

## Interview for “The Praetorian File” by Allan McLeod

*Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar is delighted to be joined by Allan McLeod, author of the newly published book “The Praetorian File: A Paige Harrington Mystery.”*

*McLeod was born and raised in a collection of small rural villages in Southern and Central Alberta. At the mostly four-room schools he attended, he was fortunate to encounter a string of dedicated teachers who fostered a love for reading and writing the English language, skills he took with him through his career in finance and then into writing full time. At age eighteen, he left home and went to work as a junior clerk in the local bank. Good luck and timing followed and he ended up having a rewarding and challenging banking career that took him to Calgary, Montreal, and New York. He’s lived in New York City since 1970. Subsequent to leaving the banking business in 1982, he started three small companies, one in Florida, and two in New York City. He has since sold those businesses. McLeod began writing his first novel in 1995 and has been writing full-time since 2000.*

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Allan. I understand “The Praetorian File” is the second Paige Harrington Mystery. Is it a sequel to the first book, or can it be read on its own?

Allan: First, let me say it is a pleasure to be here. Now, as to “The Praetorian File,” it is an entirely new mystery for Paige, and while I refer to characters and events from the first book, this story clearly stands on its own. To quote one reviewer: “You can definitely read it by itself and understand the characters and what is going on.”

Tyler: Tell us a little bit about Paige Harrington and what makes her intriguing as a murder mystery solver?

Allan: When I created Paige, I wanted a smart, gutsy woman who never shied from a challenge. I didn’t want a tough, tomboy type, however, so I made her a product of privilege, the silver-spoon daughter, if you will, of a powerful and respected Superior Court judge and his much envied old-money wife, who together sit at the pinnacle of high society. I wanted glamour, so I made her tall, gave her smashing good looks, and put her into a modeling career. I wanted physical talent, so I made her an accomplished ballerina, Olympic swimmer, and competitive decathlete. I wanted her to roam the world from a New York City base, so following her two-year modeling career, I made her an international freelance journalist with a degree in journalism from Columbia University, and put her into an apartment in the grand and historically significant Ansonia Hotel on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. I wanted her to be the woman women want to be, and the woman in whose company men want to be.

Tyler: Thanks, Allan. Paige sounds quite amazing. So what kind of trouble does Paige find herself involved with in “The Praetorian File”?

Allan: Early in the story, a young woman who fears for her life contacts Paige, and offers information that will destroy a number of powerful people. Paige soon realizes the same people who want to kill the young woman are now coming after her. She doesn’t know who these people are, but soon discovers they wield enormous power, and will stop at nothing to ensure they and their operations are shielded from the public view.

Tyler: How did you come up with the idea for the Praetorian group? Would you say they fall into the category of conspiracy theories where there are evil groups or people manipulating the government or other organizations behind the scenes?

Allan: Praetorian is an amalgam of hubris, corrupt power, and greed. There are Praetorians in some form or another at the pinnacles of government and industry, and they do not necessarily wear a conspiracy cloak. The name, of course, comes from the Praetorian Guard that for six hundred years, nobly served Roman emperors, finally dissolving when it overstepped its bounds. I liked the parallels that I saw between historical Praetorians and modern day cabalists in the way they abuse power and trust.

Tyler: Will you give us a little bit of a hint at one of the situations Paige finds herself caught in because of the Praetorians?

Allan: I don’t want to reveal anything too specific, but almost from the outset, Paige senses Praetorian is watching everything she does by having her followed, and is listening to everything she says by tapping her phones. Unknown assailants in stolen cars chase her through the streets, and thugs begin to harass her. Soon, she doesn’t know who to trust, where to turn to for help, which is exactly Praetorian’s plan.

Tyler: What do you find are the difficulties of writing mystery novels over other types of genre fiction?

Allan: Creating a good story that will entertain one’s readers is difficult in any genre. For me, the struggle of writing any good novel is finding an interesting story idea and then connecting interesting characters and events in a logical way that keeps the reader engaged throughout. All genres have an element of mystery, though in a mystery suspense novel, I believe the pace needs to be faster.

Tyler: How do you maintain that faster pace? What do you do stylistically or plot-wise?

Allan: During the editing process, anything, like meaningless dialog or minutiae that I think drags on the story’s forward movement, is chopped, and more intense scenes that place one of my characters, usually the protagonist, in greater risk or conflict, are substituted or added. When I read my own material, I don’t like to hit slow spots, which are usually the result of too much plot detail.

Tyler: Where do you get the ideas for your mystery plots?

Allan: I've frequently been asked that. Each one is different. It can be a word, a place, or a thought that gets into my brain and starts to grow into a story that needs telling. With "Death Spirits" it was Minot, ND. With "Barely Dead" it was water contamination, With "Praetorian" it was the hubris of the powerful.

Tyler: Have you been influenced by other writers or mystery shows on television or in film?

