



## About Spitting Image

When I began to think about writing a novel for older readers, I had in mind an image of a girl and her grandmother. But I did not know what kind of story my book should be. What could I have these two people do? I had characters, but no story!

Months later I learned of an incident that happened in Letcher County, Kentucky, in 1967. A Film Board of Canada photographer, Hugh O'Connor, had been filming poverty in the area under the auspices of the U.S. government. He was shot and killed by a local landlord. The man who killed him was only sentenced to one year in prison.

My PBS station aired a documentary film about the case, "Stranger with a Camera." It explored the issues of shame and dignity, and talked of how people felt when they became the *poor* ones pictured in the media for the entire world to see. Suddenly, I knew what my story should be!

I was born in southeastern Kentucky--coal-mining country. Many people there are poor. Although we moved to Michigan when I was still a baby, I spent many happy summers *down home* as I grew up. I love going there. I love the smell and shape of the mountains, the great food, and the laughter of the good people who are proud of accomplishing so much with so little.

Lots of bits and pieces of Spitting Image come from things in my own life. For example, below is a picture of my dad with his beloved '41 Mercury Coupe. It was the inspiration for the only remaining photograph of Jessie's Grandpa Henry. My father loved this car.



Also, I dedicated this book to my sister because I love her very much, and because she, in some ways, reminds me of Jessie—but shhh, don't tell her!

S. C.  
Aug. 2003