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Novel Features Neighborhood Street Names for Character Names

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Sheila M. Cronin's first novel, *The Gift Counselor*, has a clever south-side-of-Chicago connection. Imbedded on every page and in each of the major characters' names are the streets or places where the author grew up. Daughter of Chicago writer, Pat S. Cronin, a popular *Beverly Review* newspaper columnist for thirty years, Sheila M. Cronin has not only named her fictional characters after the streets she grew up on, she has dedicated her book to the people of South Shore.

Set in Southern California—where Sheila lived for sixteen years and where she got her inspiration for the story—the book tells of a single mom with a passion for understanding gift-giving, her ten-year-old son who yearns for a dog she won't let him have, and the compassionate man who enters and changes their lives just at the start of the Christmas season.

A timeless mix of romance, family drama, psychological and spiritual breakthroughs and high comedy, the novel takes readers on a page-turning journey through the month of one December, chapter by chapter, until most—not all—issues are resolved. The unresolved questions are the subject of the sequel, *Best of All Gifts*.

Asked why she chose to name her characters after city streets, Sheila gave this explanation: "The story came to me and I sat down to begin writing it. I knew I needed a large block of names and suddenly I thought of South Shore. I loved growing up in that neighborhood. It was the story's first gift."

South Shore is no longer a happy place in which to grow up. Random shootings occur regularly and the neighborhood has earned the reputation of being one of Chicago's most dangerous. What does Sheila say to this?

"I purposely dedicated the book 'to the people of South Shore.' By that, I meant past, current and future residents. I'm well aware of the current, heartbreaking situation. My hope is that my book will shine a light on South Shore to help heal and revive it. I owe it so much."

The novel is available in paperback and Kindle at www.amazon.com/book.