Allan: No doubt. I read extensively from all genres, but mostly mystery suspense. From time to time, I am impressed by how a mystery suspense writer moves a story along or develops her characters and how they interact, and I'm sure that makes its way into my own writing. In other genres, I study presentation of detail and the authors' masterful use of words to create atmosphere and a sense of place. For my money, Barbara Kingsolver does this better than most, as does Margaret Atwood.

Because I watch a lot of television and attend many movies, I'm sure story and character ideas creep into my consciousness, and I'm sure I draw on this knowledge just as I draw from the millions of bits of other information stored there.

No matter if it's by reading or watching television or going to the movies or getting involved in life, a writer has to keep doing things that refill the idea well, because let me tell you that after spending a year writing her guts out, the well is empty.

Tyler: Allan, I understand you were born in Canada but now live in New York City? Can I ask how you came to live in New York?

Allan: Sometimes I wonder that myself. I worked for a bank that, like all large, international banks in the world, frequently sent its employees to other countries to broaden their training. Usually, though, the ticket was round-trip; mine ended up being one-way.

Tyler: Do you think there are any difficulties or advantages with being a Canadian writer as opposed to being a writer in the United States?

Allan: I've never thought of that before, and now that I do, I believe spiritual location and not nationality is key. I know Canada and Canadians well, and incorporate a lot of that knowledge in my stories, but I also know the United States and Americans well, and feel as much at home writing as a New Yorker about things American as I would writing as a Calgarian writing about things Canadian. Paige is an international-minded Canadian living in and loving New York—surprise!

Tyler: Allan, while looking at your website, I was intrigued to see your list of favorite singers, which includes old-fashioned classic singers like Mario Lanza and Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy, all among my personal favorites. Has music had any influence on your writing? Those older singers of operettas seem a far cry from murder mysteries.

Allan: I've never met a musical I didn't like, and always wanted to sing like the greats, tenors mostly, though I can think of a few baritones whose songs continuously bounce around in my head, and dance like Fred Astaire. I can't see a direct connection to murder mystery, though I can assure

you my main characters are probably never far from breaking into song or taking a stylish turn on the dance floor.

Tyler: I also understand you are interested in electronic books. Personally, I feel we live in the most exciting age ever to be a writer because of how technology allows advantages for almost anyone to be published. What do you think is the future of the book publishing industry and why are you interested in electronic books specifically?

Allan: First, I love books, and I hope they never disappear, but I am interested in why, in this electronic age, electronic book technology has failed to advance, particularly in school and college texts where the costs of books and libraries is financially burdensome to the system. As near as I can determine, there is only one good electronic book reader on the market, and it costs about \$300. There used to be several; they've all disappeared. I wonder if the major publishing companies or book printers are to blame, and if they will end up like the music publishers: failing while trying to protect a dying technology and delivery system. Now I'm in trouble.

Tyler: I doubt it, Allan. I have equally wondered why e-books haven't caught on, and would guess it is partly because they are less expensive than paper but also less convenient. Are your books available as e-books and if so, what has been your experience with readers buying or responding to them in that format?

Allan: Ah, but e-books don't have to be less convenient. Given a thoughtfully designed 'reader' and uniform technology, they can be much more convenient: they can display exactly like a book, i.e. facing pages; they can be back-lit; they can feature changeable text size; they can be searchable; and a reader can carry many (for example, Sony says eighty, but it's really only a function of chip capacity) at the same time.

Last month I made one of my books ("Death Spirits") available in e-book format through Mobipocket: <http://www.mobipocket.com/>, an affiliated company of Amazon.com, and it's too early to know what kind of sales will be generated. Like any format, though, advertising and marketing is key, and the major publishing houses are still the only ones with sufficient resources to blitz a market effectively to drive sales to unheard of levels in the self-publishing world.

Tyler: Allan, can your readers look forward to more adventures for Paige Harrington, and if so, can you give us a little preview of what kind of trouble she might get mixed up in next?

Allan: More Paige is definitely jumping around inside my two brains: the one in my head, and the one in my computer. One, "In Her Own Blood," is about the murder of Paige's friend, Emily Parker, a New York-based bank officer, who learns that one of her bosses is lending money to the Russian Mafia, and intends to shift blame to the president of the bank. The second, not yet titled and still in its embryonic stages, involves the disappearance of Prudence Jones, a Washington, D.C. senator's aide, on the same night she telephones Paige in New York to say she was caught listening to a conversation between her boss and men she only described as powerful people.

Tyler: Well, it sounds like Paige will certainly have her hands full in the future.

Thank you so much for joining me today, Allan. Before we go, can you tell us where readers may go to get more information about your writing and to get copies of the Paige Harrington mysteries. I understand you have an interesting blog?

Allan: My personal web page: <http://wammac.web.aplus.net/> is a good place to start. There, I have links to the rest of my writing world. Many readers like my short story blog where I have a number of stories, some in audio: <http://wammac.blogspot.com/>. My books are also available around the world through on-line bookstores like Amazon, Barnes and Noble, etc., and are easily located through a title search.

Tyler: Thank you, Allan, and look out for Paige while she confronts all those criminals.