

My Blog

Hand of Evil Tour, Episode 1

Thursday, January 3, 2008

We're actually coming up on the end of the second day on the trail--and the second day in a very soggy Portland. Today at noon there was a surprisingly large crowd at a daytime/weekday signing in Vancouver, WA. The event was co-sponsored by Barnes and Noble and the Fort Vancouver Public Library, and they brought a lot of people there. It was gratifying--and also very wet. In Portland, that's a good thing. Last year it was icy here and the bookstore actually closed on account of weather, so I'll take rainy any day.

Last night at Powell's someone asked me why so many of my victims turn out to be named Bree. The question was posed by someone named Bree, but until she mentioned it, I had no idea it had happened. When I work on a book, I keep a name file of characters previously used in that series, but it turns out I now need to have a cross-pollination name file that includes names from all the different series.

As to why Bree came into play in the first place? I try to use names that sound as though it would fit in with the character's relative age and physical location. JAJ: Note to self. No more Brees in ANY book until further notice!!!

Looking at the days ahead, we're also looking at the weather channel. It would appear that it's going to be raining everywhere we go for the next several days in California. And who knows what will happen when we go tooling off to Colorado--in January!! We'll just have to hope for the best.

I've heard from several people now, who have come to my blog via Amazon.com. That's very good news. We spent several months' worth of frustrating effort trying to make that connection work. Welcome aboard.

Off to Murder by the Book. And hope to see you somewhere along the way.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* Tour, Episode 2** **Saturday, January 5, 2008**

Years ago we attended a play at the old Pioneer Theater in Seattle. It was called *January Book*, and it was the story of the people who came to a certain hotel in Maine in January of each year. The characters' various reasons for coming there in foul weather was the whole point.

In other words, I don't remember much about the play except the title. Now, though, I'm getting my much deserved comeuppance for forgetting the story by having my very own personal January Book each year along with something else equally daunting--a January book tour.

Those of you who were already reading this blog back then may recall that last year's tour was a bad weather *tour de force*, as it were. There was the ice storm in Portland--so bad that Powells was forced to close. There was snow in LA!!! Freezing temperatures all through southern California devastated last year's avocado crop. When we arrived in San Francisco, the doom-sayers were claiming it was the end of guacamole for the foreseeable future. In fact, the free market functioned wonderfully in that regard. Avocados came from somewhere, (Chile, perhaps?) but I never had to do without guacamole all last year.

The bad weather continued when we reached Florida. Once again there were freeze warnings, and we left Lake County, Florida less than twenty-four hours before a devastating tornado. In other words, the heavy coat I thought I'd drop off in Tucson on our way proved to be necessary throughout the tour.

So here we are again with another January book. First there was the ice and snow in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho that came close to stranding us there overnight just before Christmas. Then it rained like crazy as we drove from Seattle to Portland, but at

least it wasn't icy, so we counted our blessings. When we came home from the second signing in Portland it was to a series of phone calls advising us that a huge storm was bearing down on the San Francisco area from the Pacific, and there could well be weather delays and a lot of turbulence flying into SFO.

The turbulence wasn't that bad, although we were stuck in a holding pattern over San Francisco for well over an hour. And when we finally landed, we found that the floor of the FBO (fixed base operator) had been wet down by rain accumulating so deep on the sidewalk outside, that it had finally washed into the building. Ed, from M is for Mystery had called to see if I was really coming.

Last night, in San Mateo, we found some areas still without power (Shades of Seattle and Bellevue last December!). There were big downed trees lying on the sidewalk within a block of the bookstore. No wonder Ed was worried. Seventy mile an hour winds had been clocked on the Golden Gate Bridge. (Fortunately we didn't have to use that one until today when it's still rainy but not nearly as windy.)

So that's your current book tour weather report. Last night, in San Mateo I met a man who had visited Bisbee in the late seventies as a metal analyst. I've had e-mails and comments from folks who have said reading *Hand of Evil* alerted them to some of the things their kids might be finding on the Internet. One woman said she had never heard about blogging until she

read *Edge of Evil*, and now she has a blog of her own. And one man fired off a note complaining that my book had kept him up reading until 2:30 in the morning when he had to be up again at 5:15 to take his son to a wrestling match. Since there was no sense in going to bed for such a short time, he spent the next hour or so sending me a wonderful e-mail.

In other words, it's book tour time. I'm out here battling the weather and jet lag. I'm telling stories and hearing stories told to me by my fans, and hearing from fans--including ones who have tried the Sugarloaf Cafe sweet roll recipe that's posted on the website.

Hearing from my readers and fans is one of the things that makes being a writer the best job in the world. So keep those cards and letters coming.

PS If you have received a note from me addressed to you as Bill Nolastname or Becki Nolastname, it's because you haven't SENT ME YOUR LAST NAME!!! Right now, all of you Nolastnamers are stuck in the Ns. If you want me to use your real name, please send same.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* Tour, Episode 3**

Thursday, January 10, 2008

Last year, on our way north for the holidays we stopped off in LA for a book cover shoot for *Hand of Evil*. The results of that shoot are clear for all to see--the cover on the back that features me and our two red dog golden retrievers--Daphne, named for Daphne du Maurier, beside me on the bench, and white faced Aggie, named for Agatha Christie.

If you study Aggie's face, you'll see that thousand-yard stare in her eye. She had finally had her fill of photo-taking, and moments after this one was taken, she bolted from the frame and could not be persuaded to return.

Those of you who have been to book tour events, know a little about what happened. Because we were driving from Tucson to Seattle with our dogs, the publisher put us up at the W Hotel in LA where dogs are treated like honored guests with their own dishes, menus, beds, and pillow snacks.

Less than three weeks after this photo was taken we lost our Aga Dog to what we thought was an intractable case of pneumonia but which we now suspect as actually a severe fungal disorder. Dean Koontz's current book features a photo of him with his now-departed and much loved Trixie. I'm sure we both share similar thoughts whenever we see those two cover photos.

So Aggie's memory has been front and center while we've been on tour, more so this week in LA where we've been back at the W and staying in the same suite we once shared with Aggie and Daph.

The W. is a very nice hotel. It's trendy and has a lot of style. But for two-legged guests, it has a few drawbacks. For example, the bathroom mirror hits me just below my nose. This makes doing my hair a complicated piece of gymnastics. And it makes having a good hair day on the road more than a little difficult. (In that regard, I wouldn't be surprised that being on a book tour and running for office are quite similar. Just ask Hillary.)

Today is our last full day in LA. Tonight is Thousand Oaks. Tomorrow we fly to Tucson where we'll get to have TWO WHOLE nights in our own bed--well, in ONE of our own beds. We'll also have a chance to be reunited for a few short hours with Daph. By Sunday, though, we'll be back on the road again, humming a few bars of "By the Time I Get to Phoenix."

We're watching the Weather Channel and keeping our fingers crossed.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* Tour, Episode 4--Tucson**

Sunday, January 13, 2008

This is heaven. No, wait a minute. It's Tucson. In the middle of a book tour, we get to spend three whole nights in a familiar bed. That's real luxury. We can walk to the kitchen to get coffee. We don't have to get dressed and go down to a dining room. And our own coffee is ever so much better than what we get in hotels.

But being at home got to me. A little while ago, when Bill looked at his watch and said, we need to leave in forty-five minutes, I did a credible imitation of kids being told it's time to get dressed for Sunday School as in, "Do I HAVE to?"

After two solid weeks of being on tour, I'm used to the routine, but I'm also tired of it. I'm accustomed to spending quiet, well, relatively quiet, days in front of my computer and wearing my robe. For two weeks now, I've had to get up every day, dress acceptably, put on make up and deal with my hair. (Bill calls it "Heat it and beat it"--an old engineering term, evidently.)

So now, despite my whining, I'm off to Borders in Tucson dressed acceptably, I trust.

Several people have written to me the last couple of weeks and commented on the Internet predator aspect of *Hand of Evil*. I think parental units who actually read books--hard cover and soft cover--are less likely to be caught up in the electronic media. As a consequence, they may be unaware of how many

jerks there are out there who are preying on teenagers by pretending to be something or someone they aren't.

One of the people who wrote to me about it is a long-time fan and also a licensed peace officer in Texas. I'm including paragraphs from two of Rob Douglas's e-mails. One delineates the problem while the other suggests a possible solution.

First he wrote: Ironically enough, about the same time as the book came out and before I read it, I stumbled across pictures of a little girl I know on a public photo sharing website. She was nude and in various poses. Seeing them made me sick to my stomach, and I could not sleep for a week with those images in my head. I've been working with the FBI on getting her abuser locked up.

I love the Internet but I hate it too

In a second e-mail Rob suggested a place where concerned parents might go for help:

I really wish more parents took an active interest into what their kids did on the Internet and with cell phones. If anyone asks you about e-mail for kids, I researched and found this place called KidSafe: Their web site address is as follows: <https://www.kidsafemail.com> They filter 9 ways from Sunday, and parents can opt for a copy of all incoming and outgoing messages. They can also opt for approving of the e-mails before

the child sees them. There is also a setting that will allow only approved senders or recipients. My 10 year old and 12 year old cousins wanted e-mail, and I set them up using kidsafemail for Christmas. It is a really good site and pretty reasonable in price too.

I appreciate Rob's letting all of us know about this. Does it sound like censorship? Absolutely. That's what parents are for-- at least that's what mine always told me.

Off to Borders.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* tour, Episode 5--The Brown Palace**

Thursday, January 17, 2008

Twenty five plus years ago, when I first arrived in Seattle, I was pretty much a wreck. I had lived through some tough times by staying in a dying marriage far longer than I should have, and I had made an emotional wreck of myself in the process. I was at a low point--"lower than a snake's vest pocket," as my father would have said, when I heard about the Dale Carnegie course.

I signed up thinking a course in "winning friends and influencing people" would turn me into a better life insurance

salesman. It didn't. Instead, taking that course rebooted my life. It set me on a brand new path and got me started doing what I had always wanted to do which is write books.

For those of you who are curious about the Dale Carnegie Course, it actually *is* a class in public speaking with several large doses of the power of positive thinking thrown in on the side. Taking the class helped me learn to believe in myself again. And the public speaking skills I learned through that class--and also through a year's sojourn in Toastmasters--have served me in good stead when I've been off on the book tour trail.

In actual fact, I'm on tour right now and I don't have access to the Dale Carnegie book that I still have in my library, but my remembrance of it is that in one of the chapters it talks about the uselessness of worry because ninety percent of what you waste time worrying about NEVER HAPPENS!! As it turns out, Denver is a good case in point.

From the moment the book tour schedule landed in my e-mailbox and I saw DENVER!!!! was listed in the schedule for JANUARY, both Bill and I have worried about it. Would there be a blizzard and our plane wouldn't be able to get in? Would we need chains for the rental car? Are there chains for rental cars? Etc, etc, etc.

And so here we are in SUNNY DENVER! It is not snowing. There is very little visible snow. It's cold, yes, but we do not need chains. And all that time we spent worrying about it is . . .well . . . wasted.

So we'll be here until it's time to head for NYC and Long Island and Connecticut. And I'm just not going to think about the weather in those places. There's no point.

One book tour addendum. The people I'm hearing from are really liking Ali. Some of them still prefer Beaumont. Others prefer Joanna. And there are some who say the Walker books are tops. But the wonderful thing about my readers is that they've been willing to give Ali a chance. I really appreciate that.

Last night, in Phoenix, I had the honor of meeting Mini who is a great fan of mine. My personal position is that age is only a number and mine is unlisted, but I don't think Mini will mind if I spill the beans about her. She's due to turn 98 on February 1. And she'll be listening to *Hand of Evil* on CD.

Go, Mini! Happy Birthday!

My Blog

Hand of Evil Tour, Episode 6

The World Has Changed

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

People who have attended signings and heard me speak probably already know that as a little girl growing up in Bisbee, Arizona, I dreamed of one day being a writer. And you've probably also heard me mention that, as an English Major at the University of Arizona in 1964, I wasn't allowed in the Creative Writing program at the University because, as the professor said, I was a girl. "Girls become teachers or nurses," he told me. "Boys become writers."

At the time it was a bitter pill to swallow, but I was a girl from the Fifties. Those were the "good old days" when girls were expected to color inside the lines, play jacks or jump rope, and, once they were in college, be back in the girls-only dorm at 10:30 PM on weeknights. We were also required to wear dresses not pants to the dining room.

Bearing all that in mind, it's hardly a surprise that I did as I was told and became first a teacher and later a librarian. But the writing ambition would not be denied. Finally, at age 38, as a single parent with two small children, no child support, and a full-time job selling life insurance, I gave myself permission to

start writing. The first three novels--one that never sold and two that did--were written between the hours of 4 AM and 7 AM before I got my kids up to go to school and got me ready to go sell life insurance.

Last night at the Tattered Cover signing in Denver this all came back to me from two different directions. One woman, a little younger than I am, said she wanted to be an engineer and was accepted at an engineering school in 1969. After a year of attending classes where her professors wouldn't even acknowledge her existence, she dropped out. I'm sure she did something else for a living, but it was something that wasn't her first choice.

At the time I wasn't allowed in that class, I pretty much did the same thing. I didn't fight for entry into the class where I wasn't wanted. No, I simply gave up and became a teacher. (Girls from the Fifties weren't supposed to rock boats, either.)

Now, all these years later, I can say it's probably a good thing that I didn't. If I had been accepted into a class where the professor didn't want me and was determined that I fail, I probably would have--failed, that is, and it's possible that my creative energy would have been wiped out of existence in the process.

And then, of course, once I did start writing, I would have missed having a great character. It's no accident that the crazed

killer in my first thriller, *Hour of the Hunter*, turns out to be a former professor of Creative Writing from the University of Arizona!!!!!!

But the world has changed so much in recent years that I'm sure it's difficult for younger women to fathom how things really were "back then."

Last night, at the end of the talk and the signing, a woman came up to me and said, "Tonight it was either you or Madeline Albright, and boy did I make the right choice!" I was aware that Madeline Albright had a new book out, but, until that moment, I was unaware that we had countervailing signings scheduled for the same time at dueling Tattered Covers in Denver.

I'm glad the woman who came to see me was happy with her choice. I'm sure the subjects of our two talks were very different. Why wouldn't they be? I talked about growing up in Bisbee, Arizona, and gave my fans some sense of the background behind my various stories and characters. I'm a small town girl who has made good, but mine is still very much a small town world view.

I know little of Madeline Albright's background. After all, I didn't get to go to her event, but I'm sure her world view is vastly different from mine. After all, she was the first woman ever to serve as this country's Secretary of State. In the early Sixties, the possibility of a woman ever serving in that capacity

was beyond the realm of comprehension. But of course, Madeline Albright was only the first woman to do so. Now Condoleeza Rice is the second.

From a political standpoint you may agree or disagree with one or both of those women, but if you're like me, you can't help applauding that our country has changed so much that they've both had the opportunity to serve in such a fashion, in a position that that would have been routinely denied them years ago simply because they were women. Come to think of it, the idea of a woman running for president would have been dismissed out of hand as well.

In that regard, the world has changed remarkably, and it has changed for me as well. All these years later, I really am a writer and my competition for readers and audience in Denver last night was Madeline Albright. Whoa!!! For a girl from Bisbee, that's pretty amazing.

This morning my husband and I awakened in Denver and then flew to Salt Lake City. In our own corporate jet!! (That Creative Writing professor from the U of A is probably spinning in his grave.) What would have been a 7.5 hour, 500-plus mile drive turned into a pleasant one hour flight over a vast snowbound landscape. As we flew, I was glad we weren't driving through that desperately cold and desolate-looking territory. And I couldn't help marveling. Yes, the world really

has changed--for Madeline Albright and Condi Rice and for me as well.

That's not such a bad thing.

My Blog

Hand of Evil Tour, Episode 7-- The Airborne Dog and Pony Show Friday, January 25, 2008

Our book tour dog and pony show--without either a dog or pony in sight--has spent the last three days in Salt Lake City. On our way back to the hotel two nights ago, we missed our GPS directions by turning one block early.

Since we could see that street went all the way to where we needed to go, we used that one, ignoring our GPS Lady Director's barrage of firm and often repeated commands, "In 500 feet, turn left."

When we finally did turn left and approached the street "The Babe," as we call her, had wanted us to use all along, we found it shut down by a collection of fire trucks and emergency vehicles with flames from a roaring building fire visible from where we were half a block away.

The fire was a serious, four alarm blaze in an old deserted building in downtown Salt Lake which was still smoldering and smoking this morning when we left the hotel.

One of the complications of being in Salt Lake in January is it's also the time of the Sundance Film Festival. That meant restaurants were doing land-office business and so were the hotels. Our hotel was jammed with people waiting in line to be seated in the restaurant at ten o'clock at night. Fortunately, a local took us to a neighborhood standby, a place called Lambs where the food was great and inexpensive and there were no lines. (For you Seattle area locals, think the Dog House with better food and nicer carpet.)

But this morning, we hit the jackpot on Sundance Festival fall out. Instead of our usual Beechjet, Flight Options happened to have a chartered Gulf Stream sitting on the ground in Salt Lake City.

That's the aircraft we're using to fly cross country--a plane that comes with its very own flight attendant and china dishes. Hey, Toto, what was that you were saying about Kansas? We really aren't there. In fact, according to the monitor at the front of the cabin, we're somewhere over the middle of snowbound Nebraska.

Where but right here in the good old U.S. of A. could a little girl in pig tails and glasses who grew up in Bisbee, Arizona, grow up to have this kind of fun?

Is this a great country or what?



My Blog

Hand of Evil Tour, Episode 8--New York, New York

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

As a girl from “a small mining town in the West,” I always find New York City astonishing. The traffic seems nothing short of chaotic, but the drivers here all seem to know how to cope. So do the pedestrians. While locals go treading into the middle of intersections with complete aplomb, out-of-towners cling to the sidewalk and wait for the Walk light to appear before venturing off the curb.

Yesterday, during a radio interview, the host asked me, “Why do you seem to use journeys as a metaphor in your books?” That one stumped me, because I didn’t know I did.

I write mysteries. I seldom think about what I write in terms of metaphors. Those kinds of devices are usually confined to a whole other variety of literary endeavor. So I punted and told him, “Maybe it’s because my books are set in the West where places are a lot farther apart and going anywhere is a journey.”

Coming to NYC this week it took us two hours to travel the thirty-seven miles from Stamford, CT to the hotel in Manhattan. In Arizona two hours from Tucson takes you a hundred miles, either north or south--and you’re still in the same state. It takes five hours to drive from Seattle to Spokane and again, you’re in Washington all the way. To be sure, Seattle has its own traffic woes, including through New Yorkers’ eyes, not nearly enough taxis.

I suppose, coming to New York on a book tour is a lot like making a publishing pilgrimage because this is where it all starts. But the book tour trail is feeling long and long at this point. I’m very glad to have been here, but I’ll be glad to go home. By way of Georgia and Florida, of course. But we’re definitely on the downhill side now. And that’s a good thing.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* Tour, Episode 9--Warm and Sunny Florida, Monday, February 4, 2008**

We're in sunny Florida. At least that's what we've heard. I've ventured out of the hotel twice for events while Bill has been laid low in the room with a bug we evidently picked up somewhere along the way. We've coughed until we're literally blue in the face. But the show must go on even though I've advised attendees with suppressed immune systems to stay back.

Years ago we were early adopters of the portable GPS technology. It was something that could be moved from one rental vehicle to another and then could be used to direct us to the places we need to visit on tour--radio and television stations, hotels, bookstores, airport FBO's (Fixed Base Operators.) We found it was a great enhancement to have someone who wasn't me keeping track of the map and telling Bill several miles in advance, "In two miles keep right then exit right." And if, for some reason he failed to do so she would ring a bell and then patiently explain, "Off route, recalculating." Which she would do.

Our first Garmin wasn't what you could call "user friendly." It was a clunky design and the operating system required the brains of an electronic engineer to decode it. It came with a smoky-voiced female who sounded as though she had spent too many long nights hanging out in bars. We called her "The Babe."

Ironically, due to our colds, I now sound just like her.

Eventually The Babe bit it. The Garmin got dropped with some luggage and a little screw came loose inside, so sometimes it wouldn't work. At all. So it was intermittent but accurate. Not what you need when you're trying to stick to a complicated schedule. Bill used his Leatherman Tool to fix it in a hotel room, but our trust was damaged.

We tried replacing The Babe with a Magellan. It had no built in battery so there was no backup supply if the car had a disabled "no smoking" lighter plug. The interface was a lot quicker to use and the unit was significantly smaller and lighter. It also came with a weird gooseneck mount that looked like an elephant's trunk and vibrated so much on the road that it left the screen unreadable. That woman's computer-generated voice was terminally annoying, and instead of ringing a bell in advance of turns, she did a tuneless, computer generated but definitely female "doong, doong." The designer may have had a sense of humor, but that was embarrassing to listen to and the

database was inaccurate in several locations. The Magellan didn't make it through a whole tour.

For the past 18 months we have used another Garmin, a slick little NUVI that we can place on the windshield of rental cars (in every state except California) where GPS directions are desperately needed, (Sometimes we can find a flat space on the dash to hold it. Sometimes I hold it. Sometimes we stick it on the Hertz Neverlost Magellan.)

So we're packed now. We pack more slowly while coughing. In a little while we'll head for Fort Lauderdale. So we should at least SEE some sun.

