

Frequently Asked Questions

Background Information

Ed and Janet Howle currently live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Ed, 77, is a former professor of economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and later, founder and product designer for Kaye Products, Inc., a company that manufactures and sells mobility aids and other products for children with physical disabilities. He is from Darlington, South Carolina, earned his bachelor's degree in business at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina and Ph.D. in economics at UNC-Chapel Hill. He has three biological children.

Janet, 66, is a pediatric physical therapist from Flint, Michigan. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and her master's degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where she and Ed met. She was assistant professor in the Division of Physical Therapy, UNC-Chapel Hill and has maintained a private physical therapy practice. The couple has three adopted children and has been married 36 years.

You recently circumnavigated the globe in a 1967 Beetle. What made you do this?

We have always had adventure in our marriage. We started a business together, adopted a family of three children, lived in Paris for five years and sailed the Bahamas and the Caribbean with our children. Ed has always been interested in cars, especially antique cars. We participated in various US rallies and when this around-the-world rally was scheduled, we were looking for another adventure. While this is certainly not for everyone, but we had done so many things in partnership, we knew the demands of long distance driving would not tax our relationship.

What were the greatest challenges you had?

Everyday was a challenge; road conditions, weather, traffic, language, the unknown, tension, fatigue and car breakdowns. This rally started April 14 in New York City and ended July 21 in Paris, France. That is a long time without a routine or familiar support systems. It's hard to point to anyone specific day that was the greatest challenge, it depended, in part, on which county we were in. We had the worst weather conditions in the U.S. We had the best and worst road conditions in China.

Perhaps because of our ages, the greatest challenges for us were long days of driving. These were often combined with border crossings and clearing customs. We had two occasions, one in China and one in Kazakhstan when we drove more than 16 hours and didn't reach our destination until two in the morning. We then had to be up and driving the next morning at

8:30. In all of Asia; China, Kazakhstan and Russia, we were dependent on translators for everything. We had excellent help, but this adds another layer to daily challenges.

Would you do it again?

Absolutely! But we were out of money for another trip. Once we reached Paris, we tried to interest Volkswagen to sponsor a return trip. This time, we wanted to go all the way back across Siberia rather than return through China. Unfortunately VW turned us down. We are sure this would have set some kind of record for VW. We are looking into other long distance car events.

Was this rally related to the novel you wrote, *The Long Road to Paris*?

Yes, the idea of an around-the-world rally began in 2006 and was scheduled for 2008, the centennial year of the 1908 Great Race. That year, China hosted the Olympic Games and was faced with uprisings by their Tibetan population. China cancelled our travel permits just 6 weeks before we were to begin our rally. The organizing group, Great Race, Inc., went bankrupt. We were signed on to participate. Our plan was to write a travel/memoir of our experience. When it was cancelled, we decided to use the time until a similar event was organized to write a reality-based thriller set in a world race. We had never written fiction, and we viewed this as another new adventure.

It's unusual for a couple to write together. How do you do this?

We've done everything together, so we didn't realize that this was unusual, but we get this question all the time. We started by taking writing course through Duke University's adult education department and attending writing groups and conferences. We have learned a great deal about writing fiction. We also learned that we have different skills and take on different aspects of writing. Ed is better at plot; working out (and remembering) the complexities and sequencing of plot progression. Janet is better at filling in the color; description and dialogue. But neither one of us is solely responsible for any one part. We discuss every part of the story and the characters as they develop and spend a lot of time talking before anything gets written. Ed writes with paper and pencil, Janet writes on a computer. We often read out loud what we have written and use the other as a sounding board. There are lots of revisions!

What is your greatest writing challenge?

Other than marketing? Writing together. While neither one of us would want to write alone, neither one of us likes conflict or want to hurt the other's feelings. We have had a hard time saying we don't like what the other one has written. This goes both ways. We are better now than at the beginning, we have learned not to take it so personally. It's also hard to throw out a

day's work even when we know we need to. We have learned we need to write for the reader, not for ourselves.

Dialog has been the most difficult for us. The first time we read pages out loud in a class, we were told all our characters sounds like college professors! Fortunately, that has changed.

You mentioned marketing. What's that all about.

We started writing and are continuing to write because we find it really fun but we had no idea how involved authors must be in marketing their own book. We didn't have a website, blog or any presence in social media before we started our first novel. And that's just part of it; marketing involves author readings, book signings and other promotional events. We still find it difficult to reach out to get invited to these kinds of events. This may sound strange since we ran a business for so many years, but we had very little competition in our business. It was a small, highly specialized area and the need for our products was there. They sold themselves. And we did very little marketing. Novels are a different thing. There are lots of books out there, good ones. And how to get your book recognized is a challenge on a very different level.

Do you plan to continue to write?

Yes, we are working on a second novel, *Night Watch*. It is set on a sailboat in the Bahamas. We find we are best at writing about places and people we know. Before we finished *The Long Road to Paris*, we traveled the entire route described in that book. We had rallied in the US and know the kinds of problems and challenges that come with antique car rallying. We know the wide range of people who participate in these activities. Likewise, we have sailed the Bahamas for 30 years and know this area, the Bahamians and sailors here. We can incorporate many of our own adventures, mishaps and challenges into this next novel as we did in the first one. We find we enjoy writing suspense, especially when it is combined with a love story. Kirkus and other reviewers use the word "thriller" to describe our book but they are reality-based thrillers; no theatrics and just a touch larger than life. Our protagonists rely on their wits, quick thinking and thoughtful solutions to challenging situations.