

Author Kerry George draws on coal mining heritage

Black Damp Century novelist highlights the century-old clashes between miners, mine owners, and the government

KERRY GEORGE IS A RETIRED FEDERAL COAL MINE INSPECTOR and a graduate of Ohio University. He spent many years researching the history of mining and its impact on families in Appalachia and beyond. We asked him about how his coal mining experiences and heritage affected the writing of his novel *Black Damp Century*.

Why was this book important to you to write?

I wanted to write a story that would be enjoyable for people to read. I wanted to impart the history so my children and the children of all coal miners would understand the history of the times and the hardships their families endured. I believed that to write a purely historical piece that many would find boring would be counterproductive.

You spent many years working in the coal mining profession. What types of experiences do you think you brought to the story?

I believe that my background in mining and being raised in a mining family allowed me to bring realism to the piece. I was able to incorporate many actual events within the story.

What do people not know about coal mining that you think reading *Black Damp Century* would help them to understand?

Most people in our country are unfamiliar with the history of mining and the conditions that the people had to live under. Even the young coal miners of today do not know the hardships that the early miners experienced.

What does the title of the book mean?

Black damp is a mining term that basically means no oxygen. I used the metaphor to describe the relationship between the miners, mine owners, and the government.

Since your book was published, you've traveled throughout Ohio, giving talks about mining history and



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your book. Tell us more about your experiences and the types of responses you have gotten.

Since the book was published I have been in eight states speaking to historical groups, and at libraries and festivals. I believe the most interesting development has been the amount of correspondence that I have received. It has all been positive and very personal, the way the book has touched so many lives.

You've also gotten personal letters from readers. What have they written to you about?

The many letters that I have received have had the same theme. The writer describes their families' history in mining and how the story brought back so many memories.

Do you have any advice for writers working on their first book?

My advice for writers working on their first story is to keep putting words on paper. There is no end date for the completion of your work. If you do not do it, no one will. But magically there will come a day that you will finish and the effort will be justified.

What are you working on next?

The novel that I am researching is another story of coal mining. In 1944 sixty-six men were killed in a mine fire in Powhatan, Ohio. I would like to tell their story from when they awoke on that fateful day till their death sixteen hours later.

Black Damp Century is available in print for \$14.95 at <https://wwwcreatespace.com/3944860> or as a Kindle e-book for \$2.99.