P.S. It is NOT a dry heat.

My Blog

***Hand of Evil* Tour, episode 10--Home at Last Saturday, February 9, 2008**

The book tour is over. Going on tour is a wonderful opportunity and honor. It's also a tremendous amount of work, to say nothing of bodily wear and tear.

So far I've written two home again blog updates and tossed them both. Too whiny. For one thing, after a month plus on the road, I'm tired--physically tired. Bill and I both came down with terrific colds in the last week of the tour which meant that, with coughing overnight, neither one of us was sleeping at all to say nothing of enough.

But we're home now. Our dog is glad to see us and we're glad to see her. We're happy to be sleeping in our own bed, using our own clickers, and drinking our own coffee.

As Dorothy once told Toto, "There's no place like home!"

My Blog

***Cruel Intent* and Other Happy Thoughts**

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

For those of you who have been impatiently awaiting another blog update, here's why you haven't heard from me. I've been writing. There's only so much writing energy available at any one time, and writing books is what pays the bills. Writing the blog is fun, but if I'm forced to choose, writing a book is going to have to take precedence.

So today, in another half hour or so, I'll be loading the files for the next Ali Reynolds book, *Cruel Intent*, into an e-mail and shipping it off to my editor in New York. That doesn't mean I'm done with the book as in DONE DONE. Because by next week, the manuscript will be back in line-edited form with a listing of the changes my editor requires me to make.

My work life was complicated this week when I had to drop what I was writing to do an emergency case of copy-editing. In that instance, a previously copy-edited manuscript, one on which I had already done my share of the work, was shipped off to a book designer and was lost in transit. And had to be re-copyedited. On a deadline.

So, for all of you who think writers have perfect lives (Generally we do!) please remember that writers don't just work when they "feel" like it or when the muse deigns to drop by for a visit.

Real writers write. I wrote yesterday and the day before that and the day before that. No time off for good behavior. But the book is done and Bill has promised to take me out to dinner. Tonight, when we come back home, hopefully we won't have any unwelcome intruders in our house like we did last time. But wait. That's another story. And you can expect to see some of the fall out from that in *Damage Control*, the Joanna Brady book that's due to appear July 22, 2008.

Yes, I have been working.

My Blog

The Ghost and Mrs Muir Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Years ago there was a television series called *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. This was at a time in my life when watching television wasn't possible. Why not? Let's see, it could have been when I was dealing with toddlers. Or maybe it was when I was a working single parent. It could also have been when I was a newly married step-parent with a whole new set of challenges.

At any rate, I never saw the series. The title stuck with me because I knew a Mrs. Muir once. She was the wife of the head of the English Department at the University of Arizona when I worked there part time.

But that series came to mind this week when several different e-mails arrived asking more or less the same question which is to say: "Do you write your own books?"

The short answer to that question is: Yes. The long answer to that question is the same but more emphatic, as in YES!!!!!! (One of the girls I used to babysit back in Bisbee called exclamation marks "exciting marks. "That clever turn of phrase has stuck with me all these years later.)

I do write my own books. No one else writes them. There is no Ghost and Mrs. Jance. When people ask that question, I wonder if they envision our house resembling a Santa's Workshop with lots of little elves dashing around here and there, adding in words or even exciting marks for that matter.

I write the books. I write them from beginning to end. I start with a murder and end with the solution. I don't write pieces here and there and then stitch them together with literary duct tape.

When I'm out doing presentations, I'm almost always asked the "Does-she-or doesn't-she?" question with regard to outlining. I hate to be sexist but this question is almost ALWAYS asked by males in the audience.

I have only anecdotal evidence that leads me to believe that many of the people who ask that question are engineers! That's not to say that I'm taking anything away from what engineers do. After all, I'm writing this post on a WORKING computer and sending it to a WORKING INTERNET, neither or which would be possible if there weren't engineers in this world, busily doing their jobs.

But getting back to outlining. I think engineers like to boil things down to the essence of what's important. In math, that would be a formula. In writing, that would be an outline, where

you only write down the most important bits and then hang everything else on those branches, turning it into something not unlike a literary Christmas tree.

But my mind doesn't work that way, as anyone who has followed the tangent of this post can see without any effort at all.

So okay. I write my own books. I write my own blog postings. By myself! And I don't outline any of them.

And why don't I outline? For one very good reason. I can't deal with Roman Numerals. I have a terminal fear of Roman Numerals. My husband, a retired engineer, by the way, can look at those funny little letters on the credits of a movie or television show and can tell at a glance from all those Vs and Is and Xs exactly when the movie came out. He could probably tell me in Vs and Xs and Is exactly when *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* was on the air, too.

Not me. It turns out an understanding of Roman Numerals is one of the things I don't need to have in order to be a writer.

Is this a great job or what?

My Blog

Ain't Dead Yet!

Thursday, February 21, 2008

This morning a fan sent a note saying she had heard J.A. Jance died on February 1, 2008 and that she hoped that wasn't true.

I'm currently playing detective and trying to find out the source of that rumor, but I can say--as Mark Twain did once--that reports of my death are greatly exaggerated. It appears that some troublemaker has edited the Wikipedia Entry for my name including a death date. Kind of weird, but that article is not quite accurate anyway.

That's the way information is on the Internet. Some of it is correct and some is not. The reader should beware.

I'm definitely NOT dead. Tired, yes, because I just finished writing a book, but not dead.

Years ago, someone came up to me at a meeting and said, "I'm so glad to see Bill. I heard you got a divorce." Of course, that rumor wasn't true either. I did divorce my first husband but not the second one. Nor is the rumor true that claims a retired homicide detective writes my books and I'm just a front for him.

It's astonishing to realize that, by being a semi-public person, you're automatically subject to a certain amount of rumor-mongering speculation as well as being the target of a few bomb-hurling e-mail correspondents. Most people are polite, even when they disagree with something I've written, but some people are disagreeable when they disagree. I've decided life is too short to bother engaging with those folks.

So there you have it. J. A. Jance is alive and well, and if you hear anything to the contrary, please feel free to set the record straight.

My Blog

Leopard ate my blog! **Friday, February 22, 2008**

Who hasn't heard about the hapless kid who shows up at school with the lame excuse that the dog ate his homework? In our case, Leopard did it.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

For the past couple of years, Bill has used a Mac to manage website issues. (I can write e-mails on a Mac, and I admit I

really like some things about how mail works with the Address Book.) But there are some things about Macs that are downright mysterious.

For instance, somewhere on or around February 10th, a glitch happened in the e-mail program. The next time the Macs synchronized (I think about them sitting around mumbling in to their beards while our backs are turned!) something bad happened and the database--the database twenty-plus years in the making that started out as a phone list for publishing parties and is still--to this day--called the Dog House List--went from containing 6400 contacts to containing 34!!!!

That was a day when we sort of walked around the house, gritting our teeth and holding our collective breaths. Fortunately, there was one Mac that was left out of the synchronicity con-flab. It still had 6300+ names in it. That meant I had to go back through all the e-mails from February 10th on and put those back in, but at least the whole thing wasn't lost.

This morning we had a series of complaints from people saying, "What happened to the Blog?" and "What happened to the photos?"

The bottom line is, we don't know. People who tried to get to the blog postings were told they didn't exist. As for the photo

collection? It no longer had our photos--just the stock photos that are there to show what you can do.

In the last several days, we've had several Leopard updates from Mac, and I'm thinking one of those updates is the culprit here. But I write fiction.

The leopard definitely did it!

My Blog

Coffee Beans

Monday, February 25, 2008

Since I live in the Pacific Northwest, I'll bet everyone who read the subject line thought, "Right, another something about Starbucks." Well, yes and no.

When I first came to Seattle in 1981, my idea of coffee was Instant Yuban. (Does that still exist anymore?) The first time I ever saw coffee beans in the wild, as it were, was at a funny, warehouse-looking little shop just up from the Pike Place Market. At the time it was the one and only Starbucks establishment on the planet.

After surviving for years on Instant Yuban, Starbucks was a bit of a mouthful. I tended toward something a bit milder--Seattle's

Best Coffee. But definitely beans. Definitely stuff you grind up at home. None of my mother's pre-ground Folgers for me!!

Coffee is the stuff that fuels my brain and keeps my fingers at work on the keyboard, day after day, week after week, year after year. Over time, I'm sure I've drunk gallons of coffee. And, in the process of doing all that coffee-driven writing, I've been fortunate enough to develop fans, lots of them, who use the Internet to let me know what they think. Occasionally there's a bad apple in my e-mail barrel, but most of the time it's pretty positive stuff.

Several months ago, I heard from a fan who was elated to have scored an autographed copy of one of my books from a second hand store. Since my corporate policy is to leave no book unsigned, it's hardly surprising that someone would find an autographed book out there in the world. And since I always sign in red ink, I can sometimes personalize or else correct the personalization on those second-hand books and make it look seamless. Of course, from my point of view, I would prefer that readers buy and have NEW books signed, but then again, I've spent some time in my life when buying new books was outside the realm of my budget, so I don't quibble with my second-hand book fans. They're fans. They count.

Actually, years ago, a lady who worked in the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store told me that I was a star. In that store all the paperback books sold for twenty-five cents. Mine sold for a

dollar. “Most people seem to KEEP your books,” she told me. She wasn’t particularly happy about that, but I was.

But back to my fan. She purchased her prized autographed book and took it home, but when she removed it from the bag, it reeked so of cigarette smoke that she had to take it outside and leave it on the porch. It was at that point that she wrote to me, asking if I had any solutions.

I knew Febreze wasn’t going to do it. Wet books quickly become moldy books--and fat as well. It seemed to me that sprinkling the book with baking soda wasn’t going to do the trick, either. I’m on the board of the Friends of the Library at the University of Arizona, so I contacted the document archive folks in Special Collections and asked them for advice. *Nada*.

Then, one weekend, we saw a BBC America show that features two dotty women who travel the UK helping people clean up their impossibly cluttered and dirty households. One of their clients had been a lifelong smoker who had finally quit, but the smoke in her house still lingered. What did the cleaning ladies do? They brought in coffee beans, plates and plates of coffee beans, and let them soak up the dead smoke.

After seeing that, I wrote back to the lady and suggested she put the book in a Ziplock bag along with a handful of coffee beans and let them sit and perk for awhile.

“But I don’t drink coffee,” she objected.

“You don’t have to drink it,” I told her. “But go to the store and buy yourself a quarter of a pound of fresh coffee beans.”

Now that I’m thinking about it, the coffee beans probably cost more than the book.

That was back in September. I heard from her again just yesterday. She says the coffee beans worked.

Go Starbucks.

My Blog

WHEW!

Saturday, March 1, 2008

I’m sitting here staring at my computer and realizing that I’m DONE! *Cruel Intent*, the next Ali Reynolds book, went to New York two weeks ago. By Tuesday of this week, it was back with an editorial letter and the first set of edits. And then it was time for me to go to work on it. Again!

And so I went through the manuscript page by page twice, rereading each one and inserting two sets of editorial

suggestions as well as some of my own. All those went into the files on my computer. Once the changes were all made, I created a new master document and shipped it off to New York--via e-mail.

Having just written that paragraph, I was sitting here thinking about all the people who have read and reread the manuscript so far. And that made me wonder if perhaps, despite all that editorial vigilance, another stray Joanna might have wormed her way into THIS Ali Reynolds book. So I opened the master document and did a search. Sure enough. There was a Joanna hiding in plain sight on page 18.

Whew! That means I've saved myself considerable embarrassment--to say nothing of the cost of another Tiffany key ring.

And now what do I do with my time? Spend some time with kids and grandkids. Maybe read a book or two and then saddle up again, put my nose to the grindstone, my shoulder to the wheel, and all those other cliches that mean: **GO TO WORK!**

HarperCollins would like another joint Beaumont/Brady book. For 2009.

I'd guess I'd best get busy.

My Blog

Dedicated Drummer

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Years ago, when my husband had different house as well as different wife, he heard the central heating making a terrible noise, something that sounded like bad bearings and gears stripping. Being a conscientious DIY kind of guy, he immediately dismantled the furnace. Completely. But even with it stripped down to nothing and with the power turned off, the noise continued.

Baffled, he gave up and headed for work. Out in the driveway, the noise was even louder. There, on top of the chimney cap spark arrestor was a crazed woodpecker, pounding away like crazy on his own particular drum and letting the world know that this part of south Bellevue belonged to HIM!!!

After Bill's first wife died and I showed up, the woodpecker remained, raising the alarm each year when it was time for the birds and bees to spring into action. We've moved on, but he might still be there, tormenting whoever is living in that house now.

Last week, when Bill was working on the income taxes and I was working on editorial changes, we were both startled by a dreadful racket. We met in the family room saying, “What was that?” Sure enough. It’s a NEW woodpecker at our new house on an even bigger spark arrestor. He was there this morning. In fact, that’s what woke me up.

Clearly, he doesn’t pay ANY attention to Daylight Savings Time.

Say, you don’t suppose it’s the same woodpecker and that he followed us here, do you?

My Blog

It’s a mystery to me!

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

This was originally posted on the 5th of March. The fact that it is mysteriously blocked by our ISP time after time has finally dawned on us. I am upset that the innocent story about our dog caused this problem, but there’s nothing I can do. Here is the real posting...just a new title!!!

Today I am writing in praise of Daphne, aka Daffodil, our miracle dog who came back from a near-death experience with a

tough-to-treat fungal disorder a year or so ago. She also rose from her sick bed to announce with her fiercest bark ever that a middle-of-the-night intruder was in our house and in our bedroom. (You can expect to see echoes of that whole experience in the next Joanna Brady book, *Damage Control*, due to go on sale July 22, 2008.)

Daphne is now an only dog having lost her sister, Aggie, a year ago in December. We had thought about finding a companion dog for her, but puppies are a lot of work and very annoying to someone who is clearly enjoying her sole canine dotage.

But the reason I'm writing about Daph today is due to the fact that I slept late this morning. In my other life, when I had small children and a much different husband, it was clear that mine were the only ears that worked overnight. That first man in my life was utterly incapable of hearing a child crying in the middle of the night or early in the morning. It was no accident that they always came to my side of the bed.

Daph, it turns out, is also an early riser, but the wonderful thing about her is that she only goes to **BILL'S SIDE OF THE BED!!!** As far as she's concerned, when it's 5:30 in the morning, I'm not part of the picture or even on her radar. She goes straight to Bill and gives him cold-nosed bumps until he wakes up and pays attention. And it's not because she needs to go out. The doggy door works perfectly. She's just lonely and looking for suitable human companionship.

Yes, Daph is definitely a daddy's girl, and that's all right with me.

As soon as Bill tried to post Daddy's Girl the first time, our website went south. I heard from people all over the country saying that there was a problem. Bill tried the band-aid approach, but that didn't work. Since he was in the middle of getting the tax packet ready to take to the accountant, that had to take precedence.

It turns out the website needs a complete overhaul, and he's been working on it for several days. If you're reading this, that means it works.

Hats off to my IT guy.

My Blog

Here we go again!

Saturday, March 15, 2008

Readers who have followed this blog for a while have learned how the "writer's life" works--or at least, how this particular writer's life works. There are long periods of relative solitude and quiet interspersed with periods of frenetic activity.

Right now I'm in one of the periods of quiet, and since I'm starting work on the next book, that's a good thing. That also means that blog readers are in for a long dry spell since writing a blog posting about writing a book is about as exciting as writing a blog posting about watching paint dry. In other words, not exciting at all.

For the first time in a long time the baby has a name going in: *Fire and Ice*. It's scheduled to be a joint Beaumont/Brady book which will make it Beaumont # 19 or #17.5 if you're really picky. But all those .5 things become very confusing after a while, so this will be Beaumont APPEARANCE # 19 and Brady APPEARANCE # 14.

And whether you say it's an appearance or a book, it still amounts to my having written a lot of books about this pair of characters, with Beau having a five year drop on Joanna. After writing and thinking about these folks for such a long time, you'd think I'd be tired of them, but I'm not.

Today, after fighting my way through the "Prologue," it finally came time to start "Chapter 1." The whole time I'd been dealing with the "Prologue," I had been wondering who would grab the ball and run with it when the story started in dead earnest. Up until last night I still had no idea who would take the hand-off.

This morning when I hiked the story ball into the air, J.P. Beaumont caught it and took off with it, making me laugh as he did so. From the moment he spoke his first sentence and announced “I’m not a wimp,” he had me, and he still does. It’s comfortable being back in his head and around the folks--the long-running characters--who people his life.

I have a feeling that, when it’s time for Joanna to step onto the field, she’ll do the same thing--grab me and drag me on into the other part of the story.

For today, at least, writing a book that isn’t due to be published until 2009 is great fun. I have 3500 words in the bag right now with only 95,000 to go, but who’s counting? By the inch it’s a cinch; by the yard it’s hard.

I try not to think about all of the words at once--only the words in the next scene, the one that comes right after the one I’ve just written.

Between here and there, the beginning and the end, I’m sure there’ll be some tough times. There will be times when the story comes to a complete halt and won’t go any further. Trapped in total despair, my confidence will falter. I’ll doubt I’ll ever be able to finish the book, but then something will happen to spur me on, and I’ll be able to finish it after all.

Just don't be surprised if I'm off the blogging trail in the meantime. After all, there's only one of me, and only so much to go around.

My Blog

Curiouser, and Curiouser! **Wednesday, March 26, 2008**

After years of using Toshiba laptops, I'm now, gradually, venturing into the Mac world.

In some ways this is a good thing. The way the mail program works with the address program is a big improvement over what went before. But there continue to be glitches.

Yesterday, for no apparent reason, an e-mail that had a subject line of "How I met J.A. Jance" turned up in the spam folder on the Mac. Rather than opening it there I clicked on the message bar and told it to go to my in box. But instead, it disappeared from the Mac completely and never even touched down in the Toshiba. I can't answer it because I can't FIND it. Anywhere.

Today, an e-mail showed up on the Toshiba from someone who was asking to be added to my notification list. As a consequence, I decided to leave the message as new so I could

open it on the Mac and easily add the name to my address book. Except the message doesn't show on the Mac. Even though it's clearly on my new mail list on the Toshiba, it isn't on my new mail list on the Mac.

I'm married to a retired electronics engineer. If I bring this up to him, I know what he's going to say, one of several things: that it's highly unlikely; that it's operator error; that computers don't work that way--even when they do.

Twenty some odd years ago when he first met my dual floppy, 128 K Eagle and I told him it had to be booted twice or the cursor would freeze, he told me that was highly unlikely as well. Until the cursor froze on him, that is.

So today, I've hand transferred the address information from the computer where it was to the computer where I need it to be but where it wouldn't go. And why am I writing about this on my blog? If you've sent me an e-mail and I haven't replied, you may be stuck in some kind of cyber black hole between my two computers. Write again.

PS

After I wrote the preceding note and wished you all a Happy Easter, I went off to meet my daughter and grandson at Starbucks. (Where else? We live in the Seattle area, after all!)

When I came home, a printed copy of the e-mail I couldn't find, was right here waiting for me. Bill had found that missing e-mail for me. As for why the other one refuses to migrate from Windows to the Mac? That one's still a mystery, but the one I had wanted to read was worth finding and reading. Thank you, Mary, for writing it, and thank you, Bill, for finding it for me.

The latest in the computer wars happened yesterday when I tried to print Chapter 2 of the latest book (written in WordPerfect on the Toshiba) so Bill could read it. Part of the chapter printed properly--but then the printer ran out of ink. When we tried to print it again, after the ink cartridge was replaced, nothing happened. Worse than nothing, actually. Despite the file being there, what came out of the printer was. . .blank pages. Blank!!! Nothing there!!!

So while Bill tried reinstalling the printer and grumbled about the frustration of having to deal with Windows, I sat there and thought about the frustration of having to learn a new word processing program: As in, "If WordPerfect is that obsolete, what about me?"

But, like the weather in Seattle in March and April, eventually the sun came back out. It wasn't a Windows problem, it was a PRINTER problem. It was dirty. Needed to be cleaned.

Chapter 2 printed. Bill liked it. I'm working on Chapter 3.

Isn't technology wonderful?

Maybe.

My Blog

Know The Score

Saturday, March 29, 2008

I spent ten years in the life insurance business doing sales. One agency manager, Gilbert F. Lawson, used to recite these words at the beginning of every agency meeting: Know the score, keep the score, report the score--the score will improve.

I believe Gil lifted those words from some football coach or other. If I took the time to Google them, I could probably find out which one. But where the words came from isn't nearly as important as what they meant to me then and what they mean to me now. The truth is, they meant far more to me after I left the insurance business than while I was still in it.

For me selling life insurance was a means to an end. It wasn't what I had always wanted to do with my life, but it was a job I could do around my other job of raising children. It was also considered to be a traditionally "man's" job which meant that I

could earn enough money to support my family even as a “single mother.”

So I did that job and was glad to have it, but I didn't love it. I didn't dream about someday hitting the MDRT (the Million Dollar Round Table) which was one of the hallmarks of insurance-selling success. And that was something else Gil Lawson taught me and said often: If you can't dream it, you can't HAVE it.

So it was with no surprise and very little regret that I left the life insurance business in 1984 to launch off on chasing my lifelong dream of becoming a “best selling” author. And believe me, there were plenty of people who were more than ready to tell me it was all a pipe dream--that it wasn't going to work and would NEVER happen.

