

Ober's Profile

From attorney to novelist

By JOAN RETSINAS

Algy Temple, the attorney-sleuth of *Carom Shot*, enjoys his life. He enjoys the intrigue of working through a whodunnit. He enjoys living in Providence, with its hodgepodge of ethnic and racial divisions, and its genuine neighborhoods. He enjoys decades-old friendships that began in high school. He even enjoys navigating the Byzantine politics of academia.

Not surprisingly, Jack Partridge, Algy's creator, enjoyed creating this new sleuth.

In his teens, Jack started writing fiction, publishing a few short stories in the *Alembic*, Providence College's literary magazine. But fiction went on the back burner for decades, while Jack focused on law - his profession, as well as Algy's. But eventually the zeal to write kicked in and during vacations and weekends, he wrote short stories. Several years ago, he turned to a novel.

A novelist faces a few decisions: genre, plot, setting.

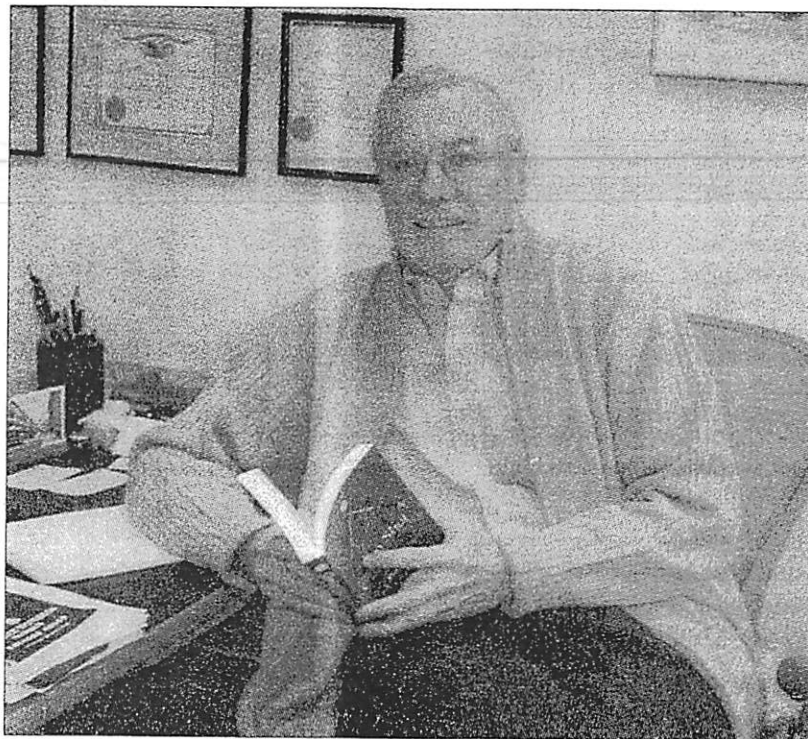
The genre decision was clear: a mystery. Jack had been reading mysteries for years - his favorites included Dorothy Sayers, P.D. James, John Le Carre, Josephine Tey. The character of Algy Temple evolved in his mind. This new sleuth would be an attorney - a good model for a detective, since lawyers, like detectives, unravel the "facts of a case." Initially, Jack put Algy inside a large law firm, but then switched venues: Algy would work for a university, much like Brown.

Other characters took shape in

Jack's mind. He has known several charismatic preachers - presaging the novel's charismatic preacher, with his rabble-rousing, and rabble-calming, rhetoric. As a Rhode Islander, Jack knows first-, second- and third-hand the political intrigues of the state - fodder to create the book's mayor, police chief and deputies. Indeed, Jack has strived for "verisimilitude" in the characters: they are probable, plausible people. While the reader might deduce "x is so and so," "y is someone else," the characters evoke different facets of familiar people - they are not fictional clones.

The plot grew along with the characters as Jack explored different ways to tie these people together. He would write one scenario, then re-write and re-cast. When he finished the draft, he gave it to his three children for comments. He took photographs of city streets, so he could remember the details. He diagrammed the hero's fictive house, so he could choreograph the movements of the characters.

As for the setting, that had to be Rhode Island. A native Rhode Islander, Jack knows the state well. He went to Providence College. He roots faithfully for the Friars. He has served on the boards of Slater Mill, the Pawtucket Boys & Girls Club, and Memorial Hospital. He is the founding partner of Partridge, Snow and Hahn, located on Providence's South Main Street. He lives on the East Side. He spends summers in Westerly. His wife Regina is a print-maker, with a studio in Pawtucket. He set this mystery on his home turf.



Writer/novelist Jack Partridge.

Jack concedes the mystery might have remained a private work. But his younger son David was at home, and David took on the mystery as a project, urging Jack to bring it to a publishable close. The two worked together, with David as an informal editor, and family members as readers, to iron out plot and character wrinkles. This November the writer J.J. Partridge

introduced the first Algy Temple mystery to readers. For Jack, "It was fun to do." Indeed, "I miss the fact that I'm not writing right now."

But Algy is not a one-time sleuth. He and Jack are now partners and readers can expect another murder, with a baffling roster of suspects, that will test both the reader's and Algy's acumen.