

CLA Conference / Tuesday, May 29th, 2008

Author Spotlight: Peter Abrahams

Peter Abrahams was welcomed by a standing room only audience of obvious fans who greeted him with a round of applause before he even began. Author of the popular Echo Falls mysteries, Mr. Abrahams originally wrote adult crime fiction before turning his talents to younger audiences. It all started when an editor liked a 10-year-old character in one of his stories and asked if he would write a YA series. The rest, as they say, is history! Peter found that he loved writing for this age group. The setting came to him in a flash (over fries at MacDonald's) as did the name Echo Falls, a town he located in central Connecticut. It was important to him that the setting be fictitious so he could render his place "not as a reporter, but as an imaginer." With surprising ease, his characters and plot all fell in order, making him realize that for him, writing for teens was inevitable!

In *Down the Rabbit Hole*, book one of the series, thirteen-year-old super sleuth Ingrid lives with her parents and older brother. In the wrong place at the wrong time, Ingrid gets caught up in a mystery that she must solve herself. The suspense, the author says, comes from Ingrid's everyday, real kid life and the story is all filtered through her eyes.

The story rings true, due, in no small part, to the fact that the author has four children of his own. Abrahams' daughter, Rosie, thinks she is the model for Ingrid, so feels free to make changes (boldly and in ink) to his writing, which keeps it real. The believable dialogue, true-to-life family dynamics and 8th grade details, are all splendidly authentic.

Mr. Abrahams said that his mother was a great influence. Her "laws" and guidance set the groundwork for his success.

- 1) Organization is everything.
- 2) Fiction is about reversals.
- 3) Torment your protagonist.
- 4) Push everything as far as you can without contriving.
- 5) Always advance the story.
- 6) Be original.
- 7) Be playful (later added by Peter himself).

Abrahams' advice - write every day! His goal is 1,000 words per day, but considers any day that he forwards the movement of the story to be a success. For him, useful thinking happens fast, in the shower or while driving, with the writing coming organically from the story. Initially he worked from an outline, but now with experience and confidence, Abrahams is comfortable just knowing the big picture. He lets the story flow, allowing his characters to write themselves. He writes, reads and edits one chapter at a time, fixing anything and everything that bothers him until he gets it just right. Once a chapter is complete, he prints it and he goes on to the next. At the end, he doesn't edit or review, but simply emails it to his editor.

Personable and entertaining, Mr. Abrahams assured us that more books are in the works!