

J.A. Jance 2012 Blogs

God Fish

Friday, January 6, 2012

We have a God Fish in our house, and no, that is not a misprint.

We have goldfish in the ponds outside. They started out as the 25 cent PetsMart variety of goldfish, and they have grown remarkably. We've been told that once the weather turns cold we're not supposed to feed them because when they go dormant they can't digest food properly. So I'm torn. I feel mean not feeding them, but I don't want to poison them, either. So I have fish food, but I'm resisting the urge to use it--on the outside fish, but the topic of the moment is our INSIDE fish--the one on the kitchen counter.

He came to live with us in the following manner. At the end of October, our daughter and grandson went to a fall festival at their church. One of the booths was handing out goldfish in ZIPLOC bags. Our daughter didn't want to have your basic one hundred dollar "free" goldfish, so she told Colt, "No. You can't have one!" and they went on their way.

But as they meandered around the church, they saw a plastic bag with a fish sitting on a bench near the door. An hour later, the same fish was still there, clearly abandoned by some other mother who didn't want a free goldfish, either.

Colt has grown up with the family television set mostly on the Animal Planet. Animal rescues are a big part of his six-year-old experience. Accepting a free goldfish was one thing. Rescuing an abandoned goldfish was another.

And so the goldfish from church, the God fish, came home to our house. Because Colt is a Star Wars fanatic, the fish already had a name by the time they got here--Emperor Palpatine. The emperor's first home was a glass flower vase we found in the laundry room. He now lives in a far larger bowl, one that used to hold a Costco supply of something like crackers or cookies. Colored beads have been added to the bottom. Water plants and an anchor have been added to give him something besides plain water to swim around in. We're not all the way up to a hundred bucks, but we're closing in on it.

Grandpa is the one who cleans the fishbowl, but I'm the one who feeds the Emperor first thing in the morning. I don't know how much brainpower fish have, but I do notice that when I come into the kitchen, he's usually hanging out on whichever side of the bowl is closest to the orange and white fish food container. And I don't have to stand around saying, "Hey, come and get it." The moment I put a pinch of fish food in the top of his bowl, the Emperor is THERE.

So I've come to enjoy watching him. And next summer, when the water outside is a lot warmer, I expect our inside fish will become one of our outside fish.

I'll probably miss him.

The More Things Change

Friday, January 13, 2012

My first sales job was in Bisbee, Arizona, in the mid-Fifties. When I was about ten year's old, there was an interesting ad on the back of my Little Lulu comics (the only ones we were allowed to subscribe to). It was an ad for the Junior Sales Club of America. Within a matter of weeks, there I was, out on the streets in my neighborhood, hawking boxes of All Occasion Greeting cards. I was happy to do so because I had my eyes on a prize--a Kodak Brownie Hawkeye Camera, complete with a flash attachment.

It took several months, but I had the camera in hand in time to take it for my two week stay at Camp Whispering Pines, a Girl Scout camp in southern Arizona's Catalina Mountains. I still have some of the black and white photos from that experience, all of which serve as a reminder of how homesick I was. The camera disappeared somewhere along the way, and now I use--my iPhone.

But this week I was saddened to hear that camera giant Kodak has filed for bankruptcy and is about to go the way of the dodo bird. People like me--very occasional photographers--don't actually use cameras any more because, as they say in the commercial, there's an App for that.

But bad news was coming hard and fast this week because now I've read that Twinkies are biting the dust. Twinkies? One of the constants in my life? On very rare occasions, my mother would go to Pay and Tote and cough up enough money for FIVE ten cent packages of two. When she brought them home, that meant everyone in the family got one and my dad, as head of the household, was allotted the extra one.

As an adult, I've walked through grocery store check out stands only to hear the siren call of Twinkie packages, the twosome kind, singing to me through the crowd--"Take us HOME!" I was especially susceptible to that several years ago when we were following the Atkins NO CARB diet. And even now, a cardboard packages containing twelve of the single wrapped Twinkies lurks unopened on the pantry shelves in my kitchen. I couldn't help myself. It was one of those two-fer deals with the card at Safeway. The contents of the first package disappeared over the holidays and now I'm considering keeping that final package unopened as a permanent memorial. Goodbye, Twinkies.

But the bad news department wasn't done with me.

I believe I've mentioned before that putting a restaurant into one of my books by name is often fatal--to the restaurant, that is. So far both Bis on Main and the Mediterranean Kitchen in Bellevue and the Arizona Inn Dining Room in Tucson have all managed to escape my literary kiss of death. Not so, Waterfront 55, Fountain Court, the Doghouse, and the Puppy Club.

