

THE

BADGER CONFESSION



J. A. RICKETTS

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER
THE BADGER RIOT

THE
BADGER
CONFESSION

The Badger Riot

The Badger Confession

The Badger Redemption
(Fall 2012)

THE
BADGER
CONFESSION

J. A. RICKETTS

FLANKER PRESS LTD.

ST. JOHN'S

2010

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Ricketts, J. A. (Judy Ada), 1944-
The Badger confession / J.A. Ricketts.

e-isbn - 978-1-926881-30-0

Cataloguing information available from Library and Archives Canada

© 2010 by J. A. Ricketts

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of the work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic or mechanical—without the written permission of the publisher. Any request for photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems of any part of this book shall be directed to Access Copyright, The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency, 1 Yonge Street, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M5E 1E5. This applies to classroom use as well.

Cover Design: Adam Freake

FLANKER PRESS
PO BOX 2522, STATION C
ST. JOHN'S, NL, CANADA
TOLL FREE: 1-866-739-4420
WWW.FLANKERPRESS.COM

Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Newfoundland
Labrador

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities; the Canada Council for the Arts which last year invested \$20.1 million in writing and publishing throughout Canada; the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.

*To my mother,
Lucy Elliott Day*

“I walked the line in ’59.”

Unknown

Characters

JENNIE SULLIVAN	– <i>Former lady striker, town clerk</i>
TOM HILLIER	– <i>Her husband</i>
PHONSE	– <i>Her brother and Marilyn, his wife</i>
PHILOMENA	– <i>One of her sisters</i>
ROSALIE AND DANIEL	– <i>Her children</i>
RALPH DRUM	– <i>Mi'kmaq shaman</i>
MISSUS ANNIE DRUM	– <i>His mother</i>
DENNIS DRUM	– <i>His brother</i>
IRMA CRAWFORD DRUM	– <i>Dennis's wife, also Vern's cousin</i>
MICHAEL DRUM	– <i>Dennis's son and Ralph's nephew</i>
GRANDFATHER'S SPIRIT	
VERN CRAWFORD	– <i>Taxi driver and CN bus driver</i>
MILLIE	– <i>His wife</i>
MELANIE	– <i>His daughter</i>
MOXIE	– <i>Windsor taxi driver, later a bar owner</i>
ROD ANDERSON	– <i>A.N.D. Company woods contractor</i>
RUTH	– <i>His wife</i>
RICHARD FAGAN	– <i>Newfoundland Constabulary officer</i>
AUDREY	– <i>His wife, daughter of Rod Anderson</i>
BRENDA AND BARBARA	– <i>Their daughters</i>
LEVI AND BECKY ABERNATHY	– <i>His adopted parents</i>
BILL HATCHER	– <i>Rod's camp foreman and best friend</i>
WALT	– <i>His son</i>
JUNIOR	– <i>His grandson</i>

CECIL NIPPARD	– <i>Former “scab” or non-union worker</i>
EMILY	– <i>His sister</i>
CECILIA	– <i>Emily’s daughter, Cecil’s niece</i>
FREDDY	– <i>A hobo</i>
MRS. WEATHERBEE	– <i>Nova Scotia farmer’s wife</i>
ALF ELLIOTT	– <i>Telegraph operator</i>
MARY	– <i>His wife</i>
AMANDA	– <i>His daughter</i>
DAVID, THOMAS, ALVIN	– <i>His sons</i>
PASTOR DAMIAN GENGE	– <i>Pentecostal pastor at Badger</i>
VIRTUE	– <i>His wife</i>
HOPE	– <i>Their daughter</i>
JONATHAN	– <i>A pastor and friend in Northern Ontario</i>
AMASAI (MAC)	– <i>Virtue’s son</i>
AUGUST MAJELLA LYNCH	– <i>Odd man out</i>

These characters are fictitious. Any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental. Joseph R. Smallwood, Landon Ladd, and Constable William Moss are key historical figures.

Prologue

March 12, 1959

A cold pre-dawn light washed over the town of Grand Falls, Newfoundland. Many people had gathered outside the Lady Northcliffe Hospital. They shuffled their feet as they watched and waited, speaking quietly among themselves, their breath sending little puffs into the sulphur-tainted air of the paper mill town. The lineup stretched all the way around the circular driveway in front of the building.

