

On Being Asked If I'm Related to Alice Munro

© 2007 Jennifer D. Munro

Well, will an ancestral link with that eminent author from north of the border improve my chances for publication?

If so, then, yes, we're related. Distantly. I mean, I *feel* Canadian. I'm polite. I don't own a gun. I have a thing for hockey players. Doesn't that count for something?

Shouldn't a lifetime of salespeople and registrars sticking an "e" on the end of my surname chalk up a few literary brownie points? "No *E*," "No *E*," "No *E*." That's my mantra. When ticket agents take my reservation, they won't set the Bic down, positive that I'll blurt out the correct appendage when I come to my genealogical senses. The pen point hovers, willing itself to curl around into a silent anchor that the stubborn Munro clan wants no part of. We refuse to be saddled with unnecessary baggage. Except on our derrières.

Alice and I both endure this insistence on "e" as we perch on the family branch. Sisters in suffering, we stand united in our kin's cause to spell it like it is

Over Earl Grey with lemon the other day, Alice reminded me that the Munro motto is *Dread God*, but Alice and I both dread folks who misfile our paperwork. Librarians and medical personnel think the first vowel should be "O" because of Marilyn and James. (Alice doesn't have it quite as bad; James was an American president, after all.) How can nincompoops ask, I sigh to Alice, whether we're related to Marilyn when everybody knows that Monroe's not her real name? At least when someone asks me if I'm related to Alice, they've got a few neurons firing.

I admit I was peevish that afternoon, listening to Alice gripe. Between you and me, Alice is stingy with the tea cookies, and I was a tad hypoglycemic. Sugar imbalances plague the Munros, although Alice denies this genetic trait, as well as the Munro tendency for big hips and alcoholism. She insists that these are willpower issues. Frankly, I think this conservative attitude poisons her work.

To be honest, I think that being closely related to Alice Munro is working against me. When agents read my work, they think, “This doesn’t *sound* like Alice.” They want more Alice. Alice, Alice, Alice. The association taints the hip aesthetic of my art. When I try to use the Aunt Alice connection to my advantage, she refuses to let me hang on her belletristic laurels and maintains that I must earn my own literary stripes. I badger her New York editor, but Alice insists that she’s never heard of me. Look at both our butts and tell me we don’t share DNA coding. Would it kill her to throw a poor relation some scraps? Our ancestral fathers danced in plaid skirts, for the love of Mike. Don’t I get some recompense for cross-dressing forebears? At least an encouraging, hand-scrawled line on rejection letters, tipping the hat to my bloodlines?

The reality? No one ever asks if I’m related to Alice Munro, because no one could ever confuse her creative genius or functioning metabolism with my floundering around at the bottom of our fictional gene pool. She has an oeuvre, but on a good day, all I have is chutzpah. I am a Munro who’s not even in the phone book, much less Alice’s PDA. But someday, when I knock Harry Potter off his smug perch on the bestseller list, maybe Alice’ll give me a ring to introduce herself and congratulate me. We’ll small talk that Munro really is the most logical spelling, just like it’s pronounced, no fuss or muss, so why so much confusion? We’re practical gals, Alice and I. Then she’ll confess that Terry Gross asked her if we’re related. Alice tells her, “I’m

freezing my bony tush off up here in the Great White North, and if it'd help push through the American paperwork for my Florida condo, then, yes, we're related—close knit, in fact.”

Alice neglects to remind Terry that she married into the Munro clan decades ago. She must have some fondness for the patronym, because she kept the name when she ditched the Munro husband (maybe he's a lush like the rest of us). But despite her lack of true Munro chromosomes, hey, I'll do what I can for Alice. That which we call a Munro by any other spelling is not as sweet as the knowledge that our fame will deliver the sensible spelling of Munro into the mainstream. Alice and I stick together in the pursuit of weeding beneath the family tree. Especially since my novel might sell better if it's on the bookstore shelf next to hers.