

Creative TYPES

WORDS // ANNA CHISHOLM

TOM BELL
author



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TOM Bell called Townsville home for 15 years, where he trained and worked as a registered nurse before moving to Melbourne and publishing his first book *Homecountry*, under the name TW Lawless.

It's the North Queensland connection and the vibrant Melbourne setting – as well as the humorous hard-drinking journalist character Peter Clancy, who returns to his hometown to settle his mother's estate and discovers some sinister secrets – that make the book a worthwhile read.

The 54-year-old grew up on a cattle station, just outside Charters Towers and was schooled at Mount Carmel College, now Columba Catholic College, before doing a Bachelor of Arts at Central Queensland University, where he studied journalism and media studies,

before moving on to social welfare and history-based subjects.

It was while working as a wardman at Charters Towers Hospital that his social justice instinct kicked into gear and the idea of travelling the world through patient care and helping the sick seemed appealing, so he enrolled in a health diploma at James Cook University.

"I worked as a nurse for about 27 years, working at Townsville Hospital for about seven or eight years, Blue Nurses, and a dementia unit at Beechworth, northeast Victoria. I've done a lot of community work with nursing. You do meet lots of interesting people. You remember things and their quirks, and you think 'I could use that in a book'," he says. "I wanted to be a journalist myself, and work for *Rolling Stone Magazine* and travel the world with rock bands. I always

wanted to be a writer but life gets in the way. It was always at the back of my mind."

That changed after meeting his now wife Kay Bell, author of *The Lornesleigh Legacy*, about Australia's convict past, the gold rush years, and the 1930s depression.

Her book features Lornesleigh Station, the cattle property where Tom was raised, also the inspiration behind the North Queensland setting in *Homecountry*, when Peter returns to his fictitious hometown of Clarkes Flat.

"I have a cousin in Townsville, nephews and nieces in Charters Towers. People who read the book living in North Queensland will recognise the places and relate to the story very much, I feel," he says.

When character Peter arrives in Townsville, he refers to it as the "thong capital of Australia" and

buys a six-pack from a seedy pub on The Strand.

"There are no real parallels between Peter and myself. Maybe he's an alter ego of mine. I had a lot of fun with him. I kept thinking about whom I'd like to have play him. He's like a young David Wenham. He's a fairly handsome kind of guy," he says.

"He's flawed but likable. He always gets the job done and has a good social justice agenda. He will go out of his way to solve the story and get it out there. He may bend the rules a little but he's a hard worker. In the following book, he's a crime investigator."

Bell is about 80,000 into his second book, *Forty Devils*, based on the same character Peter Clancy, set in Melbourne's underworld in the late 1980s, with all the twists and turns you'd expect, and a St Kilda drag queen.

"*Homecountry* started as a screenplay a couple of years ago

and I decided to write a book. It sounded better. The hardest part is knowing what your style is and feeling comfortable writing. I tried to get mine by reading books," he says.

"The name TW Lawless, was something I created.

"Lawless is my middle name. It's a family tradition.

"It was my great-grandmother's maiden name and it's been passed on as a middle name.

"I didn't like it as a kid but I like it now."

At his Box Hill home, he and Kay share ideas and edit one another's work from separate work stations.

"We don't like being disturbed too much. You do feel detached from the world."

Homecountry is available online at Amazon, QBD the Bookshop, Mary Ryan's Books, Music and Coffee, and from www.twlawless.com.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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11TH APRIL 7PM, 12TH APRIL 11AM

Full Throttle Theatre and Spoon Lickers present

SPOON LICKERS CONCERT FOR KIDS

The History of Australia - Celebrating cultural diversity

7pm Cost \$5 www.jaziqueartiqueuniquecreations.com

12TH APRIL

OPEN MIC NIGHT

Presented by Full Throttle Theatre and TMPAS

5pm - FREE. Name on the board by 6:30 BBQ at 8:30

13TH APRIL

Full Throttle Theatre and Artgaze Magazine presents

SUNSET BOULEVARD 6:30pm preshow talk

7pm Movie starts. See artgazemagazine.com or

Contact Artgaze Lab Inc : 0416 980 323

April 24th – May 5th

Full Throttle Theatre presents

On Golden Pond
by Ernest Thompson

Tickets: \$35 Regular, \$30 Members,
\$25 Concession, \$15 Students

For more information, or to book tickets & check event details:

Ph: 4721 5433

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