

*Charles and Caroline Todd comprise the mother-son writing team of the popular Ian Rutledge series. Since the series began their books have won Barry and Dilys awards, received NYT Notable Book mentions, and been nominated for Edgar, Anthony, and Ellis Peters awards. Their next book, A LONG SHADOW, hit the shelves in January, 2006.*

Judy Clemens: Okay, let's get to the important stuff first. How, exactly, does this "writing as a team" stuff work, and just how intense are the fights you get into over what's going to happen? Unless, of course, it's all a big secret and you'll have to kill us if you tell us.

Caroline: Fights? We never fight – never. We just scream a lot and slam things. Ever watched two silverback gorillas square off? Much the same. And to that add a Celtic grandmother/great-grandmother, who got quietest when she was maddest.

Charles: I always recognize the timber of her voice when she says, *Charles*, in a certain way. And she knows when I call her Caroline instead of Mom, it's time to listen.

JC: So what made you risk the arguments? What made you say, "Hey, let's do this!?" It's obviously worked well, with all the praise you and your books have received.

Caroline: Charles thought I was joking when I first suggested the idea. "Yeah, right," he said, but he'd complained about not having anything interesting to do in hotel rooms when traveling, and I knew he was great at researching anything, so it was a clever move to harness all that free time. Women always have ulterior motives.

Charles: As a southern gentleman I never argue with Caroline. It never works anyway! But I had an ulterior motive too, to see if we could do it.

JC: For a while your partnership was a big secret. What made the change to "coming out" as a mother-son team, and how big of a relief was that?

Caroline: It was a great relief. Shortly before we'd started all this, I'd been diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat. That was just as the Gulf War started, and I became an expert on it, watching CNN all hours of the day and night while we tried to figure out what caused the condition. Then it was a search for a cure that didn't aggravate my allergies. That took a while, and I really couldn't add the pressure and stress of a tour until we were sure the problem was under control. I don't often talk about any of this, but it was a scary time, and when I was cleared for action, it was a wonderful feeling. For all I knew it could have been a permanent exclusion, and thank God we'd gone with the shortest name for the cover. I could have stayed in the shadows if necessary. I think this is why I really enjoy meeting fans and going to conventions and to the Edgars. I came close to missing all that.

Charles: It was stressful for me, carrying the banner, so to speak, and worrying about Caroline. It's been more fun now that we share, and I love giving her a hard time on a panel. We even threw candy at each other once.

Caroline: That was because he had all the milk chocolate and wouldn't split it up fairly.

JC: You've said before that your travels to Europe became the heart of your Ian Rutledge series. How do travels work now? Do you still get to England? Do you do your research traveling together?

Caroline: I love to travel, any excuse will do. I'd been to the battlefields in France, I'd seen those fields of white crosses out in the middle of nowhere, lonely and yet so green and carefully tended. I think that stuck, as emotional experiences often do. Charles and I had traveled all over England as well, and we still go together on research trips – it is important to see and react to the settings both individually and together. Charles tends to get more out of pubs and chance encounters. I tend to talk to rectors and policemen and women in the shops. Market day is a well of ideas and we make good use of our few minutes at each stall. It's a rare thing to see the world in the same light, so we both bring different perspectives to the table when we write.

Charles: Man, do I ever have her conned about the pub crawl! But travel is the key to getting it right. My grandfather passed on the travel lust, and both of us will take a trip anywhere, any time. Although Caroline has been to places I'd shudder to go and eaten things I don't even want to think about. I'd rather be on the sea, and I can say with great pride that she gets seasick and I don't.

JC: How about book tours? Do you enjoy touring together, or do you do most of your events as individuals?

Caroline: We do many events individually because it makes sense to get to more places per dollar invested. We've spent a young fortune on touring and conventions, but that's the way you meet your fans and your fellow writers.

Charles: We're fans too, don't forget. I love meeting people and introducing new readers to the series. I wish we could do a lot more, but you have to stay home and write sometimes. Tours and conventions take a lot out of you, but it is worth it.

JC: Caroline, your educational background is in international relations. How has that played into your writing career?

Caroline: I have an undergraduate degree in history and English lit, and a master's in international relations. People always tell you to "write what you know," and I took that in the broadest sense. If you look at World War I historically, you see how it has affected the entire twentieth century – and is still affecting the problems in the Middle East. That has given me a fresh viewpoint of the period, rather than looking at it as nearly a hundred years in the past.

