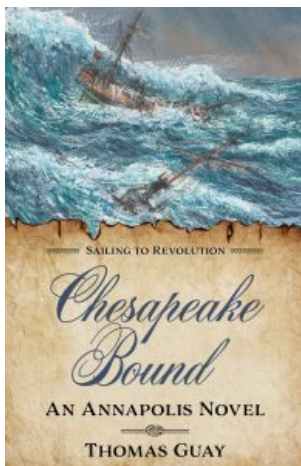




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A perilous 18th-century voyage: Chesapeake Bound by Thomas Guay



BY KELLY URGAN

In *Chesapeake Bound* (McBooks Press, 2025), readers slip into a musical evening at a pub in 18th-century Britain before boarding a ship and undergoing the perils of the sea-voyage across the Atlantic. As an American living in London, I know members of my own family undertook that voyage, yet *Chesapeake Bound* had me considering many new ideas: What about the family members who stayed behind? What if the conditions those ancestors found in the New World were worse than what they were trying to leave? These questions stayed with me as the story unfolded, making the reading journey much more personal.

Chesapeake Bound is the story of Michel Shea, a musician and a doctor, whose noble deeds get him into trouble. I asked Guay about the inspiration for this character: is he a long-lost relative, an imagined character or a historic figure found in the research? Guay said, "Shea is a distant family name on my mother's side ... the rest of Michael is a creation."

As a reader, I found the mixture of medical and musical talents to be interesting, a set of skills not often portrayed together, and I wanted to know more about why being a doctor and a musician would have been a boon to Shea. Guay stated that his background played a part. "Being a musician and reporter gave me access to levels of society that I'd never get to experience. So these abilities will allow Michael to mix and mingle with the upper classes and famous personages." Indeed, Shea's medical abilities result in him getting into a variety of situations throughout the novel that dramatically affect his own life.

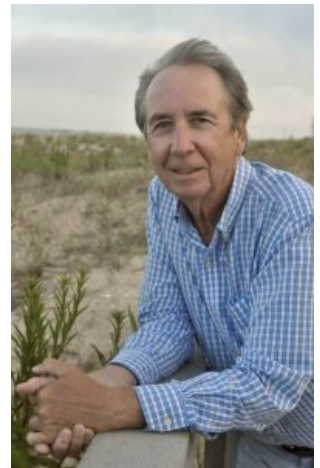
Michael's medical talents are matched by his musical ones. Guay said that he "gave Michael Mozart-type abilities so that he can hear a melody and like Mozart, instantly be able to play it." Guay wanted to share "popular musical references from the 18th century" as a means of developing the historical background. Indeed, as soon as readers understand Shea's musical skills, it immediately evokes

thoughts of a seven-year-old Mozart was playing for King Louis XV around the same time. Additionally, Michael's musical abilities remind readers of the stratification of society at the time and how special skills were one of the few means to obliterate those barriers.

For writers of historical fiction, there's a mixed blessing with thousands of events and people to pick and choose from, in addition to endless themes to explore. Often, what writers start out with blooms into something more, and Guay admitted that happened with *Chesapeake Bound*. He wanted to address the anti-Catholic history within England and the characters within the novel "became the vehicle to explore this conflict in general and then manifested in the Maryland colony, which was originally a haven for Catholics to escape persecution in England." I found that interesting because, when I was a young student, my American history classes never failed to mention the arrival of the *Mayflower*, with Puritans and Separatists fleeing religious persecution at the hands of the Church of England. I can't recall any of my teachers ever mentioning that many Catholics were also fleeing, or how they paid to leave.

That got me wondering if indentured servitude was something Guay wanted to write about or if it evolved organically. He responded, "When the Muses whispered a new idea in my ear, I'd take breaks to go into R&D mode and ponder how to work new ideas into the story. I'd read fiction, nonfiction, diaries, travel narratives from the 18th century." That extensive research on indentured servitude is woven neatly into the main plotlines, creating complex situations for the characters, who feel as if they have no control over their own lives.

In addition to that, they've thrown themselves on the unforgiving mercy of a wooden boat in the ocean. The characters' shock at the circumstances of life onboard is palpable: why had they never heard how anxiously terrifying the voyage would be? This was something I asked him to elaborate on and he said, "The sea voyage: Getting to America was arduous and for some, deadly. Why do it? Because life at home is too miserable to bear. What better way to show how desperate immigrants were than for them to risk an ocean voyage?" Guay expanded on this by reminding me how many fantastic stories take place on ships, *Treasure Island*, *The Odyssey* for example. But this aspect of the novel required him to do more research: "When I started writing, I didn't have detailed knowledge of what life was like for passengers on a sailing ship."



author Thomas Guay

That led us to the topic of how to get on with the writing, especially when the research is never-ending. I wondered what he would like to share with other writers, and he said, "My advice to any writer would be to read Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art*. He perfectly describes how 'resistance' forces creative types to procrastinate and avoid doing the work they're supposed to do – write. It's a powerful force and it's a constant struggle for me to overcome resistance and get to work."

Sage advice for all of us giving in to those resistive forces instead of writing!

About the contributor: Kelly Urgan is an American editor living in London. She is working on her first historical novel set in 12th-century England. When she's not editing, she's writing reviews and feature articles for the HNS. Read more about her here (<https://www.editegrity.com>).