

ASHWOOD
Cynthia Kraack
Sample Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself and why you decided to become a novelist.

*I've always been a writer—just spent most of my life using those skills in a more traditional career. I began writing short stories when my children were young...discovered *The Loft* in Minneapolis...then found a good writers' group. If you want to write fiction today, the market is in novels and not the old model of short stories sold to magazines. So I decided if I wanted to be serious about writing fiction, I needed to write books.*

Your debut novel MINNESOTA COLD was named the winner of the Northeast Minnesota Book Award for fiction, is ASHWOOD a sequel to that book?

Ashwood continues my work in speculative fiction and both stories have roots in Minnesota...and begin in 2035...beyond that there are no links between the books.

Why did you choose 2035 as the time in which the story begins? Isn't that when MINNESOTA COLD begins?

*Interesting isn't it that two books...written almost a decade apart...begin in the same future year? I began writing *Minnesota Cold* at the end of the 21st century so I chose a time about 35 years in the future based on how many presidential elections would take place. Random. Then 9/11 happened and change became so much more intense in our technology-enabled global way of life. I began writing *Ashwood* in January of 2008—before the financial markets stumbled—and wanted the main character to grow up with some of the traditions of prosperity...yet have to make it as an adult in a time of scarcity.*

Your writing is described as “speculative fiction,” what does that mean?

At some point, speculative fiction and science fiction were considered one and the same...both looking forward to the future. But today there are serious writers dealing with social and political issues in fictional futures that don't include flying whizmos or tripods feeding mutated creatures....people like Margaret Atwood, PD James, James Howard Kunstler. Some writers deal with their past in fiction...I think I deal with my concerns about the future.

What led you to write ASHWOOD?

The true story—I recently completed my MFA in Creative Writing through a low-residency program, which required that I spend twelve days twice a year in Maine. During my first twelve days, a short story about a dreary estate developed after listening to faculty poetry readings. That led me to thinking about how would a country like ours put its people back to work...deal with broken social institutions...and reposition itself in the world if there was a global economic crisis I have a graduate degree in labor economics....and many years working in human resources management....so I might think too much about such challenges.

Isn't ASHWOOD the first book of a trilogy?

*Yes...*Ashwood* introduces readers to the first wave of a new U.S. economy...the second and third book will follow the families of *Ashwood*.*

When will the next book appear?

If all goes well...September 2011.

Did ASHWOOD come to life in what might be termed a “channeled” state?

**Minnesota Cold* was written that way—the story of Sally Dodge flowed through short stories and vignettes over a few years and I wrote until it was through. *Ashwood* had to move from concept to completed manuscript in eighteen months to meet my publisher's schedule so I actually did a rough outline of the book and wrote to deadlines.*

ASHWOOD is set in the aftermath of a global financial crisis resulting in massive unemployment and social upheaval, are current conditions the basis for this projection into a potential future?

I began the book in January 2008. Because I have studied economics at a graduate level, I've long dreaded what might happen in an economy which is 75% consumer-driven. How does an economy function when ordinary people can no

longer afford to purchase stuff because their incomes have been so stunted by companies struggling to meet an expected level of return to stock owners. The first serious draft of this book was completed before the stock market dipped into the 6,000 range in 2009.

Did you base Anne Hartford, through whose eyes the story unfolds, on anyone you know?

Not really. Our family includes many teachers...a few former farmers...a lot of young people. But no one person really jumps out.

You have skillfully woven historic events into this novel, is ASHWOOD intended to warn readers about the fragile nature of democracy and the need for critical thinking?

Yes...it is most difficult to know how to be a fully responsible citizen in today's democratic societies. It is easy to feel big money and big lobbies plus big government belittles what an individual can influence. But...that's dangerous thinking.

ASHWOOD would make a spellbinding motion picture, have you thought about that?

I would like it be a motion picture...because I believe we need to engage in real conversations about our country and our world. I visited with book clubs, which chose Minnesota Cold and found the discussion lively and meaningful....beyond the "I liked this book because..." point and more to the heart of "What if we were forced to deal with a seriously different way of life." People weren't always comfortable with thinking about the future except in abstract ways.

What would you like to achieve with ASHWOOD?

Professionally I'd like to gain recognition outside the Midwest. Personally I'm hoping to expand the readership of speculative fiction. People like to be intellectually challenged...as well as entertained.

What are your goals for the future?

Complete the Ashwood trilogy...continue writing other forms of fiction as well. I would love to see one of my books turned into film. I would like to return to the college campus to teach writing.

About Cynthia Kraack:

Ms. Kraack is a graduate of Marquette University's College of Journalism, she also holds a Masters in Labor Economics and Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine. She spent many years in corporate communications, where her achievements were recognized by numerous professional organizations.

Publicist:

For review copies and interviews contact:

Annemarie Osborne

Annemarie.Osborne@gmail.com