(A lot of the people who said that are no longer part of my life. They more or less drifted away. When you're trying to do the impossible, you're better off not surrounding yourself with people who are convinced you're going to fail.)

But suddenly, I was out of the world where, on Monday mornings, everyone had to show up in public and have an accounting of what they had or hadn't accomplished in the previous seven days. Either they had bound applications (which is to say applications accompanied by a check) or they didn't.

Off on my own in a world with just me and my newly purchased Eagle computer, I didn't have anyone to report to but me. And, until I had that first two-book contract complete with accompanying deadlines, I didn't have any reason to believe that what I'd set myself to accomplish would some day come to fruition.

I was left wondering how to keep track? How would I know that I was actually doing this new "job" when I didn't have anyone to tell me so? That's when I remembered those all-important scorekeeping words.

Twenty plus years later, the score for today is 11,468. That represents the number of words that are currently in the book I'm writing, and it amounts to 12.08% of the total in a prologue as well as 2.3 chapters. How do I know all this? It isn't magic--it's math.

My publisher wants my books to be between 95,000 and 100,000 words. I could probably write a few more than 100,000 but not very many. If I ooze a few thousand additional words into the 100,000 plus category, my books will have to be shipped in a non-standard box. Or else the publisher will have to use smaller print. I'm quite happy with the standard box. Am I offended that the size of the shipping box dictates the length of my books? I'm not, actually. After all writing is a business and shipping is a vital part of that business.

Do I feel that my artistic sensibilities suffer because of that limitation? Let me ask you this: Was Michelangelo offended by the size of the ceiling on the Sistine Chapel? I don't think so. That was the size of the area he was supposed to paint. He had to design his work to fit inside those boundaries--those four walls. It's the same thing for me. The size of my ceiling is the 100,000 words I'm allowed to use in any given book.

And so, every day, as I write, I count the number of words. That tells me how I'm doing. If the number of words is getting larger--I'm making progress. If I'm up in the area of 75% or so, I know I'm about to step on the banana peel of the story and, from then on, the writing will be fun and relatively easy. Starting a book, on the other hand, makes for much slower going.

When I talk about this in public, I often find people in the audience who are offended!!! by the fact that I count the words. They want the writing experience to be more "artistic" than that and no doubt more magical as well.

But I'm a writer. I write my books one word at a time, and today I made it to 11,468. Maybe tomorrow I can make it to 13,000.

By the inch it's a cinch. By the yard, it's hard. Come to think of it, I believe that's something else Gil taught me.

My Blog

Happy Birthday

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Last weekend we threw over the traces. In honor of Bill's birthday, we headed to Anaheim and Disneyland. We were a party of twelve--two grandparents, four kids, and six grandkids--three of which are five or under. The older granddaughters--10, 12, and 14, were a big help with the younger ones. Even so, wrangling that many people is a lot like nailing JELLO™ to a tree.

Luggage, cars, meals for that many? I know now why I'm an author and NOT a tour guide operator.

My first experience with Disneyland was as a high school sophomore when our Senior Girl Scout troop went there. What I learned during my first trip to Disneyland was that I'm not good on Teacups. I quickly turned green and spent most of the afternoon recovering in the infirmary.

So that lesson was still with me this time. I knew better than to get on the Teacups or the roller coaster or any number of other rides. I also sat out the Merry-Go-Round. What I did instead was people watch. For hours on end.

I grew up in southern Arizona at a time “Anglos” sat in one part of the Lyric Theater and “Mexicans” sat in another. Was it segregation? Absolutely. Did we call it that? No. It was the “way things had always been.”

And then the world began to change. Martin Luther King had a dream--one that went beyond the labels of black and white and brown. He also had a point.

Things changed. Before the Lyric Theater closed for good, anyone could sit anywhere. In the early seventies, some friends who were also teachers on the reservation, adopted an African-American baby. When they drove across country to show their new daughter to family members, they were astonished--and so was I--to learn that there were restaurants and hotels in this country of ours where they were refused service because of the color of their baby's skin.

If you listen to what's being said in some of the current political commentary, you'd think we were still stuck sitting in different sections of the Lyric Theater. Those folks need to lighten up. And they need to go to Disneyland, stay off the rides, and pay attention to the world that passes by.

The people going there to have fun come in all shapes and colors. One group of teenaged girls, clearly pals and all wearing short-shorts despite the chilly weather, included several

African American girls, an Asian girl, and several whites. And what was the big discussion as they walked past? What are we going to ride next?

There were plenty of mixed message marriages. And plenty of families like ours--grandparents proudly escorting beloved children who had come into their lives through orphanages in countries far away--children who had stepped out of improbable poverty into the magic of the light-show parade. I saw India Indians in saris and Muslim ladies with scarves on their heads. And kids being kids--a tired toddler's meltdown is the same in any color or any language.

I remember the guy with nose rings and waist length red hair in a pony tail who was patiently pushing his toddler's stroller. There may be uninvolved fathers out there, but people who think the world hasn't changed for the better need to see how much care-taking responsibility many daddies devote to their little ones in this day and age.

And then there are the people on their electric carts. In the old days, Disneyland would have been a closed book for many of those folks, but not any more. Someone invented electric carts and Disneyland is renting them--hundreds of them a day. A little dose of capitalism anyone?

And then there's garbage--and how little of it ended up on the sidewalks. For all those thousands and thousands of people, I

saw one after another carefully taking their trash to the proper receptacles.

I saw parents patiently teaching their children to wait for other riders to get off elevators and rides before climbing on. I saw them teaching children to stay out of other people's pictures and to be nice to the costumed characters. I saw children learning how to get along in the world--and how to be better people.

I'm glad we went to Disneyland. And I'm glad I didn't ride those rides. What I saw was wonderful. And I'm glad to know the world has changed.

We have, too.

My Blog

Wisdom and Writing **Thursday, April 17, 2008**

Years ago, in another world, my first husband, who had been allowed into the Creative Writing program that was closed to me, told me, "There's only going to be one writer in our family and I'm it."

And so, while I wasn't writing in favor of keeping my marriage afloat, he did write. Usually after a tippie or two. Or maybe three. He never published anything, but he did write. Would what he wrote have been publishable if he hadn't been stewed when he was writing it? Could be? I don't know. There's no way to tell.

This morning I had my wisdom teeth removed. All four of them, and I had it done a number of years after most people do. As someone with a lifelong fear of dentists, it took some time to get beyond my instinctive objections. So this afternoon I'm on painkillers. Real solid pain killers.

I thought about going back to Chapter 5 of the book I'm currently writing. But then, as my mother would have said, I had another think coming.

So I'm writing this post instead. We'll see if the webmaster considers it worthy. If not, you won't ever see it, and maybe that's just as well.

My Blog

A Real Rhubarb!

Saturday, April 19, 2008

It's snowing outside right now--on the third weekend in April in Seattle!!!! This is why I'm usually in Arizona in April, but construction issues continue to plague our lives so we're here, and the sun is elsewhere.

But regardless of the weather, I know it's spring because yesterday I baked two rhubarb pies.

In 1974 when I moved to Washington state the first time, we bought a farmhouse on twenty acres in the little town of Pe Ell. The edge of the property was the Chehalis River. I haven't been back there since last winter's catastrophic floods. I hope the house is still standing, and I worry about some of the neighbors.

Sophie, a woman with an indecipherable Polish last name, was my neighbor there. She lived across the street in a small, frame house with her wheel-chair bound husband who augmented his small military pension by repairing lawn mowers and small engines.

I came to the Pacific Northwest from the desert, a place where things only grow if you plant, tend, and water them. In Western Washington, the watering pretty much takes care of itself. With that kind of background, I was amazed by the abundance of wild black berries that grew everywhere and by the dense clump of rhubarb that grew just outside my backdoor with no encouragement from me whatsoever.

Seeing the rhubarb reminded me that, when I was a girl, my mother used to make rhubarb sauce, but I had no idea how to follow suit. So one day, when Sophie came over for coffee, I asked her what I should do with all that rhubarb. “Make pie,” she said. “And how do I do that?” I asked. “Oh,” she said, in her distinctive accent, “you take some rhubarb, you know, and some sugar and some Tapioca and you put it in a pie.”

That wasn't exactly a complete recipe for a pie-baking neophyte, but when I looked in my Better Crocker cookbook and found a reasonably complicated recipe that called for orange peel and flour, Sophie's suggestion of adding tapioca seemed like a good solution.

So I made a pie crust from scratch. I cut up four cups of home grown rhubarb, added two cups of sugar, and three tablespoons of Tapioca. Then I mixed it all together and stuck it in the oven to bake. I did that by following the cook book directions. I wrapped the edges of the pie tin in aluminum foil, and then increased and decreased the temperature. Remember I was

doing this in the “old days,” the pre-convection baking days, when that’s what you had to do in order to make sure the bottom pie crust was cooked through without burning the top one to a crisp.

Yesterday there was fresh rhubarb sitting there in the vegetable section at my local QFC. I brought some home. I’m a cheater. These days I see no sense in making a pie crust from scratch when I can just unroll one of Pillsbury’s pre-made ones. But we chopped up the fresh rhubarb and added in Sophie’s recommended sugar and the Tapioca. I stirred all that together and dropped it into my pre-made shells. (If you’re going to try this on your own, be sure to put the pie on a foil-lined cookie sheet because you’re NOT going to want to have burned rhubarb leakage all over the bottom of your oven!)

I baked the pies for ten minutes at 400 degrees and for fifty minutes at 375. Four hundred is twenty-five degrees lower than my old tattered Betty Crocker cookbook recommends, but since I used a convection oven, the bottom crust cooks at the same speed as the top one.

So thank you, Sophie. Almost thirty years later, your verbal recipe still works. The pie was simple and delicious, and no matter what the weather is doing outside, I know spring has sprung.

My Blog

A Happy (Sad) Unbirthday Monday, April 21, 2008

Today would have been my first husband's 70th birthday. He missed it--by 28 years.

In those twenty-eight years he's missed a lot more than birthdays. Seven presidencies, for example. It turns most of those he wouldn't have liked. Bill Clinton? Yes. The others? Not so much.

He died when television remote controls were in their infancy. If he fell asleep watching *Starsky and Hutch* or *Police Woman*, the TV stayed on all night. (For a long time after our divorce, I wasn't able to sleep without a television show droning in the background.)

He had shuffled off this mortal coil before the idea of video recording reached the living rooms of regular folks. I have a feeling that, given a choice between VHS and Beta, he would have backed Beta. The man had an innate ability to pick the losing horse. He missed out completely on CDs and DVDs and DVRs. He missed out on High Def and flat screens and on cell phones as well. But we all know that missing out on those

technological advances is really trivial. There are other far more important things that make his early death a tragedy.

He didn't see his children's school graduations. He didn't walk his daughter down the aisle. He never held a grandchild on his knee or received a sloppy wet "bye-bye-love" from a bright eyed grandson, either.

When people in their twenties or thirties or forties die of cancer or of undiagnosed heart ailments, those are tragedies, but no one blames the person who died. Dying of cancer or a heart attack isn't considered to be your fault. Dying of an addiction problem is--there's a certain willfulness presumably involved in those deaths that doesn't apply to the others.

Yes, I know drug and alcohol addictions are physical ailments, but I also know they're also treatable. Some people after coming face to face with their demons manage to stop using and then go on to live constructive lives. My first husband didn't do that. He didn't stop drinking because he either couldn't or wouldn't or both. He died of cirrhosis of the liver at age 42.

In the last few years of our marriage, when I could no longer deny the impact drinking was having on our lives, I finally went to Al-Anon and learned what I could about the disease. Everything I read or heard said that the drinker had to decide for himself. He had to want to quite and that only when he finally hit bottom would he be motivated enough to turn his life around.

I thought that losing me and losing his kids would finally get his attention and he'd get better. That didn't happen, either. He died eighteen months after our divorce was final.

In those last few years, when my only nighttime companion was sleeplessness, I read the Bible late at night, and there was one passage that leaped out at me. Deuteronomy 30:19: I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life.

At the time, I didn't know how close my husband was to dying. I had no idea, at least not consciously. But those words grabbed me. I closed the Bible that night determined to choose life, and I've been choosing it ever since. I chose life. He did not. His life ended. Mine changed.

In my life since then, the woman he once said would never be a writer has gone on to write 40 books. I met, fell in love, and married a good man. I have children and grandchildren I never would have had if I'd stayed married to my first husband. And the second life he might have had--could have had--he missed. Completely.

On what would have been his 70th birthday, I'm saddened that Jerry Janc couldn't find a way to choose life. I think he would have liked having grandchildren, and I know for sure he would have loved having a remote control.

My Blog

The Long Slog

Sunday, April 27, 2008

When I write, I count the words. Every word in every chapter. My publishers expect me to write books that are between 95,000 and 100,000 words. (If they're any longer than that, the print has to get smaller or the shipping boxes have to get larger. For all of you who wonder whether or not the publishers dictate what goes in the books, here's your answer: That many words-- in whatever combinations and in whatever storyline I choose.)

So I count the words and keep a word count spread sheet. I know, for example, that the chapters in the book I'm currently "working on clock in at 5145 words. This is probably a little high since the word count on the first few chapters is skewed by the fact that the first chapter includes both the "Prologue" as well as "Chapter 1."

You're probably thinking, "Why would she do that? Why not separate them?" It's actually an artifact of using WordPerfect to create the master documents, and I'm apparently too stubborn to

change to some other program. That most likely means I'm an artifact as well, but let's not go there.

So I count the words. That way I know how I'm doing. I know whether or not, with the deadline looming, I'm making any forward progress. I know, for instance, that the first twenty-percent of a book is the hardest part to write. The next sixty-percent is marginally easier. The last twenty-percent, what I call the banana peel, is usually relatively easy. By then, all the story line and characters are in place, and all I have to do is ride the story to the end.

But from twenty-percent to eighty is what I call the "long slog." While I'm writing that part of the book, I'm trying to see how it all comes together. I watch what the characters say and do and try to understand their part of the story. Yes, I know this probably sounds odd to people who don't do it. And maybe it even sounds odd to people who do. But the story, although it comes from me, isn't me. And what I discover about the characters--and about myself along the way--is sometimes surprising.

For example, I was writing the second Joanna Brady book when I realized that what had happened to her father and secondarily to her had also happened to me. Both fathers, the fictional one and the real one, had come to Bisbee to work in the copper mines. When they stopped working for Phelps Dodge, they left their children--Joanna in fiction and my brothers and sisters and

me in real life--in a sort of social limbo. We weren't exactly connected to the children of the town's white collar workers but we weren't exactly miners kids, either. Being outside the social mainstream turned me into a writer and turned Joanna into a sheriff. But I didn't know that going in. I learned it while we were both in process.

Which brings me to the day before yesterday. A character in the book I'm writing said something that made me laugh and something that made Beau laugh as well. Then I got stuck. Why had she said that? What was her motivation? I spent two days working on that chapter before I finally figured it out. You're probably thinking, "Wait a minute. What do you mean it took that long for you to figure it out?" You'll just have to trust me on that. It did.

So now I'm almost at thirty percent. 29.43% to be exact. That's 27,959 words and counting. But the book has to be completed before the next Joanna Brady book comes out at the end of July. So I'd better keep my nose to the grindstone, my shoulder to the wheel, and figure out what happens next.

Why?

Because my readers want to know what's going to happen and so do I.

My Blog

Watching the Weather Friday, May 2, 2008

Two weeks ago, when it snowed in Seattle, it somehow didn't occur to me that it would be 90 degrees when we stepped off the plane in Oklahoma City where I'm scheduled to be the keynote speaker for the OWL (Oklahoma Writer's League) Conference. I figured it meant that I had brought along the wrong clothes for this appearance and for Books in Bloom in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, on Sunday.

We scored on our parking place for our rental car, finding the one non-handicapped spot just outside the front door of the hotel. A while after we checked in, we went down to dinner.

We had a light dinner in the bar. In the course of that, I did notice that the television set over the bar seemed to be permanently stuck on weather. No news, just weather, but we weren't close enough to hear what they were saying, and we didn't have any idea about the maps the weathermen were standing in front of and waving at. (Yes, I know prepositions are NOT to end sentences with, but you try fixing that one and send it to me.)

When the bartender brought our food, I asked him. “Do we need to be worried about what’s on the TV?” He didn’t look back at the television set before he answered. NO, HE TURNED AND LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW!!! This is NOT a good sign!!

And then he said, “Yes and no.”

What???

“This building contains the main municipal shelter,” he said. “It’s right out that front door and to the left. No worries.”

A few minutes later, someone came through the bar saying, “We have an F-1 tornado coming this way. Please go to the shelter.” We asked the bartender if we should pay up. “Naw,” he said. “And take your drinks with you. You might need them.”

So we walked to the shelter. Bill didn’t actually say this aloud, but I’m sure he was thinking that old familiar line, “It’s another fine mess you’ve gotten us in.”

It didn’t last long. When they gave us the all clear, we returned to the bar. On the way, the wind was gone but it was still hailing--golf ball sized hail. I’ve heard stories about those, but I don’t think I ever quite believed them. Now I do. I saw them on the news last night--five pieces of hail and one very real golf ball, all the same size.

Have we gone out to check on the car. Not yet. Yesterday when I rented it, the young man asked me if I wanted the extra insurance. “Absolutely,” I told him. “All of them.” We’ve learned from our mistakes.

Years ago, on a book tour we dashed into a hotel in downtown Portland for a quick lunch, leaving the publisher’s rented car with the valet. When we came out ready to rush to the next event on our very tight schedule, the valet said, “Your car has been in an accident.” More words you DON’T EVER want to hear.

The valet had driven out into the path of an arriving taxi, and the impatient passenger in the cab had opened his door too soon. In the process he damaged every single panel on the driver’s side of our vehicle. It got straightened out eventually, because the publisher’s insurance handled it. But there were a lot of complicated procedures Bill had to handle that day while I was doing appearances and signings.

So now we take ALL insurance coverages offered. And regardless of the condition of our rental car sitting down there in that primo spot, we’re covered. But I’d better go check and make sure it’s drivable and capable of getting us to Eureka Springs tomorrow, but you’ll never guess where the severe storm warning is right now. Yup. You guessed it.

We'll just keep our fingers crossed.

PS This didn't get posted until we had a better web connection...sorry for the inconvenience. And, yes, our rental car was drivable, but the windshield was cracked and there were pock marks of hail damage on EVERY surface. I'm so glad we signed on for the extra insurance.

In this instance we're golden.

My Blog

TP

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

Yes, today's blog post will be a meditation on TP (Yes, that TP!) and other related issues. For those of you who are convinced this is a (t)issue not worthy of discussion, I have three words: "See you later." Perhaps you'll find a post more to your liking some other time. For the rest of you back to the (t)issue at hand.

I spent eighteen years of my life with a man who was constitutionally incapable of changing the toilet paper roll. If one roll spun down to the cardboard, he never noticed. Oh, maybe he could stoop to bringing a new roll out from under the

bathroom sink, but after he used what was needed, the roll ended up on the flushing tank to await my attentions.

This was, I point out, the old days of toilet paper holders where they all came with little interior springs which would, with no provocation, shoot across the room and maybe into the sink or the tub, leaving you sitting there--me being a woman, a squatter rather than a pointer--with the remaining pieces still in hand.

So having lived that way for so many years, it was a revelation to me when I married my second husband who is not only fully capable of changing the toilet paper. He actually DOES SO! For women out there who think this is unbelievable, I'll add one more astonishing detail. He actually puts down the toilet seat. WITHOUT BEING ASKED! He just does it. For any of you ladies out there who have suffered the indignity of a backside dunking in the dark of night, you know what a wonderful thing it is to have a man who does this--without being threatened with bodily harm.

I don't suppose putting down the toilet seat or changing the toilet paper roll is the subject of any discussions in pre-marital counseling sessions. (Since our only pre-marital counseling session was actually the morning of the wedding, we didn't discuss any of this then either. So far, going on twenty three years into the process, our lack of a more comprehensive pre-marital discussion doesn't seem to be hurting us.)

Okay then, some of you may be thinking to yourself, if her life is so perfect, why's she bringing this issue up at all?

In our homes, we've come up with the perfect (t)issue solution. All of the toilet paper holders in our bathrooms are the springless kind. They all have a simple arm. You take the toilet paper roll off or you put it on and no one is in danger of having their eye put out by flying spring-loaded weapon of mass destruction. I can tell you the process is so simple, so easy, both men and women can do it with virtually no effort. Sorry GIECO, even a cave man could do it.

But right this minute, we're staying in a hotel--an otherwise nice hotel--that comes equipped with the spring-loaded kind of toilet-paper dispenser. I can see that the roll is getting low, and I suspect we're both being parsimonious about using it. Neither one of us wants to be the one who rolls off that final square of tissues.

This is one (t)issue I'll be happy to let the maid handle.

After we've checked out and gone.

My Blog

Annual Cancer Fighting Flamingos Letter Saturday, May 10, 2008

This blog update comes to you written by my daughter.

Dear Cancer Fighting Flamingos and friends,

It's that time of year again—time to have our Cancer Fighting Flamingos take to the sky as part of the Relay for Life, the American Cancer Society's major fund-raising effort.

We started this team seven years ago to honor my husband, Jon Jance, as he fought a valiant battle with malignant melanoma. Friends and family started the silly tradition of using pink flamingos and wearing Hawaiian shirts to bring light and humor into a very dark time in our lives. Our little team of flamingos has raised over seventy five thousand dollars the last six years.

