

Debut crime writer is long listed for McIlvanney Prize

A West Lothian author waited for more than 50 years to write his first novel – now it is in line to win Scotland's most prestigious prizes for crime fiction this month.

Doug Sinclair, 58, has been longlisted for this year's McIlvanney Prize for the best Scottish crime book of the year and is also on the shortlist for the Bloody Scotland Debut Prize, for his novel *Blood Runs Deep*.

The book is the first in a series of thrillers starring DS Malkie McCulloch, the "brilliantly complex detective who will risk everything to protect the innocent".

Doug, from Armadale, West Lothian, told how he had longed to become a crime writer ever since he penned a murder mystery in primary school that had his teacher and classmates gripped.

For nearly 50 years, a crippling lack of confidence caused by undiagnosed neurodivergence, prevented him from pursuing his dream, however.

He finally completed his first thriller thanks to support and encouragement from his Belgian wife Maaïke.

It has not only been published to widespread acclaim, but could potentially scoop a unique double this month.

Blood Runs Deep is one of the five titles shortlisted for the debut prize to be awarded on the opening night of the Bloody Scotland international crime writing festival in Stirling on Friday 13th.

It also sits alongside the latest works by the likes of Val McDermid, Chris Brookmyre, Charles Cumming and Doug Johnstone on the longlist for the McIlvanney Prize to be handed out on the same night.

Doug, an IT support worker for a bank, said: "The spark was always there. In primary school I wrote a murder mystery that the teacher thought was so good she bound it in vinyl and made me read it out to the rest of the year.

"Everyone else wrote half a page and mine ran to five pages, with a beginning, a middle and an end. There was a murder but no gory details. I'd have only been about 10 or 11 years old.

"I also remember reading an advert in the paper saying 'you too could be a writer', and standing in the backyard of our tenement thinking, 'could I be one of those amazing people who write books?'

"So there were early signs, but to finally be published 50 years on and for my book to be on these prize lists alongside those names, I honestly can't believe it."

Doug grew up in Edinburgh and later lived in London and Belgium before returning to Scotland with Maaïke 23 years ago. It was Maaïke who encouraged him to seek the help that has transformed his life and led to him signing a three book deal with publishers Storm.

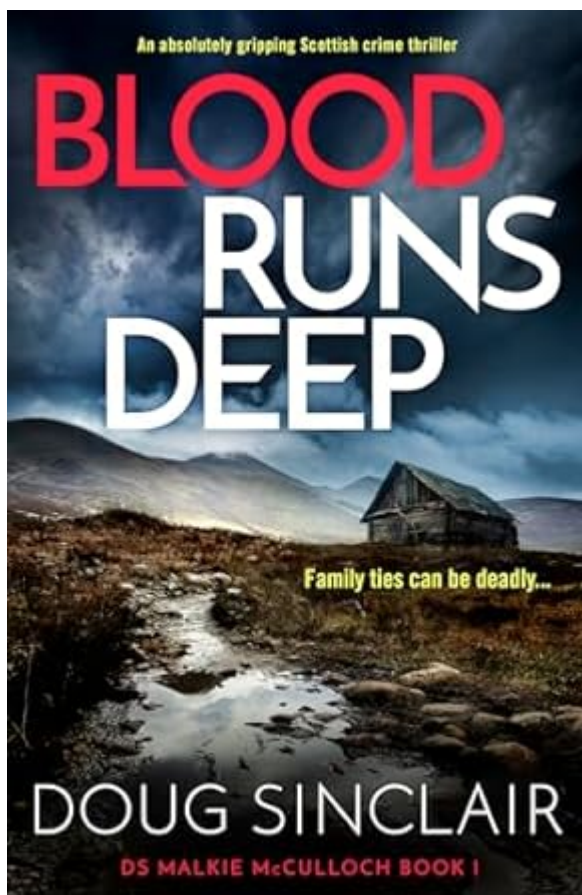
He said: "My entire life, for various reasons, my neuro divergences, as they call them now, have been fairly low level but they have been chronic, chipping away and eroding me.

"I spent my entire childhood, adolescence, and right up to

middle age believing in my heart that I was worthless. I was convinced that even if I could write I didn't deserve success or recognition. That's just how I felt.

"I started writing a book ten years ago. I wrote 70,000 words and then gave up on it because I believed nobody would want to read it.

"My amazing now-wife Maaike made me get help. We found out that I could have been prescribed medication decades ago and had a completely different life."



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author of the acclaimed Anderson and Costello thrillers, who also offered support

He wrote *Blood Runs Deep*, then later returned to the book he had earlier abandoned, which has now become the second part in the series, "Last To Die". Now he's working on a third part.

Doug said: "It took six or seven years to build the self belief to actually finish *Blood Runs Deep*, and get it out there.

"It will be labelled a police procedural, but I wanted to write about people who get damaged by the awful things society does to us, and that includes police officers. How the best of us can be pushed to do awful things by the worst of circumstances and how it impacts on the victims, the police who investigate these awful crimes and the perpetrators.