In the eerie, long moment before the sun rimmed the eastern horizon, the doors of the hospital pushed open.

Two days before, on March 10, a riot between loggers and police had occurred in the nearby town of Badger. Young Constable William Moss, a member of the Newfoundland Constabulary, was struck a blow and collapsed, bleeding in the snow.

Two days later, word of his death passed swiftly through the mill town in the early morning hours. The people left the warmth of their homes and arrived in twos and threes to keep vigil outside the hospital entrance. All eyes were now focused on the opening doors.

Six tired, grim-faced policemen carried a coffin, grief etched on their faces. Later some would remark how unusual it was to see a casket come from inside a hospital. Normally a deceased person was taken from the hospital to the funeral home where embalming would take place, and only then would a coffin be provided.

But the death of Constable Moss was anything but normal.

The Constabulary officers motioned to the crowd to clear the way. Obediently, the onlookers – perhaps two hundred or more of them –

backed onto the snow-covered lawn. Quickly, silently, efficiently, the casket was loaded into a covered army truck to be conveyed to the local armoury.

For many of the people of Grand Falls, that day seemed long, tension-fraught and drawn-out. Schools and businesses closed their doors in respect, and in fear some of them locked their doors. It was decided that the body would leave Windsor Station on the evening train after a procession through the streets of Grand Falls. The Royal Canadian Legion came forward and offered an honour guard to escort the casket to the railway station.

In St. John's, the shock of the news reverberated through the city. The newspaper headlines screamed **TERROR AT BADGER: LOGGERS, POLICE CLASH, and WORST VIOLENCE SO FAR, CONSTABLE MAY DIE. Then, POLICE CONSTABLE DEAD, EXPECT MURDER CHARGE.**

The Smallwood Government quickly realized the impact the young man's death would have. The Cabinet hurriedly came together to discuss how to contain the tide that was about to roll over them.

When word of the constable's death reached Badger, the town was appalled, ashamed that their peaceful, small town was the scene of violence of such magnitude. Word drifted up from Grand Falls that anger was rising, an anger that was the only outlet for the emotions that a senseless death had wrought.



Sunset on the evening of March 12, 1959, was at six o'clock. The funeral cortège for Constable William Moss formed at the Grand Falls Armoury. The coffin was again loaded aboard the army truck, and his fellow officers formed to walk along beside him. In each officer's mind was the thought that it could have been his head that had taken the cruel, senseless blow that killed Bill Moss.

The Grand Falls Canadian Legion Honour Guard formed to march as well. Their navy jackets, grey pants, and Legion berets were a familiar, grim reminder that these men had recently witnessed death in World War II.

Slowly the party wound its way through the streets of the town toward Windsor Station. Along the route citizens stood and watched. Men in the crowd took off their caps and bowed their heads as the vehicle passed.

Several hundred people gathered at the Windsor railway station,

waiting for the body of the policeman to arrive. A thread of restlessness, then impatience, and lastly, fury, moved through the crowd. First one voice rose, then others joined in, until the emotions of the bystanders grew so inflamed that they simply had to lash out at someone to blame.

Someone espied the IWA union office across the street. All it took was one angrily thrown stone through the plate glass window to start another riot. The RCMP attempted to control the mob as it surged toward the building, but the rioters managed to smash all the windows, and were only stopped from battering in the doors by the arrival of the procession.

Emotions still high, the group abandoned its vandalism and crowded around the army truck, avidly seeking the first glimpse of the coffin. But the coffin had been placed inside a pine box with the Union Jack draped over it. The legionnaires lifted the box onto their shoulders and carried it to the open door of the train baggage car. The crowd moved back and watched. Women in the crowd sobbed openly.

“Oh, oh! The poor, poor young man!”

The baggage handler helped settle the covered box on the rough, wooden floor of the baggage car for Constable Moss’s last journey across the island, a journey that would end in St. John’s, where his shocked and grieving mother awaited.

The honour guard stood back and saluted. Lastly, a single Newfoundland Constabulary constable climbed aboard the train car to accompany his fallen comrade. He took a position at the head of the flag-draped box and stood at attention. His young face contorted, and seemed about to break into raw emotion.

The baggage car doors slammed shut, and after a few minutes the train slowly pulled away from the station.