Many of you know that Jon finally lost his battle on August 11, 2006. Our son Colt was nine months old when he lost his Daddy—way too young for Jon and for Colt. I think God had a plan for us. He knew Jon was coming home and blessed us with a little boy who came to us just as Jon was leaving. Colt is the spitting image of his Dad.

Losing Jon has not been easy on any of us. Last year, two weeks before the first anniversary of Jon's death, my Mom was diagnosed with cancer. This was a terrific blow to our family especially coming on the heels of Jon's loss. Mom has had surgery and several follow ups. So far, due to early detection and treatment, she's doing fine.

For me, this was especially hard because I have a beautiful sweet son who lost his Daddy to the big "C" and now his Grandma was starting down the same road all before Colt's second birthday. It seemed so unfair. We're glad her cancer was caught early. So far so good. This year Mom gets her own survivor shirt.

So why do I still gather pink flamingos and Hawaiian shirts now that Jon is gone? Because it's what Jon would want us to do. Because cancer is still part of my everyday life as I try to raise my son by myself and face another day without Jon.

The Relay this year is on June 7, 2008 at Redmond High School in Redmond, Washington. This will be Colt's third Relay. I hope that makes his Daddy proud.

Please help us honor Jon and now my Mom. You can send donations to the address below. And if you'd like to be part of the walk, please contact me at the address below as well.

Sincerely,

Jeanne T. and Colt Jance
7403 134th Ave NE
Redmond, WA. 98052
425-736-8746

Now for a PS from Mom, or G. as Colt likes to call me. When I made arrangements to attend Murder in the Grove in Idaho, I didn't worry about the Relay. In the past, it's always been in May when it's raining. This year they moved it to June. So I won't be there in person to walk and to pick up my survivor shirt, but I expect I'll be wearing it--in Idaho.

My Blog

The Devil is in the Details **Thursday, May 22, 2008**

I've been writing about J.P. Beaumont since 1982. Joanna Brady dates from 1990. The Walker books started in 1989. Ali Reynolds, the new girl on the block, has been around for four.

The problem is that each set of books comes with a set of characters most of whom were alive for a number of years before the books began. Beau wasn't a newborn when I started

writing about him. He was a forty-something homicide cop. So he had a history. And a family. And the characters he interacts with have histories and families as well.

So you take all that and multiply it by four, and you have my life in a nutshell. Here are all these people--people I made up--and it's my job to try to remember everything about all of them. It's a daunting proposition. It might help if I had a photographic memory, but I don't.

Every time I start a new book with a particular character, I open my name file for that series. I started doing this on Joanna Brady # 2. In my name file, I keep track of each character's peculiarities, the major ones anyway--their weapons; their vehicles; their marital status; how old they are; etc.

The reason I started doing in the first place was running out of Random Access Memory in my head. And I did it AFTER Joanna # 1 because that's when I changed over to a different word processing program. (When I just reread that sentence, it turns out I wrote 'world processing program' which may have been a typo but isn't all that far from wrong.)

I've learned, however, that in keeping track of my characters' doings, I'm definitely not infallible.

Several years ago, when I was doing a book tour for a Joanna Brady book, I saw a couple standing several places back in line.

The two of them, a man and a woman, were smiling at me. I mean REALLY smiling like they'd just been told a joke that was hilariously funny. When they reached the head of the line, they told me that they had read ALL the Joanna Brady books (There were eight of them at the time.) in the previous three weeks! "Did you know," the woman asked me, "that there's someone in this book who died in *Desert Heat*?"

I didn't want to believe it, and I couldn't look it up in my computer. In order to check, I had to get a copy of *Desert Heat* off the shelf and read it. I'm sad to say the people standing in line were absolutely right. It took me several books to paint my way out of THAT corner. I did so by introducing a namesake of the dead guy. So far no one has made any additional complaints on that score.

And there's a possibility that I need to have a comprehensive name file as well, one that spans all the books, since I've evidently used some names over and over. I believe Bree is one that has inexplicably turned up time and again.

This week another sharp-eyed reader caught me out yet again. This time something that was a throw-away line in one book was totally disregarded in another book that was published several books later. I'm not going to tell you what the error was or where it was. If you find it, I'll let you know.

But in the meantime, please be patient. If I don't keep every detail absolutely straight in all my books--the 39th is due out this summer--feel free to let me know, but please don't let me have it. Be nice. The guy who wrote to me this weekend was right but he was also very diplomatic about telling me I was wrong.

Please remember: I'm only human after all--and I'm writing as fast as I can.

And by the way, as of today I'm 51.4 % done with the next book, but who's counting?

My Blog

Holding Our Breath **Saturday, May 31, 2008**

We're in a state of flux here at the moment, so blog posting is going to be VERY light for the next little while. It's all good flux, but it's still flux. Please be patient.

The tour schedule for *Damage Control* has now been posted on the website. Once the schedule goes up there are always some small tweakings, but it's good to go.

I know from some of your comments on the blog that people who are blog readers aren't necessarily in my new book notification list. If you want to be on it, please send me your name, city, and state so I can let you know if I'm going to be doing appearances in your area.

In the meantime, I'm moving forward with *Fire and Ice*, next summer's book for HarperCollins. I'm also doing galley proofs on the next Ali Reynolds book, *Cruel Intent*. Another reason for very light posting.

And for those who are interested in knowing the score, keeping the score, and reporting the score, the first draft of *Fire and Ice* is now 60.09% finished. Inching along, but definitely moving in the right direction.

On more thing. It's off the subject, but people keep writing in asking for the Sugarloaf Sweet Roll recipe. Just click on the Sugarloaf Cafe page and scroll down.

It's there.

My Blog

Bi-Lateral Total Knee Replacement
Tuesday, June 17, 2008

I don't know how many of you have ever watched the *Red Green Show*. It's on PBS, and it's filmed in Canada. The set is a lodge where only men are members. And only men are on the show. The main character has one red suspender and one green suspender, hence the name. At the end of each episode, they go downstairs for the meeting which is called to order then the attendees are encouraged to recite the "Men's Prayer." It goes like this: I'm a man but I can change. . . if I have to. . . I guess.

I've spent 23 years married to this particular man. He has complained occasionally that his knees hurt, but that's about the size of it. I give him Aleve, he doesn't complain. End of story.

This spring I asked him if he wanted to go to Monaco for the Formula 1 race. He said, "No." Which sort of annoyed me. We were supposed to go to England in May, but he wasn't enthusiastic about that, either. So we canceled the trip to England and took the kids and grandkids to Disneyland for Grandpa's birthday. The trip turned out to be a wonderful horrible thing. Because being there with the kids was wonderful, but being there with Bill was not. His knees were in dreadful shape--so dreadful that he couldn't tough it out and hide it.

There was a six lane street next to our hotel that we had to cross in order to get to the park entry. It had a twenty-second crossing light. We had to step off the curb the moment it turned green, and even then, it took us the whole twenty seconds to make it

across. And then he needed to sit down, but there was no sitting place. He ended up leaning on a garbage can.

Fifty feet was about all he could do at a time, and there aren't sitting places every fifty feet inside Disneyland or outside it. Several of our kids suggested getting him a cart--but in Bill's mind, carts are for people who have given up. For people who have no hope. So we didn't get a cart. And we saw a lot less of Disneyland than our kids did.

When we came back home, the severe pain had induced a case of hives. We went to the doctor ostensibly about the hives, but there was an X-ray of Bill's knees. Next came a referral to an orthopedic surgeon. He said, "Yup, you need it. Which knee bothers you most? We'll do that one first." But it turned out both knees were equally bad.

So last Tuesday, the webmaster had dual knee replacement surgery. Today at the hospital I saw him go up and down steps--three times with two rails and three times with one rail and one cane. I saw him get in and out of a regular bed. I saw him get in and out of a fake car door. I saw him walk with one cane. Yes, there was some pain, but Bill says that the momentary pain is less than the pain he has lived with all these years. **WITHOUT LETTING ME KNOW HOW BAD IT WAS!!!**

So I'm writing this to my male readers who have been hiding their severe pain by saying "No." And I'm writing this as a

wake-up call to my female readers whose husbands may have become more and more stationary without necessarily mentioning what's really going on.

Yes, we have a long way to go with physical therapy. And it isn't all going to be a walk in the park. (Oh, yes it is! Many walks in many parks if it all works out for me.) But if you're reading this, my webmaster is home with his two new knees, and we'll be going to a Formula 1 race next year or I'll know the reason why.

Thank you Dr. Auld. You are our personal miracle worker.

My Blog

The Demented Screamer Tuesday, June 17, 2008

I don't ever remember watching golf until the year Tiger Woods won his first Masters. It was wonderful to watch that amazing young man playing so masterfully, if you will.

At that point in my life, Bill had started playing a bit of golf but I was blissfully ignorant and didn't know a break from a bogie. I was one of those people who, years ago, had said repeatedly

in this order: I'm never going to get married again; I'll never live in Bellevue; I'll never own a boat; and I'll never, ever, ever play golf.

All I can say about any of that is to never say never. Because I did marry again. I did move to Bellevue--twice, actually. I owned a boat called the *Silver Lining* briefly. And now I play golf. Actually that's not entirely true, either. I play at playing golf.

But now that I've tried it some; now that I've despaired at the bad shots and rejoiced at the good ones; now that I've started out full of hope and optimism and then limped home dead on my feet after the eighteenth hole, I've found it's a whole lot easier to be interested in watching golf on TV. Because now I know it's a whole lot harder than it looks.

Especially when people are watching.

I have a hard time teeing off when the starter at Bellevue Municipal Golf Course is out there watching me tee-up. So I have utmost respect for the players who go out week after week, playing with television cameras rolling and with applauding fans lining the fairways. I'm sure it's tough being a good sport and being under a microscope at the same time.

So now I'd like to address one particular golf fan. He obviously has plenty of time on his hands and plenty money because he

goes to golf tournaments week after week all over the country. I've never met the man, and I don't know his name, but I wish he'd go home, and I'm betting there are plenty of professional golfers out on the circuit who share my opinion.

Every time one of the golfers makes a shot, this guy is the demented yahoo in the background yelling, "Get in the hole," at the top of his lungs. It's not that he's cheering one player more or less than another. It's always the same shout and always the same words. "Get in the hole."

I wish he would.

My Blog

Melanoma Breakthrough...another side of the story

Friday, June 20, 2008

When our not-yet son-in-law was first diagnosed with malignant melanoma, he was given the grim news that he might live five years. This was a tough and unexpected future for a twenty-eight year old guy in great physical shape who didn't feel the least bit sick.

He was in the Coast Guard then and stationed at Treasure Island in San Francisco. He was given permission to come to Seattle to get a second opinion at the University of Washington--which he did. Once here the doctors confirmed the mostly bad news, but one of them in particular, Dr. Jon Thompson at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, was willing to do battle. So was Jon. And so was our daughter, Jeanne T.

They set off down that tough road with a whole battalion of friends. The Coast Guard transferred Jon to the Seattle station so he could be treated here. And there was a constant Coast Guard presence with Jon at the hospital--his fellow Coasties, current and former ones as well, including the Admiral and his wife who came to the hospital several times. And there were people there from JTJ's work place at Costco along with friends from the Dog Park.

Jon fought his cancer with all the tools that were offered him, including a positive mental attitude and every chemo protocol that got close enough to him that he could sign on. Late in the battle, he was introduced to Dr. Cassian Yee, the T-cell protocol guy at Fred Hutch and the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance.

We knew from reading a Scientific American article on Dr. Yee that the only ticket into his study was a diagnosis from Jon's oncologist that he was terminal. Jon had certainly had that ticket punched, but as he pointed out to me at the time, "What's the big deal? We're all terminal.")

But Jon did get into Dr. Yee's study. And he had two years of near remission and pretty reasonable quality of life before the cancer once again got the upper hand--the winning hand, as it turned out.

This morning there was an article in both the *Seattle Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* on Dr. Yee and his study:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2008005689_cancer19m.html

Jon was one of the "other" patients in the study, the ones mentioned in the article who, according to Dr. Yee, didn't do as well as the patient in Oregon--the one they've lost track of now.

But Jon did go into remission for a while. He felt well enough to go to Las Vegas with his friends and drive a race car for his birthday celebration. He felt well enough to come to Tucson for a renewal of vows on the occasion of Jeanne T's and Jon's fifth anniversary. He felt well enough to work until the end of March when, one week later, he was told he was a candidate for Hospice. And he felt well enough to leave us with a little full-of-business miracle named Colt Stephen Jance. (You can see Colt's photo with his Mickey Mouse ears in a previous post for the Cancer Fighting Flamingos and the Relay for Life.)

Jon outlived his initial diagnosis by four years. Maybe Dr. Yee doesn't think of that as a success, but I do. And every time I see that impish Colty, who is his daddy's spitting image, I can't help but think about Dr. Thompson, and Dr. Yee, and Dr. Farber and what they contributed to Jon's last years and days.

This is the day to say thank you to all of them and to hope that Dr. Yee's study will bring the blessing of more time to other patients looking down the barrel of this killer disease.

Thank you.

WEAR SUNSCREEN!

My Blog

Beau Is Back

Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Yesterday was the on-sale date for *Justice Denied*, Beaumont number 18. Yes, number 18!!! In the world of authors and characters, that's definitely a long-term relationship. So this morning I find myself thinking about those beginnings.

On New Year's Eve of 1984, my daughter asked me, "What would you like to see happen next year?" I told her I'd like to see my book on the racks at QFC, the grocery store we used on Lower Queen Anne in Seattle.

Until Proven Guilty, the first Detective Beaumont book, came out in June of 1985. And it turned out it did appear on the racks at QFC, briefly and badly--on the bottom shelf.

Adams News, the local wholesaler who provided books for grocery and drug stores brought in 50!!! copies for the entire Seattle area.

There was no publisher sponsored book publishing party--so we held one ourselves. There was no book tour set up. As the person in New York told my agent. "This is a paperback. Nobody signs paperbacks." But I wanted to do a tour and I wanted to do signings so we set those up ourselves, too.

Because we set up 30!! signings and all the stores ordered in 25 to 30 books, *Until Proven Guilty* went into a second printing. Everyone in New York was astonished. Did that mean it was a hit? Well, not exactly. They only printed 30,000 copies to begin with.

Bill and I were just starting to date then. In fact, our first date was the *Until Proven Guilty* publishing party. He went along with me on several of those first book signings where I would

spend two hours and sell as many as ten books. At a royalty rate that amounted to twenty-five cents a copy, that meant I made \$2.50--in two hours! Bill, an engineer by profession, wondered if doing those signings was worth the time invested. We know now that it was because some of those early-adopters, the people I met and had a chance to visit with during those first signings, remain among my most loyal fans.

The first nine Beaumonts and the first Joanna Brady as well as the first Ali Reynolds were all original paperbacks. That's a pain for all those fans out there who want to have the complete collection in hardback. But believe me, I really value my paperback audience. Those are the readers who, as they say in Chicago, voted early and often.

Thank you. And if you happen to come to a signing with one of those old ratty paperbacks, don't feel like you have to bury it in your purse for fear I'll snub the idea of signing it for you. My corporate policy remains: If I wrote it, I sign it. Paperbacks included!

And if you want to go out and pick up a copy of *Justice Denied*, it shouldn't be hard to do. I have it on good authority that it's in the grocery stores on Lower Queen Anne in Seattle, but it's also in stores all over the country.

My Blog

A Lyric Statement Wednesday, July 2, 2008

It's the first of July. This morning I went downtown for an appointment and visited my old stomping grounds in the Denny Regrade--the flat part of Seattle that was carved out of the city when they flattened Denny Hill to make it more accessible.

People who have read my Beaumont books have heard a little about the regrading of Denny Hill. That kind of project would never get past the city planners in this day and age, but it did then, and the Regrade is a lovely neighborhood. (Well, it's nice when there aren't knife fights and stabbings as there were over the weekend. But I digress and I guess that's what blog updates are for--to be digressions from real work, like actually finishing writing a book. See what I mean?)

But back to the Denny Regrade. That's where I lived when I first came to Seattle in 1981. I moved into Harbor Heights where I lived with my sister and my two young children.

The kids and I had moved from Phoenix to Seattle, arriving on the third of July of 1981 with all our worldly goods packed into

the U-Haul trailer behind my 1978 Cutlass Supreme Brougham. (The Cutlass's transmission went out three years later. Do you think there might have been a connection between hauling that U-Haul and a transmission going bad? Oops, another digression! My high school English teacher would have called it going off on a tangent, but that's a digression within a digression.)

I said at the beginning of this post that the Regrade was my "old stomping grounds," and that's literally true. I was in the life insurance business back then. I lived at Second Avenue and Cedar. My agency office was at Sixth and Stewart, a hike of probably fifteen blocks which I walked every day. IN HIGH HEELS!!! No high heeled-hiking for me at the moment.

But I was in business in the Regrade. When I learned there was a Denny Regrade Business Association (aka the DRBA) I signed up. It was one of those organizations where you went to lunch once a week and talked about civic and neighborhood problems and what could be done about them. I served on two committees. One was a committee that encouraged property owners to place colorful banners on some of the light poles in the area. That one was short-lived, and I haven't seen those banners again since then.

The second one, the tree planting committee, had a much longer effect. When the trees were planted back in the early eighties, they weren't much more than oversized twigs. And it was while

serving on the committee that I learned that tree planting and Native American storytelling have a lot in common. In many tribes, stories are “winter-telling tales”--stories that are only told between the middle of November and the middle of March. In other words, don’t sit around the fire swapping tall tales when you’re supposed to be out hunting and gathering. As for trees? If you want them to survive and thrive, you’ll plant them during the cold wet months rather than in the dead of summer.

That sounds like another digression but. . . there you are. I’m hopeless.

Back to the tree planting committee. We met for months. We discussed what kind of trees would go where. I remember one guy in particular. I don’t remember his name, but I do remember he looked like an aging, gay Roy Rogers. He leaped to his feet in one of the meetings and made an impassioned plea that we make sure whatever trees were planted along First Avenue would make a “lyric statement.”

At the time, I wasn’t sure what that meant. Today, I do, because today I saw those trees again, standing tall against a bright blue sky. Twenty-five years after they were planted, the tree trunks are thick and straight. Green leaves shimmered in the early summer (Remember, folks, this is Seattle!) sunlight. People congregated under them, seeking shade for a quiet smoke or a not-so-quiet cell phone conversation. The greenery softens the cityscape, concealing the sharp corners and hard edges.

Yes, those trees do make a “lyric statement” these days, and I’m glad I’ve lived long enough to see them do it and to understand.

My Blog

A Rant. . .So Stand Back! Tuesday, July 8, 2008

The good news is? I went to have my annual mammogram today and everything is fine. The bad news? I went to have my annual mammogram today.

I don’t believe having a mammogram is on anyone’s list as one of the top-ten things to do on a sunny summer afternoon. So you could say, I went reluctantly, and with a bit of a chip on my shoulder.

I may have posted about this sometime in the past. For instance, there was last year’s non-peak mammogram experience including having the doctor--a somewhat youthful radiologist--ask me if I “still wrote books,” as if, at my advanced age, I was too feeble to lift finger to keyboard. And then he compounded the issue by asking me if writing books was my “hobby.”
EXCUSE ME? At that time I had written 38 books between

1982 and 2007. Now it's 40 with number 41 clocking in at 83% finished. So, no. Writing books is definitely NOT my hobby!

So that's where I was when I walked into the office, dreading it. And I'll admit that I went there with my body plugged full of far fewer hormones than it used to be.

The current news cycle says that **HORMONES ARE BAD FOR YOU!!!** But the same thing has been said from time to time about **EVIL COFFEE** and **EVIL RED WINE**, although periodically the experts seem to reverse themselves on those particular subjects.

It could be that same thing will happen for hormone replacement therapy eventually, but for now, the experts say they're bad, so **BAD** they are. I've cut way back on my usage of same. I still take some. (Hey, sleeping through the night without hot flashes is pretty essential in my book. And let's not even talk about **MOOD SWINGS!!!!** Because I still seem to have some of those.) But I digress.

All of this was at work when I walked (make that stalked) into the doctor's office, the same doctor's office I've been going to for **FOURTEEN YEARS!!!** I had been told to arrive twenty minutes early for my appointment, and never mind that they called me in twenty-minutes late.

A cheerful receptionist informed me that the reason for the required early arrival was to allow time to fill out a form. When I looked at it, I could see they were asking for the same old information they've had all this time. Name. Birth date. Social Security number. Employer's name. I've been self-employed since 1982--since before the receptionist was born!

I couldn't help it. I proceeded to voice an objection. "I've been coming to this very office for fourteen years," I told her. "Why do I have to fill out this stuff again?"

"It's a new system," I was told.

Wait a minute. I'm in business. I have a database. I didn't switch over to a "new" system until I found one that could collect and transcribe all that "old" information into the new one. But that was the reason for my having to fill out the form again--their new and supposedly improved system--even though my birthday hasn't changed. My social security number hasn't changed. And neither has my sex, for that matter.

But then I got down into the middle of the form and went bananas. They wanted my ethnicity! They wanted my language! They wanted my religion! Are you kidding me? They need to know my religion in order to mash my boobs between a piece of metal and a piece of plastic? Why?

