

Also by Ed Matthews

Harkers

Frontenac

Smithbury Skeleton

The Borax Boys

Sands Beach Aquarius

Bench Talk

A Novel

BOOK PREVIEW

Ed Matthews



SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS
VOORHEESVILLE, NEW YORK

Bench Talk

Published by
Square Circle Press LLC
www.squarecirclepress.com

Copyright © 2010 by Edward Matthews

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or any other information retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First paperback edition 2010.

Printed and bound in the United States of America on acid-free, durable paper.

ISBN 13: 978-0-9789066-6-5

ISBN 10: 0-9789066-6-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010930908

Publisher's Acknowledgments

The cover design is by Conor Matthews and Richard Vang (Square Circle Press), using the Corel suite of graphics software. The text of this book was created and formatted by Square Circle Press using OpenOffice.org, a free suite of office software (www.openoffice.org). The title and chapter headings are set in Windsor BT, the text is set in Garamond.

Author's Acknowledgments

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Chapter 1

My name is Dave Foster and I claim Portland, Maine as my hometown. After high school I attended Potham College here in town before the Korean War interrupted my education. After my service time I returned to complete my undergraduate studies and then went off to the University of North Carolina to study and coach as a football graduate assistant.

Early in my first semester I met my future wife, Jane Rice. We got to really know each other while taking an advanced literature course, and by the end of our first academic year we ended our dream courtship by marrying in the university chapel.

After graduation we headed to Portland where I claimed my first adult job as an assistant football coach at my old school, Potham College. The next five years brought good fortune and change to our lifestyle. Jane was pregnant with our second child when we bought a comfortable house in South Portland that overlooked Casco Bay. Our run of good luck continued when I was named head coach at Potham. From that time on, our charmed marriage seemed too good to be true, but it was. Jane had gone from teaching English at Portland Central to a stay-at-home mom when Donnie, our second child was born. When Peggy, our youngest, reached middle school, Jane picked up her teaching career and continued in the classroom until retiring at the age of sixty-two, while I gave up work at sixty-seven. My coaching had been a satisfying success, once winning the Division III National Championship.

Retired life together was the very definition of happiness, which we savored every minute of the day.

This morning was more of the same but there seemed a different force around I couldn't account for. Being a creature of habit caused my routine to seldom change. I savored the solitude of silent moments before greeting a new day on my front porch.

The magic of the moment was to watch the sky take on hints of color, grudgingly give way to morning light, and finally blossom into a full-blown sunrise. After reading the *Cape Cod Times* while washing down several cups of coffee, the time was right to cross the street and claim my favorite bench that overlooked the majestic sight of Falmouth Heights and Vineyard Sound.

In a reflective mood after settling down, my thoughts drifted off to another time. I asked myself where my life would have headed if I hadn't retired from coaching. My days would probably have been full of what I did best, and not spent looking back to what-if situations of the past. But, every time I sit on my front porch, I'm reminded of the day my wife and I took possession of the house as our summer retreat. That precious moment represented a perfect time in our early marriage. It is often said that the only things you remember about the past are the good times. Well, don't believe everything you hear. I exhaled while trying to gather my senses.

Jane was the centerpiece of my existence until a massive heart attack claimed her life while we were eating lunch at a downtown restaurant. Jane was only sixty-three when she left me—far too young for such a vibrant woman.

Her passing left me in an unfamiliar veil of loneliness that is still with me. The last three years of my seventy-year old life have been in one gigantic holding pattern, all the time hoping tomorrow will be better than today, but continually entertaining doubts about that happening.

Nervous energy swept over me that couldn't be accounted for. My effort to shuffle through last night's dream and understand it failed, leaving me without a clue.

I felt the heat settling over the beach while staring at a near empty beach. The setting was right to start a new novel written by my favorite author, Justin Astor. His writing style captivated me mainly because his damn-the-torpedoes, straight-ahead stories centered on the sea with large doses of the military thrown in to attract readers to the evil and havoc he conjured up. Astor also wrote about Jack O'Brennan, a retired Bridgeton, Virginia detective who specialized in unsolved murders.

The saltwater smell reminded me that reading was the natural thing to do when enjoying the beach. A feeling of serenity swept

over me as I gazed ahead, drinking in the scene that played out in front of me. Looking out across the placid waters of Vineyard Sound, I marveled at the clearly defined outline of Martha's Vineyard, the renowned playground of the wealthy, and destination of day-trippers from the Massachusetts mainland.

Yesterday the blue water displayed its unruly side of a mean sea with five-foot waves thumping against the beach. It was an untidy scene, to say the least, although today was different. Calm waters welcomed a handful of sailboats drifting across the relatively smooth surface. The Island Queen, a majestic ferry carrying day-trippers on its forty-minute trip to the Vineyard, caught my eye. Flags waving in the gentle breeze in front of seaside houses identified the occupants' native nationalities, favorite colleges, or organizations, a mishmash of personal preferences. Multi-colored beach umbrellas sheltering sun worshipers from cancer causing ultra-violet rays spotted the beach.

Gazing at water that sparkled under the sun's amber rays, I realized a warm day verging on torrid was in store, but days like this should be taken one at a time and enjoyed for the joy they bring. Falmouth Heights is what an ocean side retreat should be. To me, it means being in the company of family and friends in a relaxed retreat from the daily grind of life. Over-eating, getting sunburned, searching for shells and sea glass, fishing from the beach at night, and drinking a cold beer—what more could a man ask for?

A fine day to start a new adventure, I thought. Instead of a Jack O'Brennan mystery, I chose Justin Astor's latest novel, *Sunken Iceberg*. After starting my new read, I occasionally interrupted my concentration to survey the foot traffic that traveled the walk in front of me.