Now, though with the upcoming Ali book, Left for Dead, I'm in danger of taking down an entire government entity--the U.S. Postal Service. A small town post office plays a prominent role in that book as do the people who work there.

I'm hoping the post office lasts long enough for the book to be published on February 7, but I'm not holding my breath

So goodbye all you old pals. It's been swell.

Let it Rain, Let it Rain, Let it Rain

Friday, January 20, 2012

It snowed here this week, and I mean it snowed with a vengeance. We could get down the hill if we had to, but the DOT is suggesting that people limit themselves to essential driving only and ours is definitely inessential. So despite the snow plow and the stockpiled jugs of de-icer, we're staying put. We have heat. We have food. Why go out and drive around on a skating rink with a bunch of nut-cases who have yet to figure out that ice and excessive speed are a very bad idea. I understand there's a truck driver who spilled whole eighteen wheeler full of oranges on a local freeway intersection earlier this morning. I would guess he has a far better understanding about speed and ice this afternoon than he did this morning.

One of our daughters is locked into an school-closure-enforced snow-day vacation. She's stuck at home with a very busy six-year old. We've been reading Harry Potter to our grandson for half an hour or so everyday before school. We're halfway through the second book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Since there's been no school this week, I've been reading to him over the phone to give her a break. We had planned to finish the book before he watched the movie, but today I've taken pity on my daughter. I told Colt to go ahead and watch the movie. We'll finish reading the book later.

Our other daughter and her family were headed for Vegas today for a weekend gymnastics tournament. They made it to the airport just fine, but planes aren't flying, and their flight is canceled. They're currently on their way back home. So that's how the snow has impacted our lives.

An unintended consequence of the bad weather, however, has been a very welcome reminder of my mother, Evie.

There were seven kids in our family. Our mother made scarce grocery dollars stretch by buying the least expensive and toughest cuts of meat and then cooking them into submission. I was in college before I ever saw any steak other than round and any steak cooking temperature other than well done.

Once the first meal was over, if there happened to be any left-over roast beef left on the platter, it definitely didn't go to waste. My mother, using an old hand-cranked food mill, would grind that up along with some potatoes, onions, and maybe even a couple of carrots and turn it into hash.

Growing up, that was my favorite lunch-time meal--my mother's hash served with glass of milk and a slice of jam-covered bread--usually peach or apricot preserves that she put up from our own fruit trees every summer.

So today, that's what Bill did. He rounded up some lingering steak and pork roast leftovers, the last two potatoes in the house, along with the last two onions and ground them up in his not-hand-cranked Kitchen Aide. And voila!! Evie's hash!! Heaven. Someone gave us some hot blackberry preserves and that, along with a glass of milk, is what I had with my hash.

It was wonderful. We'll probably have the same thing for dinner. The weather outside is frightful. It will be nice when the rain comes and washes the white stuff away, but right now, I'm a happy camper, full of hash and enjoying some memories.

Three Days on the Road

Friday, January 27, 2012

I usually enjoy our wintertime snowbird trek from Seattle to Tucson. With the leaves off the trees it's possible to see the big nests and accompanying big birds lurking in the moss-covered bare branches. Not this time.

We had planned to leave on Sunday two weeks ago, but the combination of snow on the ground in Bellevue and snow on the ground in the mountains of southern Oregon and northern California made us rethink our scheduled departure.

When we did finally leave, the snow at home had melted because of what I asked for--rain, rain, and more rain. Which is what we drove in most of the way from Seattle to Bakersfield--sloshy, soggy, goopy rain. Not to mention a good deal of fog. The road through the Siskiyou was wet but sanded, and we were relieved that no chains were required.

I've noted before that the distance between our two homes requires twenty-six hours of driving. We break that up into three days of travel--two eights and a final killer ten which always seems like more when we hit the Time Zone change and lose an additional hour in Yuma.

This time we were traveling with Bella, our rescued Dachshund. Having been dumped on the street over a year ago, she has abandonment issues. It's amazing how, when we get out of the car, she can always manage to squirt out, too, especially when we don't want her to bail. Considering the weather mentioned in one of the above paragraphs, you can imagine that the interior of our car now has a few muddy/oily paw prints where there shouldn't be any. As for "getting busy" on the road? With Bella's abandonment issues, it's not gonna happen unless Bill and I are BOTH present and accounted for.

If the little brown dog could talk, I'm sure she would have been whining "Are we there yet?" before we ever hit Longview. By the end of that long third day, she probably thought she would have to live in the car the rest of her life.