JC: Charles, your background is in business, mostly in roles where you go in to help places in trouble. They're not glad to see you, since it means they've hit bottom. You've said this helps you to see from Rutledge's point of view?

Charles: I was a trouble shooter for a corporation and yes, no one was pleased to see me arrive. That said, there are always great people who know changes are needed. In our series there are characters who want to see the "Right Thing Done." I learned some of the skills Rutledge has employed: To understand the people involved and the situation as a whole.

Caroline: I'll add to that that his knowledge of business has been a terrific asset in running the business part of writing.

JC: A LONG SHADOW, set to hit the shelves this month (January, 2006) is your eighth book in the Rutledge series. How is Rutledge changing in your minds? Is he becoming the person you thought he'd be, or has he grown in ways you haven't anticipated?

Caroline: Like most people, Rutledge doubts himself sometimes, and it comes out of scenes that we never expected to take such a turn. It's as if he is becoming more human with every book, and you're watching honest reactions, not what you thought he might do. He hasn't gotten over Jean either. And yet the warmth and domesticity that Elizabeth Fraser created in that kitchen in Urskdale (A COLD TREACHERY) touched him, and he thought he'd found peace. Was it a fantasy – or love? I don't think he knows as the book ends. A LONG SHADOW may help him decide. What we notice most is that he's doing what many people with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome try to do – find the courage to live with Hamish – and yet he's still unable to forgive himself. And so Hamish turns on him at times almost with bitter cruelty, and it leaves new scars. In A LONG SHADOW, Hamish is as much at risk as Rutledge is, because if Rutledge dies, so will he. They're uneasy allies while Rutledge is stalked. Each book becomes a voyage of fresh discoveries.

Charles: If a character has his/her own reality, then they tend to behave outside the framework of your plan. And when Rutledge or one of the other characters shows a streak of independence, it means they're on the mark of human experience, not author instruction. That's why we never know how a book is going to end, or where, because it can't be scripted, it has to come out of human nature. Rutledge and Hamish are finding new ground between them with each novel, and yet the antagonism there – Rutledge's guilt and Hamish's death – continues to break out and startle Rutledge. He can't let down his guard.

JC: In the June-September, 2005, issue of The Strand Magazine you published a short story in which Hamish is still alive during the war. How did that feel to write him in such a different way? Will you explore that time again, do you think?

Caroline: We had wondered how these two men from different backgrounds might have worked together in life, and the short story is the perfect place to explore that. “The Lost Boy” is our favorite of the two we’ve done where Hamish was alive, and I expect there will be more. Hamish was a Highlander with a narrow experience of the world, but he had that down-to-earth common sense that ordinary people often possess. The two men might never have met in peacetime, but in the trenches they shared a bond: The need to keep as many of their young soldiers alive as they could in awful circumstances. A bond of brothers that has nothing to do with rank or station or place of birth.

Charles: One of the things you have to remember about war – or any disaster – is that it bring people close in a time of great stress and terror and courage. And we could see in the short story why these two men relied so heavily on each other and why Rutledge felt that Hamish’s death was such an unspeakable betrayal.

JC: In 2003 you published *THE MURDER STONE*, a stand-alone. How did that come about, and what did that do for you? Was it refreshing to write about someone other than Rutledge? A woman in that same time period?

Caroline: When Kate Miciak asked us to write a novel about the home front, we jumped at the chance. For one thing, women shouldered so much of the war’s horror, and they did it without fanfare – there aren’t any poems about their courage and their despair. We also saw it as a chance to do something we’d already talked about – create a character in the vein of Daphne du Maurier, whose women are always fascinating. Would we do another stand-alone? Possibly. Was it hard to step away from Rutledge – then come back to him? Unbelievably! But our payback was the number of readers who really cared about Francesca and wanted her to return.

Charles: No matter where I go, someone always talks about Francesca and *THE MURDER STONE*. I think women empathized with her very strongly. Many have told me that they’ve been faced with decisions where their strength had to carry the burden for others. I think it touched a common nerve.

JC: Are there any more stand-alones in your thoughts at this point? Other series?

Caroline: Charles keeps talking about a novel he wants to write. I have a few ideas myself. Right now, Rutledge is our main interest, but writers are a strange bunch, their minds play with all kinds of neat ideas, and then next thing you know...

Charles: Whether we’d do one alone or together has been discussed too.

JC: Charles, you’re especially interested in all things nautical. Why is Rutledge an army man instead of serving in the navy?