So this posting constitutes my official objection to the DONEI--the Department of Non-Essential Information: If you ask me what my ethnicity is? I will say American. If you ask me about my language? I will say American, occasionally peppered with a few salty words. (If you don't understand that, you're not speaking American.) If you ask me about my religion? I will say: "See one and two above. This is America and my religion or lack of same is NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!!" If you ask me about sex? I will write in YES!!!

If having my social security number in your file is so important, put it there and keep it. In-putting it over and over can lead to mistakes. See what I mean? All typists are not created equal.

Someone must have passed the word to the good doctor that I was loaded for bear. (Another bit of Americana. If you don't like it, talk to Daniel Boone!) The good radiologist treated me with all the deference one would accord to a live hand-grenade. And I was suddenly promoted from "Judith" to "Mrs. Jance." It's about time! I have a good twenty year drop on him! (There's another bit of Americana.)

And now that I have this off my still somewhat flattened chest, I believe I'll swill down a hormone or two and move on. And I'm NOT having a mood swing!

Well maybe I am, but it might be better for all concerned not to mention it at this time. After all, I have my pretty metallic pink C-1 Taser packed away in my purse.

My Blog

Dreams Were All They Gave For Free **Monday, July 14, 2008**

If you've come to one of my presentations in the past, and probably in the future as well, you know that I often close with my rendition of Janis Ian's classic song: "At Seventeen." It's a song about the kids that don't fit in--the ones who are too geeky to be cool; too clumsy to be good at sports; too tall or too short to be part of the mainstream.

I was six feet tall in seventh grade. I wore glasses that meant I had zero depth perception. I couldn't catch a ball or dodge one, either, as it turned out. That's why a classmate, Lucy Skoviak, managed to break my glasses three different times. Not with malice, but because I couldn't catch. (Thank God for Lasik, by the way.)

I first heard Janis Ian's music in the late seventies when I was going through a difficult divorce. I wanted to write but I hadn't started writing. I felt as though since my marriage had failed, I

had failed. I didn't think anything good would ever happen to me again.

There were lots of songs on Janis Ian's album, "Between the Lines," that spoke to what was happening in my life, but "At Seventeen" touched me more than any of the others, especially the last few lines:

It was long ago and far away
The world was younger than today,
And dreams were all they gave for free
To ugly duckling girls like me.

At that point, all I had was the dream. Today, with my 39th book due to come out in less than two weeks, I'm living that dream in more ways than I could ever have imagined. And yesterday a dream came true that was downright amazing.

A fan of mine, who is also a fan of Janis Ian, told her about hearing me sing her song, and Janis got in touch with me. And since she was coming to Seattle to do Hippiefest at Chateau San Michelle, I offered to pick her up at the airport, bring her here to have lunch at our house, and drive her to the event. She invited Bill and me to the concert. Since Bill didn't think his new knees would be up to that much strenuous walking, Jeanne T. and I went to the concert as a Girls Night out.

The weather was perfect. The day was perfect. Janis and I are very different. She's short, Jewish, and gay. I'm none of the above, but we're also surprisingly similar. We're creative creatures who understand there's a lot of hard work that goes into the glamour of being "on tour." She's been asked if she's ever going to write "real" music just as I've been asked if I'm ever going to write a "real" book. We've both found happiness in our lives and in our work. We've both overcome daunting obstacles.

Janis Ian's autobiography, *Society's Child*, is due out on July 24, two days after *Damage Control* is due to go on sale. I had offered to review it for a site called writersarereaders.com long before I had any idea we would end up meeting in person. My review is posted at that website. Oprah thinks *Society's Child* is one of this summer's Must Read books. I think so, too.

Janis was a star at fifteen and a has-been high school dropout at 19. She's overcome obstacles that would have stopped other people dead in their tracks. The opening chapter in the book, where she was booed off the stage, was a true profile in courage. She deserves every bit of success that has ever come to her.

And I'm proud to say that we're friends.

My Blog

Last Minute Thoughts on *Damage Control* Tour

Thursday, July 17, 2008

Tuesday and the on-sale date for *Damage Control* are both coming at me like a pair of speeding freight-trains. It's an exciting time; a nail-biting time.

Oh, and time to see the dentist, too.

My loyal paperback fans have pushed *Justice Denied* to #20 on the *NYTimes* list. Thank you to all those folks who wait patiently for my books to appear in paperback.

There have been a few last minute adjustments to the tour schedule for *Damage Control*, including a couple of address changes in Chandler and in Everett and the addition of a TV appearance and a signing (or maybe even two) in the Phoenix area on August 11.

This weekend I'll turn into the e-mail queen as we start sending out *Damage Control* notices to the folks on my list. If you expected to hear from me and haven't by early next week, there may be a problem with the address I have listed for you. Please let me know if your notice didn't come through for some reason.

This is especially true for people with earthlink addresses since if it becomes necessary to use another e-mail address, my g-mail account for example or my husband's, the earthlink messages may not go through with unapproved addresses. Again, write and let me know.

We've spent months--and I do mean months--since February, hanging around here in the Pacific Northwest waiting to be on-site to supervise some remodeling and exterior repairs on our house. We wanted to be here for the work. The long delayed building permits FINALLY came through this week. Today, we have workers. Tuesday the tour starts. Figures!

Okay, one more tour related note and then I really do need to get ready to go to the dentist. I know I can't go everywhere and sign books for everyone, but if you want to order a signed copy, I'm sure any of the stores who are listed on the tour will be glad to help you order a book and have it both autographed and shipped to you.

If you want that to happen early in the tour schedule, the Seattle Mystery Bookshop (staff@seattlemystery) is great about sending signed books to fans all over the world. One of my husband's favorite sayings is that you can have things done cheap, quick, or good--pick any two. Seattle Mystery isn't cheap, but they are quick and good. And we have a long history together. When they first opened, eighteen years and a few days ago, I stopped by before they were actually open. My books

were already unpacked. When a fan came in, looking for one of mine, I signed it for him on the spot. And since the store wasn't really open yet, they didn't have change. I was a mother with kids in school, so I dug around in my purse and made change out of the lunch money change jingling around at the bottom of my bag. When I refer to Seattle Mystery as the J. A. Jance Company Store, it's pretty much true.

Okay. Off to see the dentist. See you on tour. And remember, my corporate policy is to leave no book unsigned. If I wrote it, I sign it. That goes for paperbacks and book club books as well. If you turn up at a signing with bags of books, you may have to wait until the end of the line, but your books will be signed.

This blog posting is going together in a piecemeal fashion as things occur to me. (If you could see the house right now with faux stucco coming down so real stucco can go up, you might understand why it is I'm a little distracted!)

So here's one last thing. One of the things that happens on tour is that I do appearances, radio and television, often in the targeted cities. But now that we live in the seemingly magic world of streaming video and audio, it may be possible for people all over the country to tune in on some of those appearances. So here's the list, just in case you're interested:

Monday, July 21st, KUOW, Seattle, Live in studio 8:45 to 9:00 AM Pacific Daylight Time (Radio)

Wednesday, July 23rd, Radio Iowa and Nebraska, Live phone,
10:00 AM Central Time (Radio)

Friday, July 25th, KYCA-AM, 1490, Prescott, AZ , Live,
8:06-9:00, Pacific (Mountain standard) (Radio)

Friday, July 25th, Midcontinent Public Radio, Independence,
MO., The Radio Guys, Phone 12:30-1:00 PM, Central Time,
(Radio)

Friday, August 1st, Time Warner Cable, taped Interview in
studio, The Writer's Craft. Raleigh, NC No idea when this will
air. (Television)

Wednesday, August 6th, Phoenix, 8:15-8:50, Good Morning
Arizona, Live, in studio,
(Television)

Wednesday, August 6th, Phoenix, Your Life A to Z, Taped in
studio. (Television) No idea when this will air.

Wednesday, August 6th, Tempe, KJZZ/NPR, Here and Now,
Taped in Studio, No idea when this will air. (Radio)

Thursday, August 7th, Tucson, KUAT, Bill Buckmaster, Taped in
Studio, should air that evening. (Television.)

Monday, August 11th, Phoenix, AZ-TV, the Pat McMahon
Show, Live in studio, 9:00 AM. (Television.)

Friday, August 22nd, Port Angeles, KNOP Radio, 1450, Live,
Phone or in studio, 1:04-1:30 PM,
(Radio)

My Blog

Damage Control, Day One Another Opening| Another Show! **Wednesday, July 23, 2008**

Whew! Yesterday, the first day of the *Damage Control* tour, was a big day. It was a tiring day.

Book tours are fun. They are also exhilarating, frustrating, and exhausting. And so, for the next while, blog updates will be notes from the tour. Random notes from the tour. Being at sixes and sevens makes it tough to be organized, so I'm going to send stuff along as it comes to mind.

This is becoming something of a tradition. There is an error in *Damage Control*. Surprise!! Someone has spotted it. I'm not going to tell you what it is, but Sharon Stites of Tucson is the first sharp-eyed reader to catch it. Everyone else will be a late-comer.

When I talk to people at events, it's interesting to see how many people comment on items that appeared in the blog. Last night a nurse told me that she had read the mammogram rant to her entire office. And that they all thought it was hilarious.

When we came home, I found an e-mail from a man who was so encouraged by my husband's knee-replacement experience that he was making arrangements to move forward with his own

surgery. Actually a friend came to the signing last night, someone who knew Bill had knee replacement on June third. She was surprised to see him there and said, "I thought he'd be in a wheel chair." Well, no. As a matter of fact, the escalator at the store wasn't working and he had walked up and down 26!! steps with no pain.

Last night my daughter and I spoke to a woman whose daughter got married on the same day my son-in-law lost his battle with melanoma. It was a gentle reminder that endings and beginnings sometimes happen at the same time.

Last night as I was speaking, my grandson, Colt, wanted to join me on stage and was astonished when G, as he calls me, told him, "No."

He went back to his mom but he was really bummed about being rejected. And I'm guessing that my granddaughters from Silverdale will be there to join me at the B & N event tomorrow night. Years ago, when my mother used to attend book signings, I found it challenging to be both "author" and "daughter" at the same time. It's more fun to be "G" and "author" at the same time.

It's now 8:19 AM of day two. I've answered thirty-five e-mails and had a telephone interview--all before my third cup of coffee. Yup, it looks like it's going to be another busy day. Oh, and the construction guys just showed up to continue stripping the faux

stucco off the house in preparation to putting on REAL stucco. The banging and whanging has commenced. It's a good thing the interview is over.

My Blog

Home at Last!!!! Friday, August 15, 2008

Damage Control went on sale July 22. It debuted at # 8 on the *NYTimes* list. (Tied for 7th, but they go in alphabetical order, so the B's have it.) Thank you to all of you who went out and bought early, and in some cases often, and made that happen!! Making the list is a BIG DEAL, and I'm really happy to have landed there. It's a very long road from Bisbee, Arizona, to the *NYTimes* Bestsellers list!

You may be wondering why the blog has gone so quiet. We've been busy, and when I say we, I mean both Bill and I. He's been driving, programming the Garmin (our life-saver) and getting us to events on time. I do the signings, the talks, and the interviews. Starting with the KUOW interview on July 21, we've done a minimum of one event a day. (Usually, on non

flying days, it's two.) One morning, before the day's two signing events I did four phone interviews.

Since July 22, we've been in Seattle, Lake Forest Park, Redmond, Everett, Silverdale, Marysville, Bellingham, Spokane. Those were just the cities in Washington. After that we went to Lincoln and Omaha, NE, along with several cities in North Carolina where I did appearances in Raleigh, Cary, Fearrington Village, Southern Pines, and Charlotte, interspersing interviews along the way.

As someone who's accustomed to those "big" Western states, I wasn't particularly worried about our saturation-bombing stint in North Carolina. I mean, how big could it be? It turns out North Carolina is big enough! One day we did two signings and drove the better part of two hundred miles without ever venturing outside the state. We had a chance to have dinner and visit with some relatives after the second signing in Charlotte, but by the time dinner was over I was wiped slick. Then it was on to Fort Smith, AR, and Wichita, KS before moving on to Arizona and doing and a whole host of signings and interviews there. Are you tired yet? If reading this makes you tired, try doing it.

We could NOT have managed all that if we had been flying commercially. For one thing, we have WAY too much luggage. For another, we don't have enough time. Two to three hours in the airport on each leg would make it totally impossible. For

another thing, the modern world of airline hubs makes direct flights to and from a lot of the smaller places impossible. When we left Wichita, we flew into Sedona. No commercial flights come and go from Sedona at all! So thank you for putting me on the list, but thank you, too, for making our corporate jet, nicknamed AirJance, possible.

At a signing early in this tour, someone asked me did I mind going on tour. If you look at the paragraphs above, you can figure out touring is hard work. Even on the jet. We're away from home for the better part of a month, sleeping in strange beds and checking in and out of hotels, some of which are less than wonderful. During an early morning trip to the bathroom at the hotel in Lincoln, I was dismayed to find myself looking eyeball-to-eyeball with an immense cockroach. And when I tried to make coffee in the room, I found that the paper coffee cup (single coffee cup) had somebody else's left-over coffee still in it. We've notified the publisher that that particular hotel needs to come off the list.

So much for the glamour of being on tour, right? Not exactly. Two nights later we found ourselves in the luxurious comfort of the Umstead Hotel and Spa in Cary, NC. The Umstead is a five diamond resort that's a world away from the dive in Lincoln. It turns out, in this case, you have to take the GOOD with the BAD!

But back to the question about going on tour. No, I don't mind. If I weren't out here on tour, I wouldn't have met the oncology nurse who told me that she used a conversation about my books to calm a terrified cancer patient who was starting her first round of chemo. She discovered they were both fans of my books. She said talking about one title after another helped give the patient something else to think about besides her upcoming medical procedures.

And I would have missed speaking to a young woman in North Carolina who was a transplanted Arizonan who started reading my books when she was living in Hong Kong as an expatriate and who used the Joanna Brady books to "go back home."

And I wouldn't have met the man who came to a signing in order to purchase a copy of the latest book for his auntie's 95th birthday. And I wouldn't have had the chance of doing a joint gig with the star of North Carolina and one of my favorite people, Ann B. Ross, the author of the Miss Julia books.

When I'm out on the road and talking about my book of poetry, *After the Fire*, I can see the nods of people who, like me, have lived with the scourge of drug or alcohol addiction. When I read some of the poems, people often come up afterwards and say, "The same thing happened to me." And I'm able to autograph their books with the words, "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt."

One of those poems, in particular, I think is really important. By 1980, I had been with my first husband for 18 years and through 9 courses of treatment for alcoholism. When he showed up at my six year old son's T-ball game so smashed that he had to crawl from the bleachers back to the car, I knew I had to do something. Eventually, I moved my husband out of the house and filed for a divorce. The morning after he left, I went shopping for groceries. When I came home, I set the groceries down on the kitchen table and wrote this. It's called The Collector.

I like the green ones best.
I count them up as any miser would
And watch them grow with satisfaction
For they are the tangible symbol
Of what is processed here--
Lettuce, toilet paper, pork and beans.
The taxes must be paid in cash
God knows there's precious little of that.
Some say trading stamps are going out of style.
I'll collect them 'til I die.
At least it's something I do well.

On that bleak morning in March of 1980, I thought that my life was over; that because my marriage had failed, I had failed; that nothing good would ever happen to me again. And on that morning, although I had always wanted to be a writer, I **HADN'T WRITTEN A SINGLE BOOK.** I didn't start writing

my first novel until two years later, about that same time of year, the middle of March of 1982. *Damage Control* is my 39th!!! published book. So obviously there was a lot of good waiting for me in the future, but I had to make some tough changes in order to find it.

And so, when I go on tour, I have a chance to meet my fans and hear their stories. But they also have a chance to hear mine. And for some of the people in the various audiences, people struggling with the same issues that bedeviled me, I hope my story offers both some comfort and some hope.

Yes, falling in love with addicts of any kind is tough. When they're not passed out cold, they can be charming and engaging. But addiction is also a potentially fatal disease, and my husband died of it at age 42, a year and a half after I divorced him. When you're immersed in all that heartache--when you begin to realize how much trouble you're in--it's impossible to imagine that anyone else in the universe has ever been as dumb as you have been.

So when I write on the title page of *After the Fire*, "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt," I really mean it. And I hope, in the process, I'm offering a few other despairing people a hand up.

Yes, I'm tired. Yes, touring is hard work. Did I mention it's very hot and muggy in North Carolina? When I finally get back

home, I'll probably burn all the clothes in my suitcase. (I won't really, but I'll want to.)

But, as I keep reminding myself every morning when I wake up and try to figure out where they've put the bathroom this time, it's part of the job. And so is posting the blog.

PS It turns out that posting the blog on the road was far tougher than we thought it would be. We're safely home now. I've spent the day in comfy clothes, in my comfy chair, drinking my own special blend of coffee. I did do one interview, but only one, and since it was radio, I didn't have to get dressed up and put on makeup to do it.

Glad to go on the road. Glad to be home. I guess I really do have the best job in the world.

My Blog

Mirror, Mirror On The Wall
Wednesday, August 20, 2008

Some of you may remember the incident from several years ago when I received a poisoned-pen e-mail from a female correspondent (Not a lady!) who suggested that before the next

book tour started, I needed to visit a cosmetic surgeon and have some “very necessary work done.” She was also of the opinion that when I was out in public I needed to wear a bag over my head, so I wouldn’t frighten people. If you’re a careful reader of my books, you may remember what happened to her!

But now there’s another one--another memorable e-mail that I’m filing with that first one. This lady, using the term advisedly, was kind enough to tell me that she had just watched a video of me, an interview I did at sometime in the past. (She mentioned which one. I hadn’t had a chance to see it, but I’ll give you more background on that later on.) The meat of the missive, however, was this: “Are you ill or were you just having a bad photo day?”

Cute, huh? How do you answer that? It turns out, I’m not ill, but I was very busy. It turns out that the interview was scheduled for the day *Damage Control* went on sale. I had been up until the wee hours the night before dealing with a multiple computer meltdown and our inability to send out our 7,000 e-mails.

Early that morning--at six AM or so, as soon as New York opened, we managed to fix the problem. I then did three telephone interviews and two book signings. The interview in question, was my fourth interview of the day and was scheduled during the few minutes we had prior to the evening signing at Third Place. In other words, it was a VERY BUSY

DAY!! An exhausting day. I'm wondering if my correspondent could have maintained the pace.

I'm also someone who's a little north of sixty. The interview was conducted in a darkened space augmented with artificial light which is never kind to "women of a certain age," and especially not to women of a certain age who have eschewed all opportunities for surgical enhancement. I'm one of those regular women--the ones who have raised children and who wear their wrinkles and gray hair as a real badges of courage.

So I was tired, and understandably so. I was not ill. But what if I was? Even if I was at death's door, why would some knuckle-headed idiot be so rude as to point it out?

At the library event last night, one of my fans who came to have her book signed was there with her very short chemo hair and with her caring husband at her side. The two of them are having to delay their travel plans while she battles cancer. She's well aware of how she looks and why. I didn't find it necessary to say to her, "Oh, my goodness you seem to be having a bad hair day." Instead, I told her fighting cancer isn't for sissies and that I wished her well. And I meant it, too.

So back to my snide correspondent. My first reaction was to fire off a note that said, "How dare you! Since when is it okay to pick on someone's looks?" I wanted to point out how essentially rude that was, but then I realized that would be

rude that was, but then I realized that would be stooping to her level. So I didn't do that.

Then I wanted to tell her that it's always a good idea to actually THINK before pressing your e-mail SEND button! But I didn't do that, either, because about that time I remembered what Thumper's father always said: If you can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all.

And nothing at all is what I'm saying so far. I'm accustomed to people writing to me to take issue with my books. People who are experts in various fields are always happy to let me know how much I don't know. And that's true. It turns out the stuff I don't know fills VOLUMES!!!

They catch me in spelling errors. They catch me in continuity errors--like the guy in Charlotte, NC who pointed out there was a continuity problem in *Damage Control* (Joanna # 13) with something I said in *Desert Heat* (Joanna # 1). Good heavens! That book was written eighteen years ago. Of course, it happens that he's recently reread ALL the Joanna Brady books. I, on the other hand, haven't reread *Desert Heat* since I wrote it way back in the old days--when I was MUCH younger.

So when people tell me they can't stand Beau or his new girlfriend or that they think Butch Dixon is too goody-goody to be true, I get it. I understand that people are entitled to their opinions about my work. We may all be reading the same book,

but because of our personal history, we all have differing reactions to the same material. Consequently, when I respond to people who tell me they prefer one character over another, I thank them for being fans and let them know their preferences are fine with me. After all, as a friend of mine told me once, “Honey, thank God were not all just alike. Otherwise we’d all be married to the same man and drive a Mustang.”

But I was still stumped about what I should do with yesterday’s e-mail. Right up until a few minutes ago. That’s when I remembered the immortal words of that great philosopher, Ogden Nash.

As a beauty I’m not a great star.
There are others more handsome by far.
But my face--I don’t mind it,
For I am behind it.
It’s the people up front that I jar.

My first thought was, “Maybe I’ll send that one to her.” Then I decided to take my own advice--to THINK before pressing SEND. And then I remembered something my mother used to say: “Silence is golden.”

So I’m back to not replying at all. Oh, yes, I’m griping like crazy to you about it but not to her. There’s no point. I wouldn’t want to give her the satisfaction. Besides, I’m sure she’d be astonished. She no doubt believes that her her remarks

astonished. She no doubt believes that her her remarks were just being cute rather than offensive.