A middle-aged workman stood on the station platform and shouted out over the crowd, “He died for a good cause! We will avenge his death! Down with the IWA!”

These angry words roused the crowd, who were angry and desperate for retaliation. Again they surged forward to continue their barrage on the IWA union office.

A reporter and a photographer stood at the edge of the crowd. The photographer snapped several shots of the crowd as they attacked the IWA office. As the funeral cortège slowly pulled into the station, they moved closer to record the event.

Someone in the angry crowd spotted the media. They began to shout,

“Get the guy with the camera! Get the reporters from the mainland!” Someone jostled the photographer, sending his camera crashing to the ground, destroying his photos.

The journalists ran for their lives as the angry crowd grabbed for them. They made their way to the Anglican Church Manse, where Reverend C.S. Sheppard gave them sanctuary.

Part I

AFTER . . .

This page intentionally left blank

1

Constable Richard Fagan of the Newfoundland Constabulary boarded the train in Grand Falls, a special train that had brought twenty-five more of his fellow officers out to central Newfoundland to help the RCMP. Upon hearing Richard's story of striking down his father-in-law in the midst of the Badger Riot, the sergeant decided to get the young man out of Grand Falls as quickly as possible. He could see he was too distressed and remorseful to be of any use patrolling the streets of Grand Falls or Badger.

Richard stepped off the train at the Water Street West railway station to a dismal, overcast day. He was alone, returning on the special that had brought the policemen out to central Newfoundland. Jumping aboard one of the waiting taxis, Richard had first gone to his parents' house to tell his father of the shocking chain of events that had transpired in Badger.

The Abernathys listened, their faces reflecting the horror of his words. When he finished, both of them accompanied Richard as he made the short walk along New Cove Road to his own home, to explain his early return to his wife Audrey. As they entered the front door, the first person Richard laid eyes on was his mother-in-law, Ruth, who had come in from Badger a few days before. He was so worried about telling Audrey that he had momentarily forgotten that Ruth was also staying with them.

Richard stood in the kitchen staring at Ruth, the Abernathys flanking him. Immediately Ruth knew something was wrong, and for a moment time stood still as their eyes locked.

Audrey came bustling into the kitchen. "Richard! Where'd you come from?"

Audrey looked from Richard to the Abernathys. Richard finally released the air frozen in his chest and his shoulders sloped. He dreaded telling Audrey and Ruth what he had done to Rod.

He pulled a chair from the kitchen table and motioned to his wife.

"Here, Audrey," he said, "sit down, my dear. I have something to tell you." He motioned to Ruth. "You too, Momma Ruth."

Still standing, he continued reluctantly. "I just came back from Badger this morning."

"Badger!" The two women were shocked.

"As you know, two nights ago, Papa told you I was sent on a secret mission. I was among the unit sent out to keep the peace in Grand Falls. But Tuesday afternoon there was a lot of tension in Badger and they sent the unit up there."

At that moment one of his daughters came into the kitchen and clamped her arms around his leg. "Daddy, take me up."

Richard reached down and picked up his daughter. He buried his face in her curly hair and breathed in her freshness. "Daddy loves you, my darling, now go play with your sister. Daddy needs to talk to Mommy and Grandma Ruth for a few minutes."

His mother, Becky Abernathy, quickly took the little girl by the hand and left the room.

Richard and his father both pulled out chairs and sat at the table with the women. He stared at the floor, and eventually cleared his throat.

"Audrey . . . Ruth . . . I don't know how to say this, but a terrible riot broke out up by the Pentecostal church. There were hundreds of strikers and our unit marched on them. I don't know how it started. My God, we were there to keep the peace!"

Richard ran his hands through his hair, causing it to stick up on end. He looked back up at his wife and mother-in-law, anguish written all over his face. "During the confusion I was trying to help a fellow officer put this logger into the back of the van. The man had his back to me and was struggling, so I raised my nightstick and hit him between the shoulders. He went down. Maybe I hit him harder than was necessary, but everyone's blood was running high. Audrey, I reached down to pick him up. It was only then I realized it was your father."

"Rod?" Ruth asked. "What was Rod doing up there among the strikers?"

"You hit Dad?" Audrey exclaimed.

The shock on Audrey and Ruth's faces was too much for Richard. His voice broke. "I am so sorry. So sorry."