We long ago gave the absurd idea of "driving straight through." We stop. We have places along the way that we know and trust. Breakfast at the Country Cousin in Centralia; a night's stay and a fried chicken dinner at the Ashland Springs Hotel in Ashland; tortilla soup at the Doubletree in Bakersfield. Both of the hotels are dog friendly. When we got off the elevator on the third floor (the pet floor) of the Ashland Springs, Bella made a beeline to the room where we have stayed before.

Along the way we stop at the occasional Burger King where, after last year's griping, I'm happy to report, sliced jalapeños are once again on the menu. But there are some Burger Kings that have fallen off the list. The one east of Palm Springs is a case in point. At a stop there several years ago, the employees in the kitchen were engaged in some kind of a brawl rather than filling orders, so we now drive right past that one which we now refer to as the Family Feud Burger King.

It was 9:30 local time when we finally made it to the house in Tucson and started unpacking. Bella, having adjusted to the car, wasn't willing to abandon it until she was certain everything was out of the vehicle and that we really were going inside to stay.

Without Daphne here with us, the little dog has a very big yard to herself. The sun is shining. It's still too chilly to work outside, so I'm working inside. A copyedited manuscript for this summer's Joanna book, Judgment Call, was here waiting for my review when we arrived, so I'd better get my nose to the grindstone and go to work.

As my mother would say, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Reading Aloud

Friday, February 3, 2012

When I was in elementary school, my favorite part of the day was just after lunch when, either by official or unofficial agreement, all the teachers read aloud in their classrooms for ten or fifteen minutes. These were what my grandson calls "chapter books" as opposed to "picture books." I remember hearing Charlotte's Web, Black Beauty, Little House on the Prairie. I'm sure there were others, but they didn't make as big an impression on me.

The magic of that read aloud time, sitting with the words washing over me and imagining the pictures in my head, remains with me still, and that's one of the reasons I'm reading Harry Potter aloud to my grandson. Yes, I know. We're in Arizona; he's not, but telephones work and since we're on the same cell phone network, there are no long distance charges. And my daughter holds me entirely responsible for the fact that earlier this week, when she and Colt were having a disagreement, he called her "a Dursley." She knows enough about Harry Potter to know that wasn't a good thing. (If you have no idea why being a Dursley is bad, let me urge you to read the Harry Potter books on your own. Read aloud or not, they're fun for readers of all ages and you don't need a grandchild as an excuse!)

A few weeks ago, while reading through a batch of e-mail, I found a note from a teacher at one of the charter schools here in Tucson. He's evidently on the same page as the teachers at Greenway School once were, because he does the same thing--he reads to his class every day just after lunch. One of the books he chose to read is Desert Heat, the first Joanna Brady book. That's the book in which, Joanna and Jenny, her nine-year old daughter, deal with the death of their husband and father respectively when Andrew Roy Brady is gunned down by a drug dealer's hit-man.

Once they finished listening to the book, the kids in the class were asked to write a letter to one of the characters. The teacher took photos of some of the letters and sent them to me. Several wrote get well cards to Andy in his fictional hospital bed. One wrote to Joanna saying if she ever needed anyone to look after her dogs, she could call him. But one junior high school girl wrote a letter to Jenny, Joanna's daughter, and that one took my breath away.

The student told Jenny she knew just how she felt because she, too, had lost her father when he was shot to death at the time she was ten years-old. She told Jenny that no matter how bad it was, someday it would be better. I had a tough time reading through the letter because it's not easy to read when your eyes are full of tears and when your skin is covered with goosebumps.

So next Monday, the day before the tour starts, I'll be paying an hour long visit to that school and that classroom. If I'm able to meet that young woman, I hope to tell her how much her letter meant to me.

Last week, at another event, a man sauntered up to the table and said, "I corresponded with your secretary a couple of years ago." He went on to explain that he had written to object to a spelling error in one of my books. When he finished, I explained to him that he hadn't corresponded with my secretary because I don't HAVE a secretary. He had corresponded with me.

The story mentioned above is the real explanation of why I read my own fan mail. If I had someone sorting it for me, I might dodge some of the bad ones--including the guy complaining about the misspelling, but I also might miss out on some of the good ones. I'm not willing to do that.

PS: The Left for Dead tour starts in Tucson on February 7. The schedule is posted on my website: <http://www.jajance.com/jajance.com/Schedule.html>. The events in North Carolina are still pending at this point. Once they are finalized, they'll be posted, too.

Hope to see many of you somewhere along the way.