So now I've added another category to the e-mails to which I don't respond. And that's probably a good idea. My mother and my aunts all lived well into their nineties which means I'm likely to be hanging around and writing books for a very long time. The longer I'm on this planet--ill or not--the less photogenic I'll be. So be it.

If you feel obliged to write to me and point out that very obvious reality, don't expect a polite answer.

In fact, don't expect any answer at all.

My Blog

Thoughts About My Folks Sunday, August 24, 2008

During the last few days of August, I often find myself thinking about my parents. My father's birthday was August 21. Their anniversary is August 24. My mother's birthday was August 30. They were married for sixty-eight years with their wedding occurring three days after my father's twentieth birthday (so our mother wouldn't be robbing the cradle and marrying a teenager)

and six days before our mothers twenty-second birthday turned her into what our father liked to call an “older woman.”

Theirs was a true love match and a genuine partnership. With them as parents, there was never a hope of playing both ends against the middle. As far as we kids were concerned, theirs was an unimpeachable united front. Whatever one of them said went--no arguing; no exceptions.

They loved to travel. My father drove. My mother functioned as map-reading co-pilot. She even had an “official” backseat driver’s license. Their one most notorious “short-cut” came on a trip through New Mexico when the detour my mother put together in order to out-maneuver an Interstate-enforced long U-turn resulted in our driving on miles of dirt road and at one time passing between a ranch house and its accompanying barn. But we made it.

One of the last long driving trips they took together was on the occasion of the death of my mother’s younger brother, Glenn. After investigating the cost of plane fare to Minneapolis and having to rent a car there, they decided that the only sensible thing to do was to drive. And so they did, from Bisbee, Arizona to Milbank, South Dakota. I was out of the country at the time this happened, and in the old pre-Internet days, didn’t hear about what had happened until after Bill and I returned to the States. When I tried calling the folks several times and they were never

home, I finally called my sister. “Oh,” she said. “Uncle Glenn died. They’re in Milbank.”

I knew full well that when my parents went to Milbank, they stayed in the Mill Stone Inn. So I called there and asked for Norman and Evie Busk only to be told that they had checked out earlier that morning.

My parents were relentless travelers who believed in covering ground. When we kids were growing up, we routinely made the trip from Bisbee to northeastern South Dakota in two VERY TOUGH days.

The folks were well into their eighties when they went to Glenn’s funeral. Based on that, I allowed them an extra travel day for getting home before I started calling to check on them, but they still didn’t answer--not on day one or day two or day three or day four or even on day five or day six. Finally when day seven was drawing to a close, my mother finally answered the phone. “Where in the world have you been?” I demanded.

“Oh,” she said. “As we were leaving Milbank, I said to Norman. ‘You know, there’s one national park we’ve never visited.’” So they drove from South Dakota to Arizona by way of YOSEMITE!!! and still made it home in seven days!

She told me later, though, that as they crossed the Colorado River at Yuma and saw all those jagged desert mountains of

southwestern Arizona, my mother couldn't help crying. "I knew then it was the last long trip we'd be taking," she told me.

And it was.

A friend of mine, a teacher from the reservation, came to visit my parent's home in Bisbee once and stayed for lunch. We did what we always did at mealtimes--we sat around laughing during the meal and after it. "Is that what you always do?" my friend wanted to know. "What do you mean?" I asked. "You just sit around like that and laugh?"

The answer to that question would be yes. There was always laughter at mealtimes in their house and there was always singing later while we cleared the table and did the dishes.

I miss my parents. Norman and Evie Busk were good people. They raised good kids.

We were all very lucky.

My Blog

**Camp Grandma and Grandpa
Monday, September 1, 2008**

It's Labor Day at our house and relatively quiet. Yes, the people working on the outdoor repair project aren't working today because it's a holiday, but that's not the only reason the house is quiet. The grandkids aren't here.

Last week was Camp Grandma here in Bellevue, and we had a houseful. Colty was here for five days because his daycare provider takes her vacation during the last two weeks of August, and the substitute babysitter had to go back to school. The three older granddaughters and their daddy were all here to help chase after Colt, a child who arrives bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 5:15 AM and hardly ever moves at anything under a dead run.

Having Lauren, Emmy, and Rachel here to track after that very impish toddler was a huge blessing. We couldn't have done it without them. On the other side of the coin, I think the granddaughters enjoyed going shopping for school clothes and shoes with Grandma and her over-worked credit card. Grandma enjoyed it, too.

By Wednesday evening, the other cousins, Audrey and Celeste, were feeling left out over in Silverdale, so they came to Grandma's that night and stayed until our *NYTimes* celebration party on Friday night. It was fun. It was busy. It was challenging. No writing got done. At all. Not even blogging.

On Saturday everyone packed up and went home. It's now two and a half days later, and I'm mostly recovered. I slept until 7:30 this morning and woke up without having to be jarred out of bed at 5 AM when the alarm went off. And this morning I'm able to get back to writing as well, but as I do so I'm thinking about any number of people who have my utmost respect and who will most likely never read this blog posting or one of my mysteries, either.

Those are the good people, many of them my age or older, who have stepped into the breach to raise their grandchildren when their own sons and daughters, for whatever reason are unable to care for their children.

My hat is off to those good people. They have searched their hearts and found the energy and heart to do what needs to be done. Their golden years are golden, all right, but not in the way they expected. They all have my utmost respect and gratitude.

As I sit here writing this, with power and heat on and with Hurricane Gustav marching inexorably across Louisiana and Mississippi, I'm feeling even more grateful.

This is definitely a day to count our blessings.

My Blog

Vacation Went Too Fast! Wednesday, September 17, 2008

How do you spell VACATION? For us it's also spelled Ashland, Oregon. Bill and I have been going either by ourselves or with friends for the last twenty two years. The first time I went was with my sister and her friends in June of 1985--two weeks after Bill and I met and five and a half months before we got married.

So Ashland, home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, has been part of our married lives from very close to the beginning. During the first few years, while Bill was still working "outside the home" and while there were still kids living with us, we went for weekends only--six plays in three days. Whew!!

Eventually, once our schedules were a little more flexible, we went for longer periods. Now we do six plays in a week. We play golf. We have a "Spa Day" at the Blue Giraffe. Some friends have been going for fifteen years. Some friends have dropped off. Others have joined. But our trip to Ashland has now stretched from a Sunday to Monday weeklong event.

This year we saw several plays. One I didn't care for much, but that's the way it goes. *Comedy of Errors* set in the American

West was fun. A gripping performance of Arthur Miller's *View from the Bridge* was made all the more so knowing that a major supporting role was being played, for the first time, by the understudy. Who did VERY well. *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* was set in a gender-bending Sixties, where the show was stolen by the guy who played Bottom. But the surprise favorite, at least my personal favorite, was *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*.

If you happen to know anything about Ibsen's classic play, you know this is pretty much impossible since, at the end of the play, Hedda puts a gun to her head and ends it all. But that was no problem for the playwright. This play starts with the end of the other one, and it goes right back there. Over and over. Sort of like Groundhog Day only better.

In this instance the characters are all fictional creatures stuck in a peculiar version of limbo because there are still people out there who remember them the way they were originally written. And who care about the way they were originally written. How do these characters hope to change their fates? By getting back into their creators' heads and having the ending be different. Mammy, a tough black woman from *Gone with the Wind*, is astonished to discover that she was the creation of a white woman's mind.

As someone who creates "fictional characters," this was something that literally gave me nightmares. Hedda spent the

night following the play stomping around in my head and in my dreams, dressed in her black dress and mad as hell.

It occurs to me that some of my characters might have a grudge against me, too. Anne Corley, for instance, appeared in only one book, but her memory lingers--just like Hedda's does. The same goes for scary Andrew Philip Carlisle. He's probably pretty annoyed with me as well.

The good news is this. *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler* is fiction. As are the further adventures of Anne Corley and Andrew Philip Carlisle.

I think I'm glad to be home in Bellevue. And ready to get back to work.

My Blog

**Living Room Concert (correction on
Pearl Foundation Scholarship)**

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

Janis Ian has been an icon for me for a very long time. One of the most amazing turns of my life came this summer when I heard from her and we were able to cross paths when she came through Seattle on her way to a concert venue.

In the process we've found we have a great deal in common. We are both artists who are grounded in the very real world of business. We both appreciate our fans and know that they are the ones who keep the wheels on the bus in every sense of the word. We both tour. The details are slightly different but the fact that touring is hard work isn't lost on either one of us.

Janis's autobiography, *Society's Child*, went on sale on July 24, the day after *Damage Control* went on sale. I've been home from tour for the better part of a month. Janis is still out on the road. Which brings me to this past Saturday night.

While reading her autobiography, I learned about Janis's pet charity, the Pearl Foundation. Pearl was Janis's mother. When Pearl's marriage ended, she had to go back to work. To do that, she had to go back to school. She ended up getting her Masters Degree at age 58, but by then she was struggling with MS. So the Pearl Foundation, named in honor of Janis Ian's mother, gives scholarships to those who need to go back to school in order to return to the workplace.

To raise money for the Pearl Foundation, Janis gives living room concerts. Private concerts. And that's what she did this weekend, in OUR living room. Twenty five or so friends and relatives gathered. She posed for pictures. She told stories. She sang the songs I asked her to sing, my own ultimate Janis Ian playlist.

All told it was a magical evening. In advance of the party I was a nervous wreck. The exterior of the house is still very much a construction zone, although the work crew did a lot to clear up the front of the house so it didn't look quite so undone. But, as one of the guests pointed out, "No one is coming to see your house. They're coming to meet Janis." And they did.

Janis came and met people and posed for photos. She sang her songs accompanied only by her guitar. During the concert, I found myself holding my breath, anticipating every word of every song because I knew every word. They're imprinted in my heart.

Janis and I are very different. She's short; I'm not. She's gay; I'm not. We come from opposite sides of the political spectrum, but in one regard, we're very similar. We both received the same gift from our very different mothers--the gift of music; the gift of words; the gift of songs that tell stories.

And for a little while on Saturday, just before Janis packed up to go back to her hotel, the two of us sat on the edge of the bed in my bedroom and signed each other's books.

It was a small moment in a remarkable evening, and I can't quite explain what it meant to me. It reminded me of being in fourth grade and having a new friend, Pat McAdams, who had her own room and her own double bed. We would sit on that bed and

play with Queen Elizabeth Coronation paper dolls and talk about how we thought our lives would be when we grew up.

The truth is, we are grown up now. The paper dolls we played with back then are antique. So is Queen Elizabeth for that matter, and so are we. But for a few moments on Saturday night as we sat on the edge of the bed, everything had changed and nothing had changed. I had Janis sign a book for my still good friend, Pat McAdams Hall. Wait a minute. Isn't there a song that speaks to that? Yes. I learned it in Brownies.

Make new friends but keep the old.
One is silver and the other gold.

With any kind of luck, years from now, Janis Ian will be an "old" friend, too.

My Blog

D-I-V-O-R-C-E: Me and My PC Saturday, October 4, 2008

This has been a tough week around here. I finished the book-- next summer's *Fire and Ice*--and then lost the last two chapters!! Lost them completely! My dog didn't eat them, my computer

did. Bill Gates took those files and hid them away in the part of my computer where even techies dare not tread. When I opened my usual file folder, a system I've been using for close to twenty years, there was the book in question, but only up to Chapter 16. The last two chapters, those VERY, VERY important last two chapters, were nowhere to be found.

I could find them in my recent document list, but when I tried to save them to my book folder, the computer swore they were already there. I could SEE they were already there, but when I opened the folder to open the files they were MIA again. It was enough to drive me crazy. It was enough to drive Bill crazy, considering we had a houseful of company, including honored guest Janis Ian. It was maddening. It was infuriating, especially when my publisher wanted to send me a copy of the proposed cover!!

I went ahead and finished the master document, carefully keeping those two precious chapters in my Recent Document file. Finally, two days ago, while trying to create a copy I could attach to an e-mail, Bill found the two AWOL chapters in their secret hiding place, skulking about in a far distant corner of my C-drive.

For years I joked about not doing windows, "either kind." But that was fuzzy thinking on my part. I thought that since I used WordPerfect, which was perfect for me, as opposed to Word, which I thought was a club by comparison, that I was immune to

the vagaries of Microsoft. Not true. It turns out I owed my creative soul to the Windows company store.

Over the last year, at my husband's insistence, I've learned to do e-mail and address book work on the Mac. He kept telling me that the Mac interface between e-mail functions and address book functions was much more workable. And I can admit now--no, I can PROCLAIM now--that the scales have fallen from my eyes. I am blind no longer. He was right; I was wrong. They DO work better--amazingly better.

But I still clung to my old WordPerfect way of writing, much as some of my fellow writers still cling to their pens and yellow legal pads. I didn't want to have to learn new systems. I didn't have to learn new clicks. I thought learning all those "new" things would get in the way of my "creative process." Now I find out that even WordPerfect has "evolved" into something like a clone of Word.

I can tell you right now that the last two weeks of PC hell have gotten in the way of my creativity. (You haven't seen a new blog update recently, have you?)

So here's my Declaration of PC Independence. I'm done! *Fire and Ice*, next year's combo Beaumont/Brady, is the last--the VERY last--book I'll write on my Toshiba PC! Considering I've been using Toshiba laptops since 1989, that's saying something.

Yes, it'll be difficult teaching this old dog new tricks. I'm sure Bill and I will have some tense discussions when I explain to him how I would like the Mac to work as opposed to how it does work.

I won't be able to build and use master documents the same way I'm used to, but come to think of it, even that took time. Until I learned, through bitter experience, to put that all-important little zero in the file names for Chapters 1 to 9, that was hellish, too.

I'm sure I'll get over having my computer freeze up in the middle of a sentence. With XP that doesn't happen nearly as often as it used to with Windows 2000, but it still does happen occasionally.

So good-bye, PC. It's been a long ride and tough in spots. Reminds me of a poem I learned years ago.

Knowing you darling's been slightly swell
A little of heaven and a little of hell,
A piece of paradise that didn't jell.
So goodbye you lug, it's been slightly swell.

HELLO, Mac.

My Blog

Gravity Not Just a Good Idea--it's the LAW!

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

I take my Boniva once a month for good reason. I've done several spectacular pratfalls in my life. My daughter's personal favorite happened twenty or so years ago. I was clearing the kitchen breakfast bar of dinner dishes in our newly remodeled kitchen. I had empty plates in both hands as I headed for the sink. Someone was talking on the telephone. We had teenagers in the house and this was back in the "old days" when the only way to take a call in the kitchen was to drag a phone, with a very long cord attached, from the family room into the kitchen.

By now you're probably getting the picture. I started across the room and tripped on part of the cord, wrapping it around my leg. The next step took the phone off the counter. (It was one of those indestructible Princess phones, and it survived with no problem!) The next step wrapped the cord around a lower part of my leg. It also sent the answering machine flying off the top of the roll-top desk in the family room, thus permanently traumatizing our two golden retriever puppies, Nikki and Tess who never quite trusted phones or answering machines for the remainder of their lives.

The next step put me in contact with the kitchen counter, but I still had two dirty plates--china plates--in my hand. I slid along the counter, knocking whatever was on it into the sink. Still holding the plates, I finally came to rest against the butcher

block pull-out cutting board next to the fridge. If it hadn't been for that pull-out, I might have ended up in the living room. But I landed there, still upright and still holding the two unbroken plates. The telephone cord had knocked off my slippers and was wrapped around my two middle toes. And I was totally unhurt, if you don't count the spiral of bruises from my knee down that made my leg look like a barber shop pole. As I said, that's the fall my daughter likes best, and it would have been a huge hit on *America's Funniest Videos*.

My personal favorite happened a few months later. At the time we had the two above-mentioned goldens and Boney, our pound puppy who was half Irish Wolfhound and half German Shepherd. (That's what we think he was. Boney didn't come with any official papers.) In the evenings my daughter usually took the dogs for a walk, and she always walked them one at a time. On this particular evening, she was sick and asked me to do it. I was busy. I was writing books. I was looking after a houseful of kids and dogs. So I decided to walk all three of them together.

Anyone with even a nodding acquaintance with physics will see the problem coming--the traction of twelve little dog feet as opposed to two human feet. But it gets worse. Boney could run like a gazelle. Tess was a lot slower than he was, so, thinking (I'm a former blonde by the way!) to slow him down, I clipped those two leashes (the slow dog and the fast dog) together and put that around the back of my neck. (Yes. I'm sure you're all shaking your heads by now!)

At first things went fine. We walked the better part of three blocks with no difficulty. Then we met a woman walking her dog. It occurred to me that this might be a problem, so I told my dogs to sit. And they did. Their training from the Academy for Canine Behavior clicked right in, right up until the woman said. "What good dogs!" That was just what my dogs wanted to hear. They went racing to her to get their reward, thus toppling me like a giant sequoia and turning me into an amazing human dog sled.

I did a four point landing on the newly graveled pavement, and then the dogs dragged me along for several feet before they stopped. When the horrified woman reached out to help me up, Boney suddenly turned protective. He started barking fiercely and wrapping his leash around my neck. "Don't help me," I told her. "Please don't help me."

Eventually I got myself up and limped home, laughing hysterically and bleeding from both knees and both elbows. Fortunately I was wearing a denim jacket. That was never the same and neither was my favorite bright green blouse, but I did less damage to my elbows than I would have otherwise. I healed with only mental scars from that one.

Far less spectacular was my tumble down the tile stairs in the lobby of the Arizona Inn where they now have two very decorative J.A. Jance memorial handrails. And then there was the auction dinner where, seated at the end of an L-shaped table I got carried away telling a story and slid the back leg of my

chair off the edge of a step and went tumbling into our hostess's sunken living room.

That fall occurred in slow motion. I had time enough to think, "Don't grab the hand-rail, you'll break your nails," and "Remember to tuck and roll." Which I did. I came to rest, again unhurt, on the far side of the living room with my head in the knee-well of an antique vanity.

Which brings me to this weekend and my appearances at the Robson Branch Library in Sun Lakes. Because they had more attendees than their room's capacity, I had agreed to do two talks separated by a signing. And I had asked the organizers to have a hand-held mic along with a stool so I could sit if I felt like it.

I did the first talk with no mishap, but knowing my history, you've already guessed what happened. At the beginning of the second talk, I tried to sit on the stool--a stool with castors on the bottom on a polished concrete floor. When I missed my perch and the stool went skidding away from me.

I landed on my knee first and then on my backside. With over a hundred people in the room, I was very glad I was wearing what some call the "traveling pantsuit." I'm not glad I was wearing heels.

Two men leaped forward from the front row to help me. They grabbed my elbows, but with the heels on, that was NEVER going to work. So I stripped off the heels, put my bare toes on one of men's toes and used him as a derrick to pull me to my

feet. I didn't get his name, but believe me, I thank him from the bottom of my heart. And I'm sure the people in the audience were also grateful.

Once on my feet, I "Shook it off," as we tell our grandkids, and did the talk in my bare feet. (That's a first!) And at the end, the audience gave me a standing ovation, so I guess it was all right. And I'm all right. A bruise on one knee. A gimpy shoulder and back, but luckily no serious damage with nothing broken--other than my pride.

And so, bearing all that in mind, I guess I'll go take this month's dose of Boniva.

My Blog

Endangered Species/ Rant alert Sunday, October 26, 2008

According to yesterday's *Wall Street Journal*, there is a new endangered species: The lowly quotation mark!!!

Many of the purveyors of this fad--which I fervently hope it is--are those who write high-toned literature. Not everyday mystery writers. Or sci-fi writers. Or romance writers. The people who are leaving quotation marks out of the mix are men and women who are lauded and reviewed for their LITERARY CHOPS!

I guess if you write literature, you expect your readers to work for it. Their readers need to figure out on their own who said what or thought what or, when action occurs, whether or not it is part of what's being said or is it part of what the sayer is doing. Sound confusing? It is.

And heaven forbid that they would give their readers a break and throw in a few lowly 'he said's' and 'she said's.' After all, those help readers--and writers--for that matter, keep track of who is saying what, whether or not quotation marks are present.

Yes, I know. It's all a matter of style. And authors who choose that particular style are welcome to eschew quotation marks all they want. But I don't expect I'll be reading their books. I read books for enjoyment. When I'm having fun reading, I don't want to work that hard.

My Blog

Email-bag Update

Thursday, November 6, 2008

Yesterday I was doing the first set of editing on next summer's book. This is something that requires utmost concentration, so I didn't even open my e-mail computer yesterday. This morning I had more than seventy e-mails, and I've been sorting through

them one at a time. It's sort of like opening a goody-bag, a somewhat mixed bag as it were.

Someone who is the commander of a law enforcement training facility told me how much he enjoyed my books and asked me if I'd consider being the speaker for one of his graduating classes!! The idea that real police officers read and enjoy my books is something that really pleases me, so my answer to him, in a nutshell is a resounding YES!, depending on scheduling.

Another woman who is working her way through the Beaumont books in order, just finished reading *Breach of Duty*. She told me that one of the sad parts in the book--the situation with Sue Danielson--made her cry, and her daughter was astonished to see her mother shedding tears because of a character in a book. It turns out I'm not nearly astonished. I sometimes find myself laughing and crying as I write the books, so it's no wonder to me that my readers would do the same thing.