Richard looked from Audrey to Ruth and then to his father, antici-

pating their immediate concern. "Don't worry, he's okay, but I expect it will take him a long time to get over the fact his own son-in-law knocked him to the ground."

Richard couldn't look into their eyes, and kept staring at the endless pattern of flowers on the vinyl tablecloth. His father continued for him.

"And there's more news. One of our officers was struck in the head and lies in a coma at this moment at the Lady Northcliffe Hospital."

Richard looked up to see tears running down Audrey's cheeks. He was beyond comforting her, except to say over and over, "I'm sorry, Audrey. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Ruth pushed herself away from the table. "I have to get back to Rod as quickly as I can." She turned to Mr. Abernathy. "Levi, will you take me to the station, please? I'll catch the afternoon train."

Five minutes later, Ruth came out of her room with her suitcase. Audrey and Richard were still sitting at the table. The girls had followed Grandma Ruth and she took a moment to kiss her granddaughters goodbye. Next she came up behind Audrey and bent over to wrap her arms around her in a tight hug.

"Mom, please let me know about Dad. Please," Audrey cried.

"I will, my dear." She couldn't face looking at Richard. He couldn't find the right words to say as she passed into the porch and out the door, followed by Levi Abernathy, who took her suitcase.

As he was leaving, the grizzled old police sergeant looked over his shoulder at Richard. "My son, the best thing for you to do is go on to work and report in. The chief will want to have a word with you. I'll meet you at headquarters later."

Right now Richard's main concern was Audrey, who was wiping tears from her face. She tried to force a smile for their daughters' sake. "Do you mind if I do that . . . report in, Audrey? Will you be all right until I get back?"

Mama Becky crouched and with two strong arms pulled the girls in. "I'll stay with Audrey. Go on, Richard. It'll give you something to do."



When Richard arrived at Fort Townshend, the office was in turmoil. And Levi had been right. The chief was anxious to speak with Richard.

Constable William Moss had died during the night, and rioting had

broken out in the streets of Grand Falls. It was also likely that rioting would break out in St. John's, a dire prospect since more officers were being readied to go out to Grand Falls. This left only sixteen men per shift, for a total of sixty officers to police a city of seventy-five thousand people.

The body of the slain constable arrived in St. John's on Friday night and was conveyed to the home of his mother and stepfather on University Avenue. It had been decided to have a short service in the house, despite the strong rumours that his mother would have preferred a dignified church service, before moving her son's body on to Port Blandford, Newfoundland, for burial.

On the morning of March 15, Premier Smallwood arrived at the Hounsell home. With him was Opposition Leader Malcolm Hollett, St. John's Mayor Harry Mews, and Chief of Police Edgar Pittman. Also present was Canon R.R. Babb of St. Mary's Anglican Church, to conduct the hastily arranged living-room funeral.

Outside, ordinary citizens packed the icy streets. Standing at attention on the road and in the driveway were detachments of the Newfoundland Constabulary, the RCMP, local firemen, the RCAF, the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Loyal Orange Lodge.

As Richard stood freezing on University Avenue, he overheard some muttered conversations among the bystanders.

"Geez b'y, this is all that Joey's fault, you know. And now here he is putting on a big show. Turns me stomach, it do."

"No, my son, you're wrong. Our good Premier sent them cops out there to keep the peace among them savage loggers. I read it in the newspaper, and newspapers don't lie."

"I'm sure they don't lie," another fellow sneered, "but they sure know how to exaggerate."

The men, perhaps fortified with rum against the cold, continued arguing until their voices became raised. Richard went over to them.

"Gentlemen, please remember where you are. This is not the place to start a fight."

The men sobered and quieted somewhat, but Richard could still hear comments from the rest of the people.

"I heard that Joey wouldn't let him be waked in a church because he's afraid of another riot like they had in Badger. Dey sez his mudder is some upset, you know."

Richard wondered, *What is the real truth of all this? Will we ever know?*

At noon, pallbearers carried the casket from the house to the waiting hearse. Richard and the rest of the cortège moved along University Avenue, Elizabeth Avenue, Bonaventure Avenue, Harvey Road, Patrick Street, and Water Street to the railway station.

Waiting at the station was a crowd estimated at fifteen hundred people. An honour guard formed a semicircle as the hearse came to a stop. The casket was reverently taken to the baggage room, where Canadian National Railway workmen, bare-headed, lifted it into the baggage car for the journey to Port Blandford, where Constable Moss would be laid to rest.

