

A SEASONAL MESSAGE FROM GRAHAM MASTERTON

As another year comes towards its close, it's time to look back and to assess what has been achieved, what new friends have been made, and what has been learned.

I wrote a new novel in my crime thriller series featuring Detective Superintendent Katie Maguire, *Begging To Die* – the tenth novel set in the criminal underworld of Cork, in the Republic of Ireland.

This series has been almost supernaturally predictive. In 2015 I published *Blood Sisters*, based on the true facts about scores of babies and infants who had died while in the care of an Irish home for single mothers run by nuns. Because the children were illegitimate, they weren't permitted to be buried in consecrated ground, so their bodies were thrown into a septic tank underneath the home's garden.

In my novel, DS Maguire discovered these bodies and had them all exhumed, identified where possible and given decent burials. In October – three years after the publication of my book – the Irish government at last decided to exhume the real children from the home in Tuam and have them identified by DNA and respectfully laid to rest.

In another thriller, *Dead Girls Dancing (Tańzace Martwe Dziewczynki)*, a building on the north bank of the River Lee in Cork burned down, killing the dance troupe inside it. Two weeks after the publication of the book, a building only a few metres away from the building in my book was burned to the ground.

I was inspired to write *Begging To Die* by the homeless people and rough sleepers in Cork, and suddenly this has become a fierce topic of public discussion in the city. I really do believe that fiction can often foretell fact.

Maybe the most striking example of this was *The Hell Candidate*, a horror novel I published in 1983 suggesting that a Republican Presidential candidate in America only managed to win the election because he was possessed by Satan. Ring any bells?

Apart from writing, though, I made a point of visiting several different countries this year and making new friends. I went to Belgium for the Brussels Book Fair in February. I toured Poland for the Empik Apostrof Festival, visiting Warsaw, Gdansk, Szczecin and the Pyrkon Festival in Poznan. I went to the Fantasmagoria Festival in Thessaloniki in Greece, where I made friends

with the lovely Greek writer Evangelia Papanikou and to Bordeaux in France where I met Anna Starobinets, the Russian 'Queen of Horror.'

In July I went to Wołów Prison near Wrocław to present the prizes for the second annual Graham Masterton Written In Prison Award, and also to visit towns around Wrocław to talk to readers. I met the children from Dom Dziecka orphanage, too, in Strzelin, which I support, and read them a spooky story about Baba Yagar!

I also helped a new writer Dawn G Harris to publish her debut thriller *Diviner*, and the Irish neuroscientist Dr Sabina Brennan to write and publish her first non-fiction book about brain health, *100 Days To A Younger Brain*. I am very proud of both of them.

I have always believed that writers should be more than entertainers. They also have a responsibility to use their insight and their understanding of human nature to make friends with people from all walks of life and to do as much as possible to give them a vision of what they could achieve so that they can feel happy and fulfilled. So my message is not only about Christmas, but about every day of the year, which should be just as special as Christmas.

Best wishes to all of you. I hope next year will bring you friendship and success and joy (and maybe some scary stories too!)