiosity – which broadens into laugh-out-loud moments as the plot invariably thickens.

While the authors take a few liberties with local geography, readers who know these islands enjoy the added sparkle of seeing fictitious events spinning a web in familiar territory.

It's quite a web the authors spin. In *Never Hug a Mugger*, a young Quadra man is found severely beaten



Authors Sandy Duncan and George Szanto hard at work on Book 4. The creators of the Triple I cross-border island-hopping duo salute a fruitful collaboration.

in a nearby Campbell River woods. His father, Jason Cooper, calls on his old high school buddy to find out why.

Noel Franklin, gay investigative reporter turned detective, is in his early 40s and lives in Nanaimo. He enlists his lovely and talented sidekick Kyra Rachel from Bellingham to join in the chase. They make their way to Quadra accompanied by Noel's teenage niece Alana.

A quirky crime-solving unit to be sure, but that's who shows up at the Cooper's door on Quadra Island to investigate the beating that's

left eldest son Derek in a coma and the rest of the family in shock.

In short order we're introduced to the entourage: middle son Shane, aspiring Olympic figure skater; 15 year old Tim who wears a ball cap backwards and helps his dad in the family woodlot; and mom Linda who adroitly balances rural living with a nursing career in Campbell River. A supporting cast of dozens swirls out in a wake behind the main drivers.

So far it's a credible Quadra-esque lot, Olympian credentials notwithstanding – a detail that proves pivotal to the story and provides a thread from which the mystery might unravel under Triple I's scrutiny. Yet it takes its sweet time, and therein lies the book's appeal.

Never Hug a Mugger isn't a lightning-paced, car-bombing explosion of

one literary special effect after another. Nor does it employ the *film noir* icons of its cinematic forbears: no low-slung fedoras, whisky-soaked voices, or arabesques of tobacco smoke. (In fact, only once does a character even *think* about having a cigarette.)

The working friendship between Noel and Kyra takes an interesting turn in the series' third book... and it's not what you think

Instead the authors have coyly trotted out a blend of salient details, interwoven stories, a few red herrings, and snippets of overheard conversation – peppered to taste with some very funny progressions of dialogue

and action. Which in itself isn't so surprising – at the beginning of their collaboration Duncan and Szanto thought they'd be working on a play. As the project developed into a series of novels, Islands Investigations International walked into the scene, and Noel and Kyra haven't looked back. Nor have their creators. Says Sandy Duncan with a gleam in her eye, "We really like our detectives. They're coming along nicely."

Noel and Kyra are clearly in good hands. Their own history is a slow reveal as they work the case on Quadra, and readers can't help but get caught in the tightening spin of surprising combinations and unforeseen events on which the story hangs. In the end *Never Hug a Mugger* passes the test of good detective fiction: hard to put down until the last question is answered, the world puts itself back together, and the reader is left hungry for the next mystery lurking in the wings.

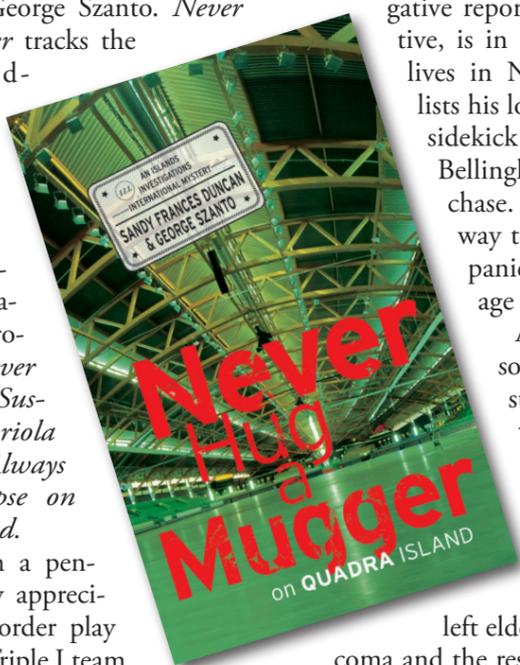
BY ROBYN BUDD

Sandy Frances Duncan is a former clinical psychologist and the author of ten award-winning books for adults and children, including *Gold Rush Orphan*, nominated for a 2005 BC Book Prize.

George Szanto is the author of half a dozen novels, the most recent his Mexican trilogy: *The Underside of Stones*, *Second Sight* and *The Condesa of M*. He is a National Magazine Award recipient and winner of the Hugh MacLennan Prize for fiction.

Never Hug a Mugger on Quadra Island is published by Touchwood Editions, and is available in hardcover at Book Bonanza for \$26.95.

A book launch with the authors is planned at the Heriot Bay Inn later this fall.



Quadra trailblazers 4

A notebook of treks chalked up by islanders who like to work up a sweat in the service of outdoor adventure.

Name Sean Dick. **Mode of transport** Longboard, one speed bicycle, feet. **Destination** Everywhere on Quadra. **Inspiration** I used to love snowboarding, but I don't snowboard any more. What I love is carving down a hill, and now I get to do that everyday on my longboard all over the island. **Advantages** Between my longboard, my bike, and a bit of walking, my transportation's covered. I got rid of my truck because I didn't need it any more. I was longboarding last February, when there was snow and ice all over the road. I have to say the weather really hasn't gotten in my way. I longboard in the wind, in the rain, in the dark...

Workout factor I've noticed my cardio is pretty... well... it's great. I get a kick out of skating with younger guys, 'cause a lot of times I've got juice for more hills than they do.

Advice for starting out With longboarding, get all suited up. Get a good helmet, knee pads, wrist guards, elbow pads, the full deal. Then hook up with someone who knows how to skate, and get them to show you the ropes. I started when I was 48. It didn't take long to learn because of snowboarding and because this makes me happy. It's a choice, isn't it, being happy. Why choose differently?

Anything harsh about longboarding? No such thing as a bad day on a longboard! **Good to bring** A bit of water, maybe. **Good to have** Get the best wheels and bearings you can. Makes all the difference in the world.



HEADS UP for a repeat broadcast of **UNDER OUR SKIN**, a documentary about Lyme disease by Andy Abrahams Wilson

WHEN Tuesday September 6 at 9pm and Wednesday September 7 at 12am

WHERE Knowledge Network

WHY "Unfolding like a real-life thriller, **UNDER OUR SKIN** exposes the hidden epidemic of Lyme disease and reveals how our troubled health care system is failing to address one of the most serious and mysterious illnesses of our time." "Eye-opening for medical consumers and health professionals...."