

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID HOUSEWRIGHT

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wanted to do something with the gangsters that I knew lived in Saint Paul during the first three and a half decades of the century.

What research did you undertake in writing *Jelly's Gold*?

I lived in the Minnesota History Center for about six weeks, sifting through their archives as well as reading all the newspapers from that time, which fortunately are saved on microfilm.

How long did it take you to write the book?

About five months, which is a personal best for me. Usually it takes me about nine months to write a book.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *Jelly's Gold*?

Getting the historical facts right was the big challenge. There are an enormous number of stories that came out of that period of Saint Paul's history that simply could not be true. For example, I know for a fact that Al Capone was in prison during the time when I'm told he was shooting it out with Feds in a resort near Brainerd.

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I want to give them a sense of the city during that period. You need to understand that the O'Connor System (that allowed criminals to stay in Saint Paul without fear of prosecution as long as they refrained from committing a crime here) was not a secret. The entire city was an accomplice in this. What's more, the system did not last for just a few years during Prohibition—as many people suppose—but for 35 years. Think about that. For an entire generation a major American city was safe haven for every kind of cutthroat—and people liked it that way!

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I've always wanted to be a writer and can't remember ever wanting to do anything else. My journey, if you want to call it that, was so conventional and painless as to be boring. When I was in school, I wrote for anyone who would let me, and when I got out of school, I did the same, starting out in newspapers before drifting into advertising.

It took me a year to write my first book. It took me another year to find an agent who liked it as much as I did. It took my agent a year to find a publisher that shared our enthusiasm. The book came out in September of 1994. Six months later it was nominated for an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America. Eight weeks later it won. Since then I have been nominated for the Minnesota Book Award (won twice) and a Shamus from the Private Eye Writers of America. My tenth book came out in June of 2010. Boring!



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A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL


MINNESOTA
BOOK AWARDS

Genre Fiction Winner

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**JELLY'S
GOLD**

A McKenzie Novel

**DAVID
HOUSEWRIGHT**

EDGAR AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *MADMAN ON A DRUM*

Jelly's Gold

by David Housewright

MINOTAUR BOOKS

Jelly's Gold



SUMMARY:

Rushmore McKenzie, a retired Saint Paul policeman, often works as an unlicensed P.I. When two graduate students show up with a story about \$8 million in gold that has been missing since the 1930s, McKenzie is intrigued. As the story goes, Frank “Jelly” Nash was suspected of masterminding a daring robbery of gold bars in 1933, and when he was later killed, the treasure was left somewhere in Saint Paul. Two thugs are also in competition to find the gold, and McKenzie gets increasingly involved when the hunt turns deadly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book’s main themes?
2. It was said that if a criminal hadn’t been seen for a while during the 1930s, either look for him in prison or in Saint Paul. What made it possible for Saint Paul to serve as a safe haven for all types of criminals?
3. What did you learn about Saint Paul’s history that you found most surprising or interesting?
4. Rushford McKenzie often does “wrong” things for what he believes are the “right” reasons. In what instances do you believe McKenzie doing the wrong thing is the right thing to do, and are there instances when it is wrong?
5. If you are friends with a “bad guy,” does that make you a bad guy?
6. Should someone be embarrassed by actions of his/her parents that took place before they were born?
7. The author’s favorite character is Heavenly. What were your reactions to this character, and why do you think the author chose the name, “Heavenly”?
8. Which 1930s character and which modern day character did you find to be most intriguing?

9. At what point in the book did you figure out the identity of the killer? What clues are given?
10. When you think about the elements that make a really good mystery, what are they, and to what extent are they used in *Jelly's Gold*?

About David Housewright

David Housewright has worked as a journalist covering both crime and sports, an advertising copywriter and creative director, and a writing instructor. He has won a number of awards for his crime fiction, including two Minnesota Book Awards. David's tenth book, The Taking of Libbie, SD, was released in June 2010.

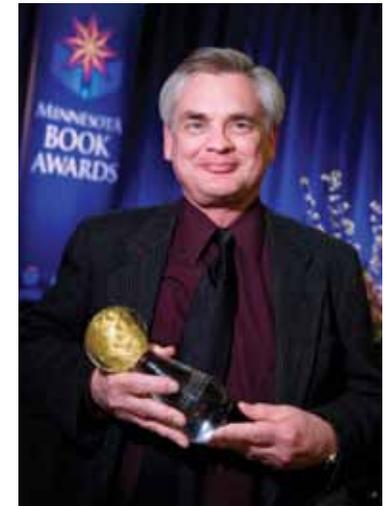


Photo by Scott Strebble

Visit www.davidhousewright.com to learn more about the author and his work.



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