A man who is a very careful reader, took me to task for some of the editing miscues in *Damage Control*. In the course of letting me have it due to what he considers inadequate editing, it turned out he himself made some geographical errors. That made me smile. It turns out no one is perfect. I'm not, my editors are not, and neither is he!!

Three separate e-mails came from folks across the ponds--and I do mean ponds plural. Two messages came from readers in

Australia and one from a reader in the UK. Two of those are readers that I categorize as “Read in Order” folks. They want to start at the beginning of each series and read to the end. . . well, at least until they’re current since I’m a long way from letting go of the keyboard. It’s in honor of people like them that my website has a page called Books Listed In Order.

Telling new readers to check a page on the website is a lot easier for me than writing out a complete answer each time I’m asked. (Believe me, I’m asked often.) And fortunately for all of us--for my new readers and for me, all of my books are still readily available and still in print--in paperback and electronic download formats.

Several other people asked to be added to my notification list--and they have been. But the e-mail winner of the day came with the following heading: I’m a Thrift Shop shopper - you are not there!!

Before I get to the meat of his e-mail, I need to give you some background. Years ago, back in the early nineties, I met a woman who worked in the local St. Vincent de Paul thrift store. “All our books sell for a quarter,” she told me, “except for yours. Those sell for a dollar apiece.” Hearing the words, I knew in that moment, that I was going to be a hit--maybe not right then, but certainly eventually.

This morning's correspondent went on to explain that, after years of hearing about my books, he finally went searching his local thrift store market--to no avail. My books weren't there and aren't there because people tend to keep them and reread them. They have come to regard the characters as friends. He went on to say that he's finally given up and resigned himself to the fact that he'll have to buy them new--probably at Costco. (Hey, he already told me he was a thrifty kind of guy.)

But I also know from experience that what he told me is correct. Once people have my books, they tend to hold on to them. I saw an example of that this week when a friend of mine moved to Texas. One of the last boxes she packed contained all the books from the bottom shelf in her bedroom and they were all my books--a complete collection of autographed first editions. In the course of moving out of a home and into an assisted living facility, she has had to pare down her possessions. I'm really complimented that my books made the cut.

So now all the e-mails have been answered. Next summer's book, the Beaumont/Brady called *Fire and Ice*, is now in New York in the hands of my editor. And once I finish writing this blog update, it'll be time to turn my attention to Ali Reynolds # 5. I need to get busy. The next book tour is bearing down on me at breakneck speed.

My Blog

Hail and Farewell

Monday, November 10, 2008

In the past two weeks, the world of popular fiction has lost two giants--Michael Crichton and Tony Hillerman. I read Michael Crichton's books, but I never had the pleasure of meeting him. From what I've read about him, he sounds like a real Renaissance kind of guy.

Both men were storytellers who knew how to pull their readers into their stories and maintain interest. Crichton wrote about how science can go too far while Hillerman wrote mysteries that included insights into the Native American experience.

I crossed paths with Tony several times over the years. Once, during a literary weekend conference in Phoenix, we ran into each other in the hotel lobby. Tony was in a state because he had just discovered he had left his house keys in the dresser of a hotel somewhere in Ohio.

The conference was paying for the rooms, so when Tony stepped up to the front desk, he didn't have a credit card at the ready. The clerk said he'd have to leave a \$50 cash deposit to cover the

phone bill. “Wait a minute,” I said to the clerk. “Do you have any idea who this is?”

In a word, no. He had no idea, but in the end, Tony didn’t have to leave a deposit, either.

After we finally finished checking in, the four of us--Tony and his wife, Marie, and Bill and I--went in to the hotel restaurant to have lunch together. A sign outside the dining room announced that the restaurant would close for the afternoon at 2 PM. Since we were forty-five minutes ahead of that deadline, we thought we were good, but clearly the help, including wait-staff and cooks--were already in closing time mode. The food was bad and the service was even worse. The following week we read in the newspaper that the hotel’s restaurant had been SHUT DOWN by the health department! So we were lucky that, bad as the food was, at least we weren’t poisoned.

At that conference, Tony gave me one of my favorite lines, one I’ve used on lots of occasions since: Literary fiction is where not much happens to people you don’t like very much. And when I encounter literary snobs--the kind of people who go out of their way to announce that they read literary fiction but they never read mysteries--I recall Tony’s very wise words and smile. They’re welcome to all the literary fiction they can handle.

The last time I saw Tony was at the aptly named Hillerman Writer’s Conference in Albuquerque two years ago. It was clear

he was slowing down, but he also enjoyed basking in the crowd's much deserved admiration.

I don't know how many readers these two storytellers had in common, but I was one of them.

So long, guys. It's been good to know you. I expect that readers all over the world will be enjoying your literary legacies for years to come.

My Blog

Coffee Time

Thursday, November 13, 2008

I don't know how many of you may have surmised this, but my books wouldn't get written without a certain amount of caffeine intake. Yes, I'm addicted to java. I inherited this condition on both sides of the DNA chain from both my mother and my dad who always had forenoon coffee.

I have morning coffee, forenoon coffee, noontime coffee, and afternoon coffee. Usually no evening coffee. That would be over-doing it.

This year for Father's Day I bought Bill and me a wonderful individual coffee machine. It makes terrific coffee, but like the

lady who is the voice of our traveling GPS, it can be a bit of a nag, even though it doesn't do the nagging out loud.

When you turn it on in the morning, it goes through a heating cycle, complete with a little red screen that says: UNIT IS HEATING. Then it does a rinse cycle and the screen announces: UNIT IS RINSING. At the end of that, it splashes a little bit of plain water into a cup which you need to dump into the sink. (Best to have a sink nearby.) In my experience, the next step is: EMPTY TRAYS. I have learned to do so without arguing because nothing is going to happen until they are empty. So I remove the trays, empty the dead coffee grounds, rinse the trays, and return them to their proper positions.

This is where the process gets dicey because, as often as not, the red screen will still claim, erroneously TRAYS MISSING. That's when I tend to start going nuts. Caffeine deprivation will do that to you. I stand there in the kitchen yelling back at the sign, "It is NOT missing! It's right there! Can't you tell?"

Eventually the connection that links the tray to the machine's brain makes contact. The TRAYS MISSING sign disappears. I hit the button that says 2 COFFEES. The red screen says: ADD WATER. I do that. I punch the two coffee button again. It seems to make a start on the process, grinding for a moment. Then it stops and the red screen says: ADD BEANS, even though I already did that while the sign UNIT IS HEATING was doing its thing. So I open the container that holds the coffee

beans and shove some of them in the general direction of the grinder mechanism. With any kind of luck, the CHANGE FILTER sign won't come on because I have NO idea how to do that.

Finally all is right with the world. I get my coffee. I go to my chair. I go to work.

A little while ago, I did all of that for my afternoon cup of coffee. So far, I've managed to get to 21% of the next Ali book written, and I need to keep moving while the fingers are up to their task.

So I went through the whole song and dance, except for the dreaded CHANGE FILTER maneuver. Then I pressed the TWO COFFEES button and walked away from the machine. Except for one small oversight. I failed to put a coffee cup on the tray.

Now, not only do I NOT have coffee to drink, the little red sign is once again proclaiming EMPTY TRAYS!

Some days you just can't win.

My Blog

Happy Pub Day, P.D. James! Saturday, November 15, 2008

Yesterday the *Wall Street Journal* published an article about P.D. James in honor of the publication of her latest Adam Dalgliesh book, *The Private Patient*. I took the article quite personally since P.D. and I have a lot in common, starting with our names, both first and last.

At the beginning of the article, the writer felt constrained to reveal Ms. James's full name just as some people want to know what the J. A. stands for. You'll notice I'm not repeating that information here. I don't need to know her as anything other than P.D. That works for me. I'm sure her use of initials grew out of the same prejudice that caused my use of same--we're both women writing police procedurals with male protagonists. As I was told by the marketing people back in 1984, "Readers (Meaning, of course, MALE readers!) won't accept a police procedural written by someone named Judy."

Of course, it's not 1984 now, and it's not 1964, either. Things have changed. Lots of women writers write police procedurals, but the truth is, now that I've now seen P.D. James's given

names, I've already forgotten them. They're none of my business.

Another thing the two of us have in common is that we're neighbors. Not physical neighbors. She lives in the UK. I live in the US, but in mystery sections in bookstores all around the world, her books and my books sit side by side. James and Jance. Isn't alphabetical order wonderful?

When my books first started coming on the market, I went into literally thousands of bookstores to sign stock. (I kept track. One year my body was in 600!! bookstores. My publisher said, "We should put you on benefits. You're in more bookstores than some of our reps.") But I saw it as a path--the long one--to becoming an overnight success.

In those early years, my many bookstore visits revealed that in any given store, while I might have two or three books present on the shelves, my near neighbor, P.D. James, would have a dozen or more. In the course of the next twenty plus years, my shelf space has expanded in lots of stores, but then so has hers.

We were both relatively late starters. She was 42 when her first novel was published. I was 43.

There are some differences, of course. For one thing, she's a Baroness. I'm not. Her enormously popular Adam Dalgliesh books have been made into television dramas for *Mystery* and

Masterpiece Theater. My books have not been and most likely won't be turned into screenplays, but given a choice--TV or bookstore shelf space--I'll take the shelf space every time.

In the interview, P.D. handled the inevitable question about whether mysteries are really "literature" with a good deal of grace. But the part of the interview I liked the most--the one that spoke to me--was when she was asked if this was her "last" Daghiesh book. Was there "closure?" Was this, as it were, the end of the line for Adam *et al*? And, by inference, wasn't it also the end of the line for P.D. James?

I hate to be guilty of practicing reverse agism here, but I suspect the interviewer to be guilty of a certain amount of . . .well . . . Let's just call it youth. It sounded as if she was saying to P. D. James, "Come on. You're eighty-eight years old, for Pete's sake. You were treated for heart failure while you were writing this book. Aren't you done yet?"

P.D. made it abundantly clear that she's not done by saying that if this Daghiesh book really had been the last one, she would have ended it on a "good note."

Brava, Baroness James! Way to go! I have to say that hearing those words from you gave me a real boost. I just turned 64. If you're any indication, I can look forward to as many years of active writing ahead of me as I have behind me.

When some of your fans come prowling in bookstore mystery sections to find your new book, maybe they'll pick up one of mine and give it a try. And maybe the reverse will happen as well. That's the magic of reader cross-pollination.

Let's hear it for shelf space.

My Blog

Happy Pub Day to JA Jance! Wednesday, November 19, 2008

We've been doing some work on the website. This morning I noticed the Happy Pub Day wishes to P. D. James and realized that yesterday was Happy Pub Day for J.A.Jance. *Hand of Evil* went on sale in paperback yesterday. In grocery stores, drug stores, and better bus depots everywhere.

I started out as an original paperback author--a lowly original paperback author--as in with very little critical attention and, like Rodney Dangerfield, with very little respect.

Early in my career, I volunteered with the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference. My job was to pick up a visiting East Coast agent from the airport and take her to the conference site south of Tacoma. On the way there, she allowed as how original

paperbacks were where “anybody who wanted to could get published.” This particular anybody took offense. In a big way! I don’t know how the agent got BACK to the airport, but it certainly wasn’t with me. For all I know, she’s still wandering in the woods outside Pacific Lutheran University waiting for her ride.

But I digress. Back to the world of original paperbacks. Starting out, my agent and I discussed what were then the realities of publishing. If we chased after a hardback deal, as a new author I’d be lucky to end up with a print-run of 3500 books. In original paperback, the print run would probably be ten times that. (In actual fact the first print run of *Until Proven Guilty* clocked in right at 30,000.)

One of the grim realities of book sales is that you’re lucky to sell half of what is printed. When faced with a choice between possibly selling 15,000 books as opposed to 1,500 books, there didn’t seem to be much of a contest. Selling more books seemed like a reasonable way to start building an audience. We opted for paperback and never looked back. For a long time.

The first nine Beaumonts, the first Joanna Brady, and the first Ali Reynolds book were all original paperbacks. Did I work any less hard on them than I do now on my hardbacks? No. Absolutely not. If anything, I worked harder. For one thing, I couldn’t type nearly as fast as I can now. (Practice is everything.) While I was writing those initial books, I had kids

living at home. Kids mean work. Writing means work.
Promoting means work.

And promote we did. Before *Until Proven Guilty* was published, we asked the folks in publicity about whether or not there would be a tour. They laughed. “Are you kidding?” they told me. “Your books are paperbacks!” (As if I didn’t know.) “Nobody signs paperbacks.” But as it happened, I was a nobody from Bisbee, Arizona, and I was going to sign my books whether they were paperback or not.

I went on off on tour anyway and signed books anyway. For the first five years of my career, the touring I did was arranged by us. Paid for by us. A minimum of thirty signings per book. For nine books. I’ve been told that I’m a shameless self promoter. Really? So be it. It’s taken twenty-five years of that for me to become an “overnight success.”

I remember walking into a Crown Book Store in southern California, somewhere around Beaumont book six or seven. I introduced myself to the clerk and asked if they would like me to sign some stock. He went to the back room door and shouted, “There’s someone out here who wants to sign her books. I don’t know why.”

I’ll tell you why. Because I was busy building my base. Paperback readers are my bread and butter business. Those

readers were with me for a long time before anyone at the *NYTimes* even noticed that J.A. Jance existed.

Sometimes, when I'm out on tour, someone will say, "I can only afford to buy paperbacks. Will you still sign them?" Damned straight, I will! If I wrote it, I sign it. Period.

If you show up at a signing with several bags of books to be signed, you may have to wait until the end of the line. Unless I have a deadline of some kind--an interview to do or a plane to catch--I'll sign them. Not just the hardback. Not just the new paperback. Not two books only. I'll sign them all. Why wouldn't I? Loyal fans make my life possible.

It's the least I can do.

My Blog

Thanksgiving for sure!

Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Thanks be to Drizzle they're gone. The *Cruel Intent* Announcements that is. If you wanted to receive one and didn't, please let me know. I've spent the last three days sending them out with my own little fingers. If you got one and didn't want it, let me know that as well.

One of the things I'm thankful for this year is my new friendship with Janis Ian, someone I've long admired. She's doing her annual charity bit to benefit the Pearl Foundation, an organization named in honor of Janis's mother. Pearl Foundation gives scholarships to folks who need to go back to school in order to reenter the job market. If you're interested, go to her website, www.janisian.com and shop till you drop. Sales of merchandise go to benefit the foundation.

And now it's time for me to get dressed and go to the grocery store because Thanksgiving dinner is my one day to shine. I don't cook that often. Well, I do the occasional batch of oatmeal, around here. . . but Thanksgiving is mine! The whole meal deal, as they say: turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, lefse, etc.

If lefse is a foreign word to you, it's a good bet you probably aren't Scandinavian. To put it in perspective, think of a flour tortilla made from a mashed potato dough. A little sweeter than a flour tortilla but just as thin. (Some people insist on eating their lefse with sugar and cinnamon. Purists, however, eat it with butter and maybe just a dip in the turkey gravy.)

I used to make my own lefse, a process that generally fills the whole house with a light dusting of flour. Then, for years, we went to Stanwood every year to pick up our supply. Sadly enough, the bakery that used to make it went out of business.

Fortunately we found Grandrud's Lefse Shack. (<http://www.lefseshack.com>) If you'll pardon my saying so, Grandrud's lefse just like the stuff Grandma Anderson used to make.

But getting back to cooking. A number of years ago, when I was cooking Thanksgiving dinner, everyone wandered in and out of the kitchen at will. It was down to the last few critical moments. Bill was cutting the turkey. The potatoes were mashed, and I was making the gravy. It was hot in the kitchen and crowded. It also happened to be a sunny day. As a consequence, my sun glasses were where they usually are summer and winter--on top of my head. As I concentrated on whisking the last few lumps of flour out of the gravy, what should happen? My glasses slipped off my head and fell into the gravy pan, as in SPLAT!

What followed was a stream of very ungrandmotherly-like words. My son-in-law, the ever vigilant Jim Berry, immediately cleared the kitchen of all "little ears." Since then I've been required to give him a "five minute gravy warning." It's become one of our traditions, and that's what Thanksgiving is all about--family traditions.

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone reading this. May your gravy not be lumpy.

Next week the tour starts, but we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

My Blog

If At First. . .

Wednesday, December 3, 2008

Let's see, wasn't it a blog or so ago when I sent out a big cyber WHEW because all the notices had gone out? Not!

Usually when they go out, I receive a flurry of thank you notes from fans who are glad to hear from me. Those are usually accompanied by a few un-subscribe notes along with a bunch of bounced e-mails because the addresses are no longer valid.

This time after that first e-mail blast there were a few responses, but mostly not. Then people who read the blog and who knew they were on the list started letting me know that they hadn't received the notice. It could be that it's buried in with all their viagra ads and they didn't bother to sort me out of their spam file. But their complaints were numerous enough that I resent the notices. That means that, in the last week, I sent 7500 e-mails twice!! (Except for one section of the Ms. They evidently got three copies in one day. Sorry about that. Definitely operator error.) And I apologize for the duplication to the rest of you who received it twice as well. Some did. Some didn't.

When you send out that many e-mails, a couple of things happen. Gradually fewer and fewer computers in the house will

have anything to do with me. And my husband, who has been required to intervene on numerous occasions, is losing patience as well. But it's **IMPORTANT** to me that my fans know when a book is coming out. And **TODAY IS THE DAY** *Cruel Intent* hits the bookstore shelves. I believe this is known as guerilla marketing, but it works. I can't be in the stores in Palmdale and Boston, and Sequim and Seattle on this first day, but I know from the notes I've received that my fans will be there.

Yes, I did get some Unsubscribe notes. Five to be exact. It may be sexist of me to point this out, but in four of those cases, the wife was listed as the fan while the husband's e-mail address was where the notice was sent. If there are lady readers out there who didn't see their notices, they might want to consider having **THEIR OWN E-MAIL ADDRESS**.

So now it's opening day. Another opening; another show. I need to put down the computer, go wash and iron my hair, put on some makeup, a pair of high heels, and hit the road. This is the part of the job that can't be done in my bathrobe!

Book tours are tiring. They're also exhilarating. Going on a book tour is an honor and a privilege. It's also a vital part of my job. Right now I'm feeling good about touring. Ask me again about the middle of February and I might give you another answer--probably a whiny one at that. But, as I said in my notice, "Hope to see you on the road."

Wait, you say you *still* didn't get the notice? Well here it is, one last time!!!

* * * *

I don't mean to fill up everyone's mail boxes, but it has come to my attention that a lot of people didn't receive this on the first go down. If you did, please excuse this second attempt. The one thing that has changed since last week is that *Hand of Evil* in mass market paperback will debut at # 9 on the *NYTimes* list in another week. I'm actually in a statistical dead heat with Tom Clancy, but once again alphabetical order rules. If you received a *Cruel Intent* announcement last week, there's no need to read any further.

I trust everyone had a great Thanksgiving. When it comes time to count blessings, one that is dear to me is being able to write books lots of you like to read.

Cruel Intent, Ali Reynolds # 4 goes on sale in hardback on December 2. *Hand of Evil*, Ali # 3, went on sale in paperback format on November 17. Some of you are probably wondering what happened to Evil # 4. Well, I sort of ran out of Evil. Too many Evils can become confusing, so *Cruel Intent* it is

What this really means is that another book tour is breathing down my neck. At my website, www.jajance.com, we've posted a schedule page that gives the tour stops and dates. In

December we start in the Seattle area. If you live in Western Washington, please check for appearances at the beginning of December and again toward the middle of the month. After Seattle we head south to Portland and several appearances in California--in the Bay area as well as LA and San Diego. Back home to Seattle for a few more pre-Christmas events.

Oh, wait. Is there going to be Christmas at our house this year? From the looks of the schedule, it'll have to be a drive-by.

On January 2 we head south to do appearances in Phoenix and Tucson then east to Texas, north to Chicago and Ohio before heading back to Arizona. Due to construction issues in Washington, we missed our Arizona stay this year. We're doing our snowbird bit next year no matter what! There are February events in Savannah, Georgia, and Yuma, Arizona, as well as March events in Tucson and Sanibel, Florida. In other words, it's going to be a busy couple of months.

As for these e-mails. Sending them out is work, and we don't want to send them to folks who aren't interested in receiving them. If you would like to be removed from my list, please let me know. Simply press the reply button to this e-mail and type the word unsubscribe into the subject line. We sent out more than 7000 individual e-mails last summer for the new Joanna Brady book. Three people asked to be removed, and one of those was a man whose wife had been the fan. He wrote to let us know she was gone.

Not everyone can make it to events. If you would like a signed copy, however, please feel free to contact stores where I will be doing events. People there will be happy to have me sign a copy that can be shipped to you.

This summer when we tried to send out our messages, we got crosswise of AOL and were pretty much out of business for several days. I spoke to AOL this morning. We should be good to go. If it works, you'll receive the messages as you're used to seeing them with your name at the top. If that doesn't work, it'll mean we're having to use a list-serve format which is a lot less personal.

One more bit of Internet housekeeping. If you try logging on to the website, www.jajance.com, and the front page has the cover of *Damage Control* rather than the one for *Cruel Intent* on the front page, you may need to empty the cache on your search engine in order to get the current issue.

Hope to see you on the road.

Regards,

JAJance

My Blog

A Christmas Adventure

Friday, December 5, 2008

The last time I was on a book tour in December was twenty books ago!! Twenty!! But being on tour in December comes with some peculiar problems. Like what to do about Christmas.