Moments after returning to my novel, I noticed a solidly built man dip his head in a nod as he effortlessly moved along in a smooth gait, all the while keeping his eyes on the walk as if looking for a crack that might upend him. Placing him around my age, I raised my hand in greeting and then returned to my reading. Half-an-hour later he returned along the sidewalk, stopping to silently stand in front of me. Even though deeply entrenched in Astor's novel, I sensed his presence. The stranger nervously rubbed his mouth before breaking the silence. He coughed and

then asked, "Do you mind if I sit down?" The question was posed with the rich mellow tone of a Virginia accent.

I tried to ignore the interruption, but my unguarded solitude seemed shattered as I made a welcoming hand gesture, accompanying a chin nod.

"Not, at all." I think my smile made the newcomer feel welcome.

It was a defining moment in my life when our diverse histories came together on that bench; although at the time I didn't realize how his presence would dramatically redirect my life.

An awkward silence settled over the bench for several minutes before the new arrival moved to a more comfortable position. Intuition prompted me to introduce myself to the other man.

"By the way, my name is Dave Foster, and I'm from Portland, Maine." I extended my hand to the stranger whose handshake was brief but solid.

"It's good to meet you. I'm Charlie Jamison and Bridgeton, Virginia is where I'm from," he said with a soft-edged voice. He ran a hand over his gray brush-cut, his attention focused on the distant Vineyard nestled comfortably in the sound.

I was dazzled by the striking beauty of the area and hoped Jamison would leave as soon as possible. Reading was better than listening to some stranger who would probably make incessant banter of little interest to me.

At the same time a well-appointed woman near my age walked by, prompting me to consider what she might look like before stepping into her stylish athletic gear.

"Did you get a load of that?" he asked.

"Indeed I did," I replied. At least he liked what he saw, thus removing any doubt in my mind about how he viewed the opposite sex.

We sat quietly watching the activity that swirled around us until he spoke, a smile crossing his face.

"I feel like I can reach out and touch the Vineyard." After that, time passed as we sat in silence. Finally, Charlie picked up where he left off. "This whole area has a quality hard to describe. One can hardly look away from a setting like this," he said with

conviction, heartily exhaling. “This breathtaking view kind of grows on you.”

After hearing Charlie carry on about the scene I knew so well, my mind left his one-way conversation to retreat into my own thoughts, like a tortoise pulling into his shell. I could hear his words outside my head, but they had no meaning until his next sentence snapped me back to the present.

“Life at times is like running into a brick wall, and whatever is left is waiting to go wrong.”

From time to time I had experienced moments of doom and gloom; his thoughts were not words I cared to hear on such a grand morning. I felt the need to redirect the conversation, so I asked: “Does your wife visit the beach?”

Jamison stiffened, a dark shadow settling on his face. An excruciating quiet passed before he slowly turned to face me. “Betty used to love the beach, but unfortunately she passed away two years ago.”

I didn’t know what to say, but I knew instinctively he was suffering. A number of questions flashed through my mind, however, it felt prudent to hold back and remain silent. I sensed his need for conversation emanated from deep grief that apparently consumed him. Strangely, I liked the manner in which he managed his distress. I couldn’t help myself and asked: “Do you want to talk about it?”

By some unknown coincidence, two tired old men saddened by the loss of their wives found themselves living with questions they couldn’t answer.

“Thank you for understanding. Times have been difficult for me of late, and perhaps you’re the one I need to talk to. That will have to happen on another occasion, maybe tomorrow,” he nodded in resignation.

I felt caught off guard by Charlie’s startling revelation. He rose, reached for my hand, and then walked away toward the side street opposite the bench. He departed not with the vibrant stride he earlier displayed, but rather the slowed down pace of an emotionally distressed man. His departure left me with an empty feeling.

After Charlie left, I sat thinking about my new acquaintance's emotional state, understanding his sorrow, but nevertheless feeling helpless. Words alone couldn't aid him at this stage of his life.

The sun's scalding rays proved too much, forcing me to cross the street and settle on my front porch. Only a stone's throw from the beach, it proved much needed relief from the dog days of August. Charlie's mention of losing his wife began to register while I idly gazed at the water. Soon my memory took over, bringing my deceased wife's face into focus.

About the Author

Ed Matthews lives with his wife, Carol, in upstate New York's Greater Rochester area. A graduate of Alfred University, he was employed as a history teacher and football coach at Caledonia-Mumford Central School for thirty-two years. He is a veteran of the Korean War and served two terms as mayor of the Village of Caledonia. Ed is the father of four grown children and nine grandchildren. *Bench Talk* is his sixth published effort.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS



Cornflower's Ghost

An Historical Mystery

Thomas Pullyblank

ISBN-13: 978-0-9789066-5-8

ISBN-10: 0-9789066-5-9

LCCN: 2009934094

SCP Product #: SCP-0016

Retail Price: \$19.95

Physical: 232 pages; softcover

“... a vastly entertaining novel ... that pulls you in and keeps you thinking long after you’ve turned the last page.”

Brian Carso Jr., Misericordia University

“... a vivid reminder that the past is always with us, and it profoundly affects how we live in the present and how we shape the future.”

Paul D’Ambrosio, New York State Historical Association

Thomas Pullyblank has skillfully woven a tapestry of historical mystery and modern-day campus politics into a uniquely American story that addresses the larger question of how our past should or should not be employed to address contemporary issues. Based upon two hundred years of upstate New York history, **Cornflower’s Ghost** translates meticulous research into believable historical characters and events. As with the lessons of history, each of the contemporary characters strives not just to solve a historical puzzle, but rather to gain some degree of self-understanding.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.SQUARECIRCLEPRESS.COM