Tails from the Left for Dead Trail

Monday, October 22, 2012

Book tours are full of highs and lows. At the moment, I'm sitting in a truly green green room, waiting for a television interview that was scheduled for oh-dark-thirty. I wish I could say it's a pretty green. It isn't. I've been told this will be a "stand up" interview. I'm not thrilled about that since the interviewer barely comes to my shoulder.

Last night we left Poisoned Pen and were driving along Camelback, minding our own business when the SUV in the right hand lane ahead of us suddenly slewed up over the curb and onto the sidewalk. He scraped along there for a while, shooting up showers of sparks, then he staggered off the sidewalk, over corrected, and came shooting sideways across our lane and into oncoming traffic. Fortunately the other lanes were empty. While I clutched Bella in a death grip, Bill, my hero, took evasive action. We managed to miss the guy by bare inches. Once he righted himself, he sped off, took the next left and disappeared into the night. I don't know if he was DWI (driving while

intoxicated) or DWT (driving while texting,) but he was clearly impaired, and we were very lucky.

Somehow it wasn't as scary as our encounter with the wrong way driver in Gorst-- maybe because it was over much more quickly. However, we both came back to the hotel feeling very lucky to have dodged that bullet. Bella, on the other hand didn't seem to have an opinion on the topic. She had a lot to say, however, about the biblio-kitty that lives outside the Poisoned Pen. Bella was outraged when at the very first bark, the cat decamped straight up a near by mesquite tree. Evidently Bella's unknown-to-us past didn't include an up-close-and-personal relationship with a feline.

So the close encounter with the SUV counts as a book tour low point. Here's a high point:

Tuesday evening at the Barnes and Noble in Tucson, a woman who arrived at the signing during my talk, waited until the end of the autograph line before she approached my table. Thirty years of experience in the book business has taught me that the people who want to be last in the autograph line can go one of two ways. Either they're genuinely nuts and want me to help them get THEIR book published, so they can be there autographing books, or else they simply want a private word with me. In this case, it was the latter.

"I wanted to thank you for writing to my literacy counselor," she said.

Those of you who have written to me over the years know that I personally answer my e-mail, and it happens that I did remember a literacy volunteer writing and asking if I would send a note of encouragement to a client who was using my Joanna Brady books to learn to read. Of course I wrote the note, and now that client, a dark-haired young woman in her mid-thirties, was standing in front off me.

"You're welcome," I said.

I stood up and went around the table to give her a hug. Surprisingly enough, she was as tall as I am. By then she was crying, and so was I.

"Now I can read and understand what I'm reading, she said "You have no idea how that has changed my world!"

So those are the kinds of things that happen on tour. It's eight AM. I'm out of one green room and into another. I've done one TV interview, had breakfast, and am off to the next. From there we go to Surprise in the far northwest corner of the Valley of the Sun. After that we go to Changing Hands in Tempe, in the southeast part of the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Miles to go before we sleep. I'd better go take my vitamins.

Top Ten

Friday, February 17, 2012

We're having a very rare morning on a book tour. After a night of sleeping in our own bed, we're in our comfy chairs, wearing our comfy robes, and sipping our very own coffee. Bella is every bit as tired as we are. She's sacked out in her bed on the sofa. Doing twenty-five events in two weeks flat wears you out, regardless of whether you're a person or a puppy.



Traveling and living out of suitcases is hell on fingernails, so yesterday I was in Andy's Nails in Bellevue having an emergency mid-tour manicure when my editor called from New York. It was the late (in New York) Wednesday afternoon call every touring author hopes to receive, one that let me know that *Left for Dead* will debut at # 10 on the New York Times list.

Even while I was growing up in Bisbee, Arizona, that New York Times bestseller cachet made it as far as the spindle book rack of paperbacks that were for sale at Warren Drug. There wasn't a bookstore in Bisbee back then, and the book selection available in the various drug and grocery stores was pretty much it.

Back then I hoped to be a best selling author some day, but as that old Janis Ian song says, "Dreams were all they gave for free to Ugly Duckling girls like me."

And now that dream has come true, not just once, but over and over, and now it's time to say thank you. My publicist has worked for months, coordinating and booking the various interviews and events, in any number of out of the way places. Who knew that two-hundred people would show up at the Vagabond RV park outside Tucson or at the library in Wickenburg? If you don't know where Wickenburg is, check your Arizona road atlas.

I went to all those places, and so did my faithful companions, my husband and my dog, but someone else showed up, too, my readers and a whole collection of booksellers who took their sales skills on the road. A huge thank you to all of them.