Being organized helps. The Christmas cards went to the post office THIS WEEK!! And Harry and David will be helping out with the distance Christmas present issues.

What's striking to me, though, is how my life has changed.

In 1980, when my first husband moved out of the house, there was zero money. Less than zero. For Christmas that year, the kids and I strung packing popcorn on dental floss and used that to decorate our tree. We used those same strings for several succeeding Christmases, but finally the dental floss strings managed to tie themselves into such complicated knots that we had to give up on them. That year we also made flour and salt cookie Christmas tree decorations. Those lasted for several years, too, until some little critter found his/her way into the decoration box and consumed same.

In other words, I've done hard times Christmases, and they were wonderful in their own particular way.

But due to my many fans, our lives are much changed since those bad old days. This year, because of the tour, we're in a situation where there's far less time than there is money. So this past Saturday, armed with a fully loaded credit card and three bright-eyed grand kids, I pulled off my first ever Grandma's Grand Christmas Adventure. The three younger grands, ages 6, 4, and 3, were just the right age to be enchanted. Three parental units were in on the gig as well.

We met up in downtown Seattle for an early lunch. That was followed by a visit to the Four Seasons's traditional Teddy Bear Suite, a room stocked with teddy bears doing all kinds of interesting things. With any kind of luck, I'll eventually be able to post a photo of Audrey, Celeste, and Colt sitting together in a teddy bear lap.

After that we walked up the street two blocks to where the horses and carriages were lined up. The one we chose was pulled by a black horse named Barney who was decked out in a set of reindeer antlers. The seven of us clambered into the carriage and then went for a ride, waving at passersby and noticing the decorations including the now Macy's (formerly the Bon) star shining several stories tall on the corner of the building. We finished the ride by feeding Barney carrots.

After the carriage ride we rode the carousel by the Westlake Mall. Next, on the walk to Nordstrom's, we encountered a pair of street musicians playing drums. All kinds of drums. Colty was enchanted. He likes nothing better than bonking tabletops with silverware, so one of his mother's constant admonishments is "No banging." But here was good banging. Mother approved banging. He was so interested, that one of the musicians asked if Colt wanted to try his hand at it. YES!! So Colt was handed a pair of much used drumsticks and wham, wham, wham he went. He was in heaven! And when that song ended the musician GAVE Colt that set of drumsticks.

Then off to the kiddie shoe and clothing department at Nordy's. Shoes and slippers and shirts and skirts were tried on and purchased. When we headed for the cars, parked back at the Four Seasons, the drummers were still on the sidewalk, and Colt had an encore number. By the time we dragged our way back to the cars--with some other Christmas shopping along the way--we were all pretty tired. Grandma was certainly tired. But we came to the house, got our second wind, and then went out to celebrate Colt's third birthday.

All in all, it was an altogether wonderful day. I can hardly wait for next year.

Okay, okay. So much for having fun, now it's time to sign off the computer and go do another signing. But I just wanted to let

you know that it's not all work, work, work. A certain amount of playing is also necessary, especially at Christmas.

Someone asked me yesterday if I could sum up my life in six words or less. Since less is more--I did it in four: The journey is everything.

And by that I mean the whole journey. The good parts and the bad parts. And from a writer's point of view, sometimes the bad parts make for better books.

And for better blogs.

My Blog

Goodbye Old Friend Monday, December 8, 2008

We're on the road. Leaving Portland this morning on our way to the Bay Area. Portland was comfortable as far as weather was concerned. More sunny than wet. And no ice. Ice storms are big in Portland. Fortunately the signings there went off without a hitch.

I'm writing this on my new MacBook Air which really DOES fit in my purse. (Yes, it's a large purse, but there are a lot of other essentials in there as well. I'm working on a book right now, writing using Pages. I'm still worrying about how we'll go about creating the master document when I finish writing. Bill says not to worry. We'll handle it. But after 18 years!!! of working in WordPerfect, I still worry.

The MacAir really is light as a feather compared to my old Toshiba. And the battery life is amazing. The battery on my five year old Toshiba was good for about ten minutes. And the power connection was getting glitchy. It had to be sitting in a very SPECIFIC position in order to maintain the electrical connection. The one thing the Toshiba still had going for it was Solitaire. (A certain amount of Solitaire, along with certain amounts of coffee, are integral parts of my writing process. But Bill went on line and found a nice OSX Solitaire game that works. In other words, now I'm REALLY good to go.

And so, before we left home, I buried my old friend. I used a thumb drive to remove all the working documents. Then I turned it off, unplugged it, put it in the bottom drawer of my bedside table, and walked away.

Good-bye, old friend. We've written a whole lot of books together. But the choice was clear. If I got a new Toshiba, I would have had to face up to a new OS on my own, because my

IT guy/husband refused to go back to dealing with all the PC system issues. So I'm part of the Mac world now.

All the way.

My Blog

Green Chili

Friday December 12, 2008

Sometimes I'm a slow learner. Several people have written to me over the years asking for the recipe for Butch's Green Chili Casserole. It isn't really Butch's.

The original recipe came from my mother, Evie Busk, who raised and fed seven children without ever having the benefit of either a microwave or a dishwasher. (She did have dishwashers, actually, and dishwipers, too--the two-legged kind.)

As I wrote that down I happened to think of something else from those days. The dish-washing part of doing the dishes was not a much sought after duty. For some reason dish-wiping was. Rather than assign those tasks on an arbitrary basis, our parents established the rule that someone had to declare themselves "wiper" during the course of the meal. One sister, who shall remain nameless, always managed to beat everyone else to the punch. As we finished saying grace she would say, "Amen."

Wiper.” And she might have added “Gotcha” as well, because she always did.

But back to the casserole. My mother wasn't a gourmet cook by any means, but she provided nutritious meals, three times a day, on a budget that was pretty thin at times. And for most of the time my brothers and I were in elementary school, we walked home from Greenway School for a home cooked hot lunch.

How I envied those other kids who were lucky enough to “take their lunches” and who got to sit in the lunchroom over the noon hour, swapping sandwiches and Twinkies. (Twinkies, by the way, were pretty much beyond the pale of our grocery budget and were considered to be an amazing treat on those rare occasions when we did have them.)

This is to say that my mother was a good cook who did it every day. When our father retired from the insurance business in the early eighties, my mother said to him, “You're retiring? I'm retiring. The kitchen is closed!” And believe me, she made that one stick.

But back to the casserole. People have asked for the recipe. After sending it out on an individual basis countless times, I finally decided that posting it would be a good idea. And here it is:

Evie Busk's Green Chili Casserole from J. A. Jance

You won't find my mother's recipe for Green Chili Casserole on Food TV because, as far as I know, its never been written down.

Here it is:

1 can diced green chilies,
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 cup diced green onions.
1 pound grated sharp cheddar cheese
1dozen corn tortillas.
2 cups oil.

Heat oil and cook tortillas until done then allow to cool on paper towels.

Stir together soup, green onions and green chilies in a sauce pan and bring to a boil over low heat, stirring to avoid scorching.

Spoon a layer of the soup mixture into a lightly greased casserole dish, add layer of tortillas topped with cheese. Continue until used up. Top layer should have cheese on top. Bake at 425 degrees for approximately twenty minutes. Serve with refried beans and salad.

My Blog

Notes from the Road Friday, December 12, 2008

At a recent book signing event a woman in the audience told me in no uncertain terms, “I like Beaumont and Ali, but I can’t stand that Joanna. What makes her think she can be sheriff? Just because her father was a sheriff and her husband was in law enforcement doesn’t mean she can be. My father was a doctor but that doesn’t make ME a doctor.”

When I started to write the first Joanna Brady book, I thought she was going to be an amateur sleuth in the Miss Marple tradition, but the truth is, all the books I had written up to that point were police procedurals. It turned out I had a very tough time figuring out how or why Joanna would have access to the kind of information that would allow her to solve the mystery. As a consequence, I ended the book with her agreeing to run for the office of sheriff in her deceased husband’s stead.

I’m sure many of the fictional voters who elected Joanna to her fictional office thought that they were giving her a sympathy vote and that she would serve as sheriff in name only with trained officers doing the real police work. Then in the second book, *Tombstone Courage*, she makes an egregious law

enforcement error, one of ten potentially fatal errors police officers, even trained police officers, make. In law enforcement parlance Tombstone Courage means failure to call for back-up.

By the third book, Joanna has come to understand the danger of her lack of training and sends herself to a police academy. I asked the woman in the audience, the one who was so offended, if she had read that one. “No,” she said. “I don’t read those books!”

Okay. You win some; you lose some. That’s the way life is.

At the same signing, one woman wanted to know if *Cruel Intent* was a stand-alone since, without the telltale “Evil” in the title, she didn’t recognize it as an Ali Reynolds book. *Cruel Intent* is definitely Ali Reynolds Number 4. I didn’t reuse “evil” at my editor’s suggestion since she thought too many evils might confuse my readers. It turns out not enough evils confuses my readers as well.

But still, it’s nice to be out here on the road, meeting the folks. At one signing a woman showed me pictures of her very perky collection of Corgis. It turned out they were perky because someone had mentioned the “WALK” word and they were eagerly awaiting an open door. Still, the three of them were very cute.

Another woman said she was glad I mentioned Down Syndrome folks in my books and sent me a photo of her seven year old son, C.J., who is also a Down Syndrome child.

And then there's the woman who wrote to me from Australia who said that listening to my books is helping her make her way through a very serious battle with breast cancer.

I read all the e-mails. I see them all. I appreciate them all.

Thank you.

My Blog

Home for the Holidays Tuesday, December 16, 2008

When you're standing on the outside looking in, the idea of going on a book tour sounds wonderful. I remember a time in my life when I was forever taking people to the airport and bringing people home from the airport without ever getting on a plane myself. But you have to watch out what you wish for because you just might get it.

Eighteen years ago I went off on my first publisher-paid book tour. It was also my first solo excursion to the East Coast. I was astonished when, in the face of an afternoon rain storm with

possible snow flurries, the media escort in DC said flying was a bad idea. Rather than driving me to the airport, he put me on a TRAIN to go to Boston. As a girl from the BIG state West, I was astonished when, every time the train pulled into a station, we were in a different state. That doesn't happen in California or Texas or Arizona or Washington state, either, for that matter.

Since then, I've gone on more book tours than I care to count. I'm glad to go, but you need to know that they are hard work--physically demanding hard work. When you stay in a different hotel room every night, it's not easy to remember which room number is yours. After a while, you tell the dining room folks to check with the desk because you have no idea.

In the beginning, I went on book tours by myself. For the past seven years, my husband has traveled with me, serving as media escort, and Driving Miss Daisy with the help of the Babe, as we call the voice in our dash mounted and portable GPS who moves with us from one rental car to another. We were early adopters of GPS technology and the Babe had saved our bacon and our marriage on more than one occasion when we've been trying to make it to a book signing or an out-of-the-way radio or television station.

For a while, in the nineties, I learned to do tours with carry-on luggage only, but in the aftermath of 9-11, that is no longer feasible. All the liquids I need for two weeks on the road definitely do NOT fit in one of those small Zip-Lock bags. In

the face of airport security, we've been fortunate to be able to use fractional jet transportation for much of the travel. Expensive but convenient. This last tour was done half on commercial aircraft and half not.

Years ago, my mother complained that I was never in a play or Sunday School pageant or school photograph without scrapes on one or both of my knees. (For school photographs that didn't usually matter because, in the old days, I was always in the center of the back row.) If you've followed the course of this blog and remember my reminder about the lesson I received on the law of gravity last October, you probably already know where this is going.

In terms of physical duress, the *Cruel Intent* tour started ominously. Early on, I was introduced to a man who gave me an absolutely bone-crushing handshake. He ground my fingers together so hard that the pain kept me awake over night. And the next day, when it came time to sign books, I could barely hold my pen--my red pen. That hand was still gimpy when we left Seattle for Portland and California. Flying commercial meant wrestling luggage on and off rental car shuttles. But I was doing it. I was okay.

Until Pasadena. The hotel there offers a shuttle to places within a three mile radius, and the book signing at Vroman's was well within that boundary. As we left the hotel for the shuttle, I was looking at the arriving vehicle. I was NOT looking at my feet,

In the process I took a flying leap off an invisible curb--invisible to me, that is. It's clearly painted. Bill is threatening to revoke my high heel privileges since I was wearing that same pair of shoes when I went splat in Chandler in October.

So I landed on both knees and on the balls of both hands. Took a while to get back up. The knee is scraped and bruised, but the heavy knit material on my pantsuit kept the injury to my knee from being a lot worse than it could have been.

I limped into Vromans ten minutes later. I was on time, but the presentation was delayed while my very helpful hostess applied ice, Neosporin, tape, and gauze to my knee. Which is still very ugly, six days later. Scabby. With a yellow bruise that goes from the top of my knee almost to my ankle. I will NOT be wearing a skirt to any upcoming holiday events.

The first two days, I couldn't carry my purse. Bill stepped in and carried it for me. Then, functioning as our CFO, he did something else. He called for the jet and we came home on that instead of flying commercial. He figured if I was having difficulty dealing with my purse, getting luggage on and off shuttles was out. And he was right.

So now we're home. Sleeping at night in our own bed. Sitting in our comfy chairs. Running our own familiar clickers. Christmas is barreling toward us. And so is the cold weather. It was shocking to leave cloudy but comfortable sixty degree

weather in San Diego to come home to 25 degrees with ice on the roadways and with snow on the shoulders.

But we're home. And happy to be so. The January part of the tour will be a whole other story.

My Blog

Winter Won-er La-d Friday, December 19, 2008

Rather than run afoul of Internet Scrutinizers, you're just going to have to come along for the ride.

According the Lerner and Lowe, women's heads are full of "Cotton, hay and r---s." (Rhymes with Hags.)

My head, on the other hand, is full of lyrics. I'm a person who has always had a song for every reason and every season. In fact, when we first moved to Seattle and lived in a downtown high rise, I mortified my son by often breaking into song about whatever happened to be in my head at that particular moment. He found this disconcerting. especially when we were in elevators. With other people.

Because of this peculiar mindset, my blog updates often have "familiar refrain" sounding titles. Which evidently annoys the dickens (Charles, of course) out of the Lords of the Internet

(think Lord of the F----) who will let an improperly named blog open a couple of times but then, fearing copyright infringement issues, they immediately shut it down again.

That's when my faithful blog readers get that obnoxious URL NOT FOUND message. The Lords of the Internet also have dirty minds. When we titled a blog entry Daddy's Little G--- (Rhymes with Pearl) they thought it was porn and shut that one down, too, even though it was a blog posting about our golden retriever, Daphne.

That's why I'm asking you to please be patient if reading this essay is more like decoding a puzzle than anything else. I'm trying to say what I want to say, all the while outwitting the powers that be

So I'm looking out at our snow-surrounded swimming pool lined with some very unhappy snow-bedraggled palm trees and I'm NOT dreaming of a ----- Christmas. And we're not even IN Beverly H----, LA. There's a good six inches of snow out on our patio, and the weather people, not to be sexist, are predicting even more snow for this weekend along with very high winds.

Fortunately, Bill gave me a generator for last year's Christmas present. Between that and our new Verizon air cards we should be prepared for almost any contingency. In the meantime, All I ---- for C----- is a very Northwestern rainstorm that will raise the temp to my favorite wintertime reading of 47 degrees. A properly positioned Pineapple Express would do a lot to get rid

of all this pesky snow. (As you may have already guessed, I am not now and most likely NEVER will be a skier.)

Do I sound like a White -----mas Grinch? Yes. I am. I admit it straight out, and here's the reason why:

Our house in Bellevue sits at the top of a very steep driveway. And the side road at the bottom of the drive, also steep, has yet to be plowed and/or sanded. My gimpy knee is still giving me difficulty from the fall I took in Pasadena last week--before the bad weather arrived in California--so I'm unwilling to tempt fate again by trying to drive on icy roadways to reach icy parking lots to reach pretty much unattended book signings.

(Hey, if they closed BellSquare in Bellevue, WA, at 7:30 last night, why should I try to be a retail hero?) I trust that the outlets I'm missing along with the fans who were planning on seeing me there will forgive me. Weather permitting, I'm planning on stopping by all those places next week to do stock signings. Besides, it's not like I'm not working. I'm writing instead.

So it's Beginning to Look a --- Like C----- will never come. This is the Sunday is when we usually hold our traditional family holiday get-together, but with another storm expected, that's just not going to work. The party is off the table. I don't expect kids and grandkids to risk life and limb in coming Over --- river and ----- the -----s to a party. This year, in addition to P----- on Earth and G----- to Men, we're concentrating on flexibility.

And looking beyond Christmas, What are you ----- New Year's,
N-- Year's E--?

My Blog

It Is Fiction

Tuesday, December 23, 2008



Since my books are as “bi-regional” as I am, people often ask me which location do I prefer? I always answer, “It depends on the season.”

June in Tucson is generally a bad idea or else it’s an acquired taste, depending on your point of view. And winters in the Pacific Northwest can be a pain--more so this year than in any of the twenty-seven years I’ve lived here. (I’m a Northwest transplant dating from July 1981. I don’t generally count the years in the mid-seventies when I was living in Pe Ell west of Chehalis.)

But back to writing bi-regional books. From the questions I'm asked, it would appear that folks often assume that I need to be in Arizona to write an Arizona book and in Seattle to write a Seattle book. Generally speaking, this is not true. I can send my head and my typing fingers to the other place even if I can’t physically be there. (Having good maps available as I write is a BIG help!)

This week as it happens, I’m in Seattle where there’s more than a foot of snow in our yard. Still. Close to a week after the first dump of eight or nine inches. This is NOT typical. Usually after it snows here, the rains come and snow goes away. Not this time.

And so, while I’ve been writing, I’ve also been looking out on a snowbound landscape. Now it happens that I'm working on the next Ali book--the one for NEXT winter. I realized this morning, that with my little toes longing for heat, I had

somehow forgotten that when Ali drove from Sedona to Phoenix on the last day in May, the heat would have blasted into her face the moment she rolled down the car window. Fortunately, this morning, I remembered to fix that.

And just now, writing this, I remembered something else. The ninth Beaumont book, *Payment in Kind*, begins with just this kind of snowstorm--when the city closes the main drag up and down Queen Anne Hill so kids can use it for sledding. (Locally that steep stretch of street is referred to as the Counter Balance, even though the street cars that gave the *real* counter balance its name have been gone for generations.)

I actually wrote that fictional snowstorm scene while sitting in a hotel room in Hawaii where my husband's then-employer was holding a September sales conference. I wrote the scene based on a snow storm that occurred when I first arrived in Seattle in the early Eighties. I sent the manuscript to New York and it went through the usual several months'-long editorial and production process. A year and a little bit later, the book came out in February. As it happened, that year we had also had a post-Christmas snow storm.

I was doing a signing in Lynnwood when a woman came charging up to the table and said, "You're really fast, aren't you." I must have looked sufficiently puzzled because she tapped the cover of the book and explained, "This snowstorm just happened a couple of weeks ago."

People who end up reading that book now--and I do have new Beaumont readers who are just starting on the series--may think I rewrote that book just this past week in order to include our current snowstorm. Trust me. I didn't. I was too busy dealing with Arizona in the summer.

My Blog

The Last One of 2008

Monday, December 29, 2008

Tonight, on the 29th of December, we'll be having our NYTimes list celebration for *Hand of Evil*. Of all the holiday events we planned for this season, this apparently (so far and with fingers crossed) will be the first one that hasn't been delayed, postponed, or downright canceled due to inclement weather. The trees outside are blowing in the wind, however, and the Bellevue Main Post Office, less than a mile from the scheduled venue for the party, is currently without power.

You're probably thinking, wait a minute. Someone from Seattle is complaining about bad weather? Yes! Absolutely. Usually when it snows here, it rains the next day and the snow is gone. Not this time. Several pre-Christmas signings were called off when I couldn't get down our ski-slope driveway to the road. Actually, we could have gotten down it. The real problem is stopping at the end of the driveway. Across the road is a free-fall cliff with assorted trees. You're welcome to call me a

weather wimp all you want, but taking a nosedive off into the woods is not on my list of Must-Do Lifetime Events.

Our traditional pre-Christmas family get-together got booted to two days AFTER Christmas. Instead of going out to celebrate our wedding anniversary, we stayed home for a celebratory dinner of Honey Nut Cheerios and champagne.

But when we did finally get together and the little kids were able to dive head-first into their presents, it made the wait worthwhile.

My best friend, a life-time friend from fourth grade on, is Pat McAdams Hall. She flew in from Orlando to come celebrate with us tonight. I did an almost complete meltdown (Bill says it was an anxiety attack.) worrying about whether her plane would get here and whether or not Shuttle Express would manage to get her to our house. They got her to the bottom of the driveway. Their driver didn't like the looks of that ravine, either, so our daughter-in-law, an experienced Eastern Washington snow-driver, hopped down the hill in her 4 X 4 and brought our Florida guest up to our snowbound hideaway.

Today the snow mess is pretty much melted from right around the house, but with clear blue skies visible outside, now I'm worried that the weather will turn cold and what's left will turn back into solid ice. Do I sense another anxiety attack coming on?

On Sunday of this week, I head to Arizona to do the next part of the *Cruel Intent* tour. Having lived through the past three weeks, I can't help but wonder what things will be like in Chicago and Cleveland--in January.

Brrr. I guess I'll bring along a coat.