Charles: I love the sea and the tradition of seafaring in my family. The harshest mental devastation took place in the trenches. Men huddled in the stinking mud for months, suffering horribly and never knowing which assault would be their last. The execution of

Hamish would never take place like that in the Royal Navy. It would have been done in cold blood back at headquarters, with the blame spread among a number of people, not just one. But don't discount what the Navy did then and in WWII. They deserve their own accolades. Think about HMS Hood.

JC: Caroline, you've been such a supportive mentor for me, from before my first book was even published, up through this very day. I know you've done that for other authors, as well. Did someone serve in that role for you? What rewards do you receive by being such a positive and helpful force to new authors?

Caroline: People have been very kind to us. Ruth Cavin, to name only one. Because she believed in us from the very beginning. And there's never a satisfactory payback for kindness, except to pass it along to others. There are so many talented writers out there, and I think there should be a chance for all of them. (Besides, I'm selfish – success for someone else means more great books for me to enjoy. ) It isn't a matter of rewards, just real pleasure when something good happens for someone.

JC: Charles, you have put so much time and energy into Mystery Writers of America: Board member, Chairman of the Edgars Committee, now as secretary. You must believe in the organization strongly to offer so much to it.

Charles: I have been honored to serve at the national and chapter level of MWA. Writers today face so many challenges, not only getting published but maintaining their career. I've been fortunate to serve with some great authors and really terrific people who care about giving back. Caroline and I share a desire to see an organization like MWA serve its members to the best of its ability. It's our voice and we need to keep it strong.

JC: You both offer a lot to other authors. Your new book, *A LONG SHADOW*, is dedicated to Jon and Ruth Jordan, publishers of this fine magazine. How have they affected your career?

Caroline and Charles: Ruth and Jon are so typical of people in the mystery world. They had an idea, they worked hard making it come to life, and in the process they brought a lot of new thinking to the mystery magazine. People like Lynn Kaczmarek and Chris Aldrich at Mystery News, George Easter at Deadly Pleasures, Kate Stine at Mystery Scene, and Andrew Gulli at Strand Magazine really do so much for the writer in an age when the publishers don't have the money to spread publicity around. They are knowledgeable, they are objective, and they serve a terrific need. Ruth and Jon are the most energetic and enthusiastic people you can imagine, and that brushes off on the rest of us. Being around them is just plain fun. Besides, they share our love of animals...

JC: Charles, you and I were talking at Bouchercon about how confusing it is when a new book comes out and people ask specific questions about it, but the book freshest in your mind is the one you're working on at the time. What is the project on your mind today?

Charles: I've been busy with Orientation, helping turn over MWA board tasks to new faces, and Noreen Wald and I are thinking about Symposium for Edgar Week – and Edgar Week itself. There's always the web site to keep up with, and I've been involved with South East Chapter MWA, and did I mention trying to make peace with three female cats who don't understand why I don't spend more time with them? And there's Caroline on the phone with a computer problem – and what was the question??

JC: Never mind. Now, the two most important questions I left for the end. Charles, you have a degree in the culinary arts. What is your favorite thing to prepare, and when can we have some?

Charles: I do love continental French Cuisine – my favorite dish is a chicken breast pounded flat and lined with fresh spinach, crab meat and sweet red pepper. It is rolled like a jelly roll and poached. I like to serve it sliced on a base of hand-whipped hollandaise with carved small new potatoes and asparagus. A pinot noir is a great touch. Caroline makes the desserts.

Caroline: For me, anything chocolate. Brownies, fudge, cakes, ice cream, I've done them all.

JC: And Caroline, You're a huge baseball fan. Who were you rooting for in the 2005 World Series? And it's just about SuperBowl time. How is your team faring?

Caroline: Of course the Braves should have been in the series. What can I say?? John [Caroline's husband and Charles's dad] is just grateful the Red Sox finally won in 2004. The Raiders aren't in contention this year, but I like the Steelers and the Niners, too. I'm sorry to see Favre falter, but Brady is something else when he's hot. And Vic in Atlanta. Give me a good exciting game, and I'll watch, whoever is playing.

Charles: I'm a UNC Tar Heel basketball fan and we share a long family tradition there. GO HEELS!! It's that time of year, and I love it. Actually I enjoy all the Bowl games, college as well as pro.

*Judy Clemens is the Anthony and Agatha-nominated author of the Stella Crown series. TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE, her third book, will be out this August.*