And then there are my readers, my loyal readers, who received their e-mail announcements and immediately pre-ordered the book. I know for sure that they saved that announcement, too, because they are using it to send me their own personal reviews. So far my personal favorite is the one-word review, "Brilliant!" Is my head swelling yet?

Today is another day of appearances. At the house on the kitchen table is a whole stack of envelopes awaiting book mark signatures. They'll get done but not until next week.

We've included a Bella-eye view of the book tour so you can see what a book tour appearance looks like to a vertically challenged dog.

But once again, thank you to everyone who made it possible including my very talented web mistress. It really does take a village to make this work.

Catching My Breath

Friday, February 24, 2012

After two plus weeks of absolutely frenetic activity and non-stop travel, I'm sure Bella is feeling as though she fell off the edge of the earth. Ditto for me and for Bill. It's taken all week for us to recover, and now it's almost time to hit the road again. This time we're heading for appearances in St. Louis.

So today, I was minding my own business and working on reviewing my galleys for the upcoming Joanna Brady book, when I received a disturbing e-mail. It turns out someone had received an e-mail from me claiming that I had found the perfect way to make money at home. The truth is, I have, but it's not something I advertise in an e-mail with no subject line that comes loaded with a hyperlink.

I have no idea how someone managed to access my list, but they did. I have now taken corrective measures. And if you receive something from me that suggests I have cheap viagra pills for sale or that I've found a way to solve all my financial worries, I suggest you go no further. Do what I do--hit the delete key--IMMEDIATELY!!!

When I send out new book announcements, the subject line clearly indicates they are new book announcements. And there is always an opt out line if you wish to opt out. When I send out regular e-mails, the subject line indicates I am responding to something that was sent to me. If there's no subject line, DO NOT OPEN!!

For the people who have sent me e-mails alerting me to the problem? Thank you. I appreciate your concern.

As for the jerks (You're welcome to insert an appropriately non-grandmotherly word) who sit around wasting your time and mine creating junk like this? I have a feeling that a spammer of some kind is about to die a terrible death in one of my books. That's how mystery writers deal with people who annoy them.

We knock them off--and then we get away with it.

Getting Down To Business

Friday, March 2, 2012

For the past three weeks, I've been out on the book-tour road and doing a lot of talking about writing. People at book tour events want to know how writing works: Question: Where do ideas come from? Answer: Everywhere and nowhere. Question: How long does it take to write a book? Answer: That depends. Question: Does writing get easier the longer you do it? Answer: No. Question: Can you help me get my book published? Answer: No. Question: Should I self-publish my book? Answer: I have no idea.

By now you're probably getting the picture. It's a lot easier to TALK about writing than it is to actually do it--to put your butt in a chair, put your fingers on the keyboard, and make the words leak out of your head. Sometimes the scenes gush out like a flood. Sometime it's more like having an ill-trained phlebotomist trying to do a blood draw on someone who's a notoriously hard stick. (Guess who that might be???)

But that's what time it is--time to go back to the interrupted melody that is Ali # 8 and to try getting that story back on track.

This is the part of writing that has nothing to do with being out in public. As a duck glides serenely across a body of water, what's invisible from a distance is the legs underneath the surface, paddling like crazy. This is the boring grammatical part where subjects have to agree with predicates and no participle can be left to dangle. (If you don't know what a dangling participle is, you probably don't have the blessing and curse of the Bisbee High School English mavens in your background--Rachel Riggins, Anne Medigovich, Anita Shreve and Barbara Reavis. What each of those ladies taught me all those years ago still serves me in good stead.)

So please be patient. Blogging may be light for the next while. There's only so much of me to go around.

The Money Sucking Bridge Modest Proposal

Friday, March 9, 2012

We live close to the Money Sucking Bridge, aka the 520 Bridge. It's far more convenient for us to use the 520 Bridge than the I-90 Bridge. That requires going through downtown Bellevue, and everyone who has ever traveled I-405 knows how much fun that is. We weren't thrilled at the idea of having to buy a Good-to-Go device for our vehicles, but we did it in December so we'd be Good-to-Go. And we are. Only it turns out to be a much better deal than expected because almost no one else seems to be using the bridge.

On a day in December, after the tolling started, we left the house at 3 PM, dropped off some paperwork in downtown Seattle, and were back home again by 4:15, all of which was done in what formerly would have been rush-hour, bumper-to-bumper traffic. And why was that? Because we were almost the only ones using the bridge during the prohibitively high toll traffic time.

The toll advisory committee, whoever they may be, decided to set the tolls to punish almost anyone going to or coming from work. People working regular jobs--someone living on the east side and selling books at the U. Dub