

Cynthia Riggs:

Wow. I knew Dan was going to be the right person to introduce me. He mentioned my mother. This is what my mother would always call a typical Vineyard day. We get it about a half dozen times a year. Well thank you Dan.

I'm honored to be standing here on the new old campus of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. My family has a long association with the Museum. My dad, Sydney Noise Riggs was one of the presidents of the Museum when it was called the Dukes County Historical Society. He was the founder of the *Dukes County Intelligencer*. My mother also wrote a book for the Museum called *People to Remember* and did a number of articles for the Intelligencer, so I really am honored to be here.

Now my Vineyard ancestors were all seafarers and so like them, I was a boat captain. This was what I did for my career. Piloting boats on waters far from the island. And instead of whaling I operated tour boats, charter boats, a ferry on Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River for twenty years, and I also taught sailing and did a few trans-Atlantic boat deliveries.

And then I returned to the Island in 1988 to the Cleveland House. It was built by an ancestor, James Athearn, and I'm the eighth generation to live in that house. And when I returned, the house was in pretty bad shape. My mother had been living alone there for a number of years. And we decided in order to do some of the repairs and maintenance, we decided to open a B&B. And we didn't want to change our lifestyles. My mother was a poet, and I wasn't really a writer at that point, but we thought we'd open a B&B catering it to writers and poets. And we've kind of expanded that now for poets and writers and creative people of all types, artists, dancers. We just had a visitor from Australia that's involved in the educational systems throughout the world. And this is what the bed and breakfast is all about.

My mystery writing career came kind of late in life. It was after my mother died. She was almost 99 when she died. And I was kind of at loose ends, and a bed and breakfast guest suggested I go back to school and get my MFA in writing. She had seen me writing but I was just kind of writing in a desolate way. I wasn't a serious writer. I was 68 at the time, and I didn't think going back to school was in the cards for me. But she insisted, and I applied not knowing what I was going to write. And my friend Jonathan Revere, the one we did numerous television shows with, he said 'why don't you write murder mysteries? That sounds like fun.' So that's how it started.

Now the Vineyard is an ideal setting for a mystery writer. We have these six very different towns with an assortment of interesting characters and just a constant reminder of what separates us from the real world. It's just a unique place. Now in deciding to write murder mysteries I wanted to pay tribute to my mother who was a very strong Vineyard woman as Dan mentioned, but as a 99 year old it seemed kind of improbable as a sleuth so I made her much younger at 92. I named her Victoria Trumbull, and the name comes from well Victoria is a strong regal name for a sleuth and Jonathan Revere suggested that there's an exit on the Connecticut Turnpike called Trumbull, Connecticut, so she's named Victoria Trumbull.

Now 92 is still a little bit implausible, so the way I worked it out is I have Victoria losing her driver's license after she backs into the Meal's on Wheels van, and my fictional police chief who's patterned after our real West Tisbury police chief at the time Beth Toomey, she feels so sorry for Victoria she invites her to ride with her whenever she needs a ride anywhere, so Victoria climbs into the shotgun seat and my fictional chief is now stuck with this ancient sidekick. And it works because as you know Beth was new to the Island, and my fictional chief is new to the island. And Victoria knows everybody and knows where the bodies are buried and knows who's not speaking, but most of all she's not afraid of anything. So I'm working on number fourteen in the series. My first one was published when I was seventy.

Now when I started the two-year program it was a creative writing program at a low residency program, I thought I could write one book. It seemed to me like writing a book was a monumental task kind of like writing a sweater, you'd never get it done. But one page piled up on top of another page so by the time I finished the two-year program I had four books written. And my advisor said well the first two books were unpublishable, but the third book might have some promise. So that ended up being my first book.

Now at this point fifteen of my books are in print. This includes the thirteen that St. Martin's has published, and I have my own publishing company the Cleveland House Books, and Lynn Christoffers who's out here somewhere taking photographs, she and I put together a guidebook called Victoria Trumbull's Martha's Vineyard. It's illustrated by Lynn, and I wrote the text. And we added some of my mother's poetry because we thought that would be different for a guidebook.

And the second book I've just published, I started a new series set in the Washington D.C. waterfront because I lived on a boat there for twelve years. It's called Murder on Sea Dock. And I hope it's the first in what's going to be a new series. And I'll continue the Victoria Trumbull series.

The Cleveland House seems to nurture creativity. Not just me, but everybody that comes into contact with it. The poetry group that my mother established more than fifty years ago, it's called the Cleveland House Poets, they continue to meet here bi-weekly. And according to William Waterway who's now the director of the group, it's the oldest continuously meeting poetry group in the United States.

The Vineyard is rich in numerous ways. We have a glorious landscape thanks to our glacial origin. Our already rich culture is constantly enhanced by newcomers adding their ideas and thoughts. And we most surely have the most highly educated workforce probably in the nation with PhD's who shingle, and paint, and care-take summer people's houses, and landscapers, housecleaners, and shipyard workers with advanced degrees. I used to work at the shipyard and my boss had a Masters degree in oriental religion. And with this heritage Wampanoags and whalers, artists and deaf mutes, fishermen and farmers it's really no wonder the Island has nurtured so many creative people. And it's no wonder our Island has been called the Athens of the Atlantic.

My parents would be pleased to know I was awarded the Martha's Vineyard Medal, but I'm not sure they would agree I deserve it. It belongs to all the people who have made it what it is. And I just want to thank you for selecting me as the one to represent them, and I accept this on their behalf. Thank you.