

Q&A with Cynthia Kraack Author of *Leaving Ashwood*



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 themes in fictional futures that don't include flying whizmos or tripods feeding mutated creatures....people like Margaret Atwood, PD James, and James Howard Kunstler. Some writers deal with their past in fiction...I think I deal with my concerns about the future in my novels.

This is a unique genre of writing. What led you to it?

*“What if” questions are at the core of speculative fiction and fascinate me. You don't need sophisticated scientific experiments gone wrong to spin the world out of control. Watching news coverage of the Bosnian war in the 1990s made me wonder how urban and suburban America could survive stripping away of infrastructure. *Minnesota Cold* came from that journey.*

***Leaving Ashwood* is the third book in the trilogy. Is it hard to say goodbye to your characters?**

It is hard to say goodbye to Anne Hartford, her family and friends. Something tells me that Phoebe Regan will show up again in my writing. Just like in real life, walking away from a group of young people who are just beginning to become fully formed adults is tough.

More than once, a line appears that the vote of a shareholder is a commitment to building a better world while the vote of a citizen is an uneducated guess at what liar is the most trustworthy. Could you say a bit more about this thought?

*In 2050 large multinational corporations really dominate world policy and action. Physical war is obsolete because it is bad for business...for shareholders. The line is spin from a corporate point of view. The vote of a shareholder in *Leaving Ashwood* is no different than the vote of a shareholder today that is about preserving and growing individual wealth, not about improving the world.*

Tell me more about the life of a writer. Do you live to write or write to live?

Would “Yes” be a fair answer? Leaving Ashwood is my fourth published book. Like a marathon runner, I have to write most days or I find myself pacing and kind of edgy. I’ve not always written books, but I have always been a writer—a journalist, corporate communications, interactive game design, and freelancer.

You split your time between Minnesota and Door County. What kind of a role does place play in your writing?

I am a Midwesterner and have placed my writing in the Midwest so my energy can go into the people and story. My early years were spent in a small farming town and I worked for an agribusiness and that comes into my work more than I expected. I believe place impacts people. Families in Door County don’t spend their weekends in shopping malls and restaurants. Kids in big cities aren’t usually related in some way to most of the other kids in their classroom.

Are you working on any other books right now?

I am marketing a novel about a family dealing with the gradual loss of its matriarch and finishing a novel set in rural Wisconsin about a middle-age daughter returning home during a time of significant change. In a change of pace, I am also working on a memoir about growing up in a small town in my great-grandmother’s house.

Cynthia Kraack is the author of the Ashwood trilogy released by North Star Press of St. Cloud Minnesota which includes *Ashwood* (2010), *Harvesting Ashwood: Minnesota 2037* (2012) and *Leaving Ashwood* (2014). Her first novel, *Minnesota Cold*, won the 2009 Northeastern Minnesota Book Award for Fiction and *Harvesting Ashwood* was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award. She is a graduate of Marquette University’s College of Journalism and holds a Master’s in Labor Economics and Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota as well as a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine. She has spent years in corporate management, consulting and freelance writing.

Author available for interview.

Publicity contact: Jana Robbins, 651-269-4381, robbinsjana@mac.com