

## Alumni Connection



### **Jessie Chandler (RCHS '86)**

*Jessie Chandler is a published author and a 1986 graduate of Robbinsdale Cooper High School.*

Jessie Chandler graduated from Cooper High School in 1986. She has pursued her writing career since the age of 12, when she tried her hand at writing a western. That attempt failed, but she persevered and has recently signed a three book contract with Midnight Ink in Woodbury, Minnesota.

The first book in the series was just released and is called Bingo Barge Murder. In Chandler's words, the plot "is kind of like Janet Evanovich meets Clive Cussler ... it's funny and you better laugh and read fast because there's a figurative ticking time bomb the main characters have to deal with. There's a truckload of stolen nuts, two bumbling mafiosos, a junkyard dog named Dawg, and my poor coffee shop owner who's desperately trying to prove her best friend innocent of murder right in the middle of chaos."

We caught up with Chandler via e-mail:

### **When did it first hit you?? ... *I want to be a writer!***

My mom was a teacher and librarian with District 281 for 34 years, spending most of her time at Northport Elementary. I was lucky enough to be surrounded by books practically from the moment I was born. Mom kept me steeped in Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Encyclopedia Brown, The Three Investigators, and numerous other authors as I grew up. I When I was about twelve I had read a ton of Louis L'Amour, and decided I wanted to write a western. I started it, and was rather horrified at how horrifying that attempt was. I relegated it to the circular file posthaste. But after that, I always told people I wanted to write a book, but never really expected to actually do it. It wasn't until 2003 that I was hit with the notion to take my writing desires to the next level. I'd read a series of books, and had fallen in love with the characters. They'd become my friends. I was crushed when the series ended. I moped around the internet and stumbled across the website [NaNoWriMo.org](http://NaNoWriMo.org). It's short for National Novel Writing Month, where the goal is to write a 50,000 word novel in one month.

So I figured if there was a concrete timeline of just 30 days, I might be able to pull it off. I plotted and planned the month before, and November 1st, started NaNo. November 30th rolled around, and lo and behold, I'd written 50,000 words of a manuscript. That's when it hit me for real that I truly did want to be a writer, because it was FUN.

**You graduated from Cooper High School in 1986...**

### **Tell us about a few of your most memorable times in school?**

Oh boy. There were a lot of memorable moments in the halls of Cooper. The Worm and its demise were really memorable. I remember running onto the field after a football game with hordes of other students and dropping to our backs on the ground, wiggling our hands and feet in the air in defiance of the mandate to cease and desist.

Senor LaBudd's Spanish class...and all the crazy fun we got into. The students in my Spanish class were pranksters and you never knew what was going to happen next.

John Grigelko "G" (I have no idea how to spell his last name) was a track coach my sophomore year, and he made a huge impact. He was a fantastic coach who challenged, supported and pushed each member of the weight team (those who threw the shot put and discus) to do their best.

Learning to slalom ski and competing on the alpine ski team. What a blast that was.

Becoming co-captain of the ski team and tri-captain of the track team my senior year. Those were both amazing experiences.

### **Were there any teachers who influenced your career as a writer?**

Vern Hollister (again, not sure of spelling) taught Creative Writing, and that was really my first foray into the written word that wasn't part of a required school paper. That was an awesome class. We explored poetry, freestyle writing, and I even attempted a screenplay based on Sr. LaBudd and my Spanish calls folks. I can't remember exactly what it was about it, but I do recall it involved pepperoni pizza.

### **Are any of your characters based on people you knew during your school career?**

Not so much from school, but from various jobs I've held throughout the years. I've taken some crazy situations as well as some of the more interesting folks I've come across and mixed them up into some goofy characters.

### **How do you come up with the ideas for your books?**

Brainstorming. Lots and lots of brainstorming with writing pals. And the newspaper. Bingo Barge Murder started from an article I read about stolen almonds in California. These stolen truckloads of nuts netted some serious ka-ching. It was just too unreal. Nuts? Really?

My third book, tentatively called Pickle in the Middle Murder, was just finished a couple of weeks ago. It started with a dead body in the privy at the Renaissance Festival. The idea for that came from my cousin who said I should write a story about a dead guy in a porta-potty.

I keep my eyes and ears peeled at all times. You just never know when you might see something that lights the match, or hear something that leads into some fantastic plot ideas.

**In your book *Bingo Barge Murder*, who do you see playing the lead characters should it be made into a movie?**

Oh what a fun question!

Shay O'Hanlon-Hillary Swank because she's a cutie and has the potential to be a great Shay

JT Bordeaux-Sandra Bullock because she's a mix of serious and hilarious

Nick "Coop" Cooper-Shaggy from Scooby Doo-not much more to say there

Edwina "Eddy" Quartermaine-Loretta Devine-just think Madea's Big Happy Family and I think you'd agree.

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