"It was Caro who said 'it's all about emotional intelligence' and I never forgot that phrase."

The McIlvanney Prize recognises excellence in Scottish crime writing and is dedicated to the late William McIlvanney, the novelist, short story writer and poet regarded as "the father of Tartan Noir".

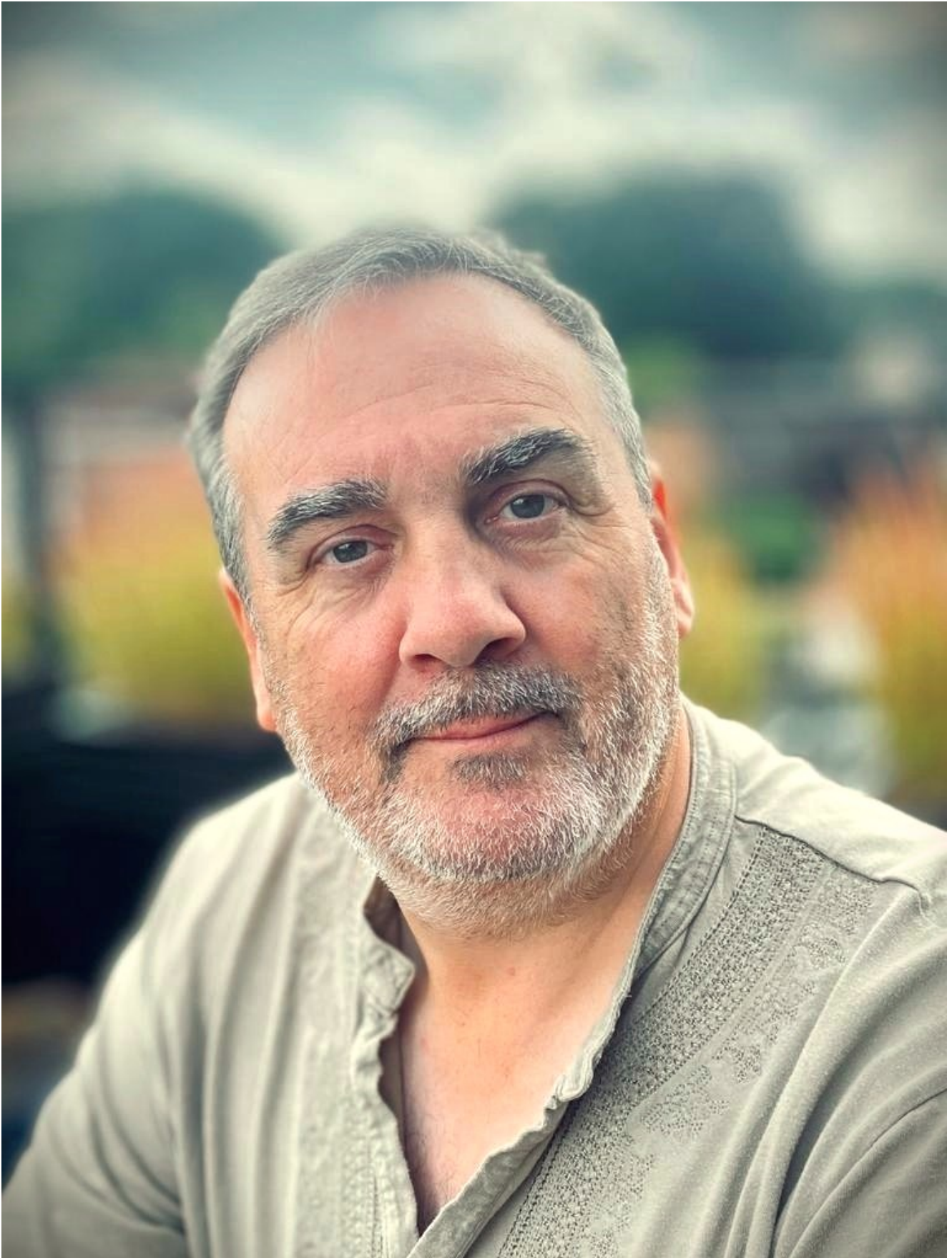
The longlist was selected by an "academy" of booksellers, librarians, bloggers and broadcasters and the winner will receive a Glencairn Crystal Decanter, £1,000 and nationwide promotion in Waterstones.

Doug added: "I was well known as someone who had no confidence or belief in myself. I always said I would write a book and when I did, and it was published, so many people were so chuffed for me.

"A lot of people have come back and said 'see, I told you you could write', 'it's a good read', and that sort of thing.

"I think I'm finally accepting that I can write. I would love to become a full-time crime writer.

“I’ve just reached number five and number ten in two categories on Amazon, which is amazing. I’ve not hit number one yet but I believe it’s going to come.”



Doug Sinclair