Constable Richard Fagan was among the honour guard that was hand-picked and led by Sergeant Levi Abernathy. Richard and five others would accompany the casket to Port Blandford and keep a nighttime vigil in the church.

"You're still the only one who has come back from Grand Falls, my son. The only one who was part of the fracas. It is only fitting that you should be at his graveside."

Richard took a moment's break and called Audrey from the police station. "Audrey, how are you now, my dear?"

"I'm all right, Richard. I just want you to come home and put your arms around me so we can talk together about what happened out home."

"Audrey, I have to go to Port Blandford overnight. They've made me a part of the honour guard. Papa Levi is going too. We'll come on back tomorrow after the funeral."

"Oh, Richard, I know I'm supposed to be a brave and strong police officer's wife, but right now I don't feel either brave or strong."

"I know, my dear, and I'm sorry. Stay strong, sweetheart, please. I love you."

"I love you too, Richard. Be careful."



The town of Port Blandford, a community of about six hundred people, was situated on the eastern side of Terra Nova National Park on the waters of Clode Sound. The railway was the biggest employer, although at one time a sawmill had brought men to the area for work.

The body of William Moss rested all night in the Anglican church. Sergeant Abernathy, Richard, and the others were fed their supper at the local boarding house, and after the meal they took turns standing vigil in the church.

Marie took me to Millertown and the great Red Indian Lake – a very special trip for me. A warm thank you to Ruth and Bruce Loder, owners of the Badger River Efficiency Units; your beautiful place is second to none.

In Grand Falls–Windsor my appreciation goes out to Madonna Crant and staff at the Harmsworth Memorial Library for your wonderful help with research; Bev Butler and staff at the Heritage Centre, who were so patient as they dug through the mountains of archives that were released when the paper mill closed; John Thompson, Artistic Producer of the A.N.D. Company players, who found me amazing pictures that many said did not exist. Also to Shirley Morrow, director of the A.N.D. Company players and the Players themselves for their production of *Yesterday's Men*, a play depicting the loggers' plight, and to the Webber Girls Coffee Club for your friendship and support.

Many thanks go out to Jack Etheridge for explaining the workings of a paper mill; to Stanley Temple, former bus driver for CN Roadcruiser Service; to Carl Greening for the photos of William Moss's funeral in Port Blandford; to Steve Cole in Lewisporte for the bowie knife; and to John Kitchen, who walked the Gaff Topsails.

To Chief Mi'sel Joe, Conne River; Mayor Bill Hogan (RNC Ret'd), Placentia; Peter Moriarity (RCMP Ret'd), Stephenville; Wallace Hoddinott; and Max Pinsent, formerly of Brighton, Notre Dame Bay: Thank you all.

Special thanks go out to Bob and Doris Mercer of Port Albert, Notre Dame Bay, for being so helpful when I inquired about a boat that I had seen tied up in the harbour there.

In Mount Pearl/St. John's, thank you to Grace Hollett, who accompanied me to the university to research the House of Assembly readings for 1959; Cyril and Marion Hayden, and Harry and Jo Hayden for delicious dinners and long talks; to Linda White, Archives and Special Collections Division, Memorial University; and the friendly and obliging staff at Media Centre and Microfilm Room. It was a wonderful experience to meet and interact with you.

If you helped me in relating memories and I have overlooked your name, please accept my sincere apologies. This book covers the period 1959–1989. Some stories have been withheld and will appear in the third book, tentatively titled *The Badger Redemption*.

Even though this story is woven around true events, all characters, except historical figures, are products of my imagination. Any errors are mine and mine alone.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUDY (DAY) RICKETTS was fourteen years old at the time of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) Strike of 1959. A native of Badger, she, along with other schoolchildren, watched from the roadside as loggers and local authorities came together in a famous melee that effectively ended the strike. She believes that the children of the day never recovered from witnessing this terrible event in Newfoundland's history.

The Badger Confession is Judy's second book. Her first book, *The Badger Riot*, is a National Bestseller and was the #1 bestselling book in Atlantic Canada in 2008. Judy can be reached by email at jaricketts@nf.sympatico.ca. Her author website is www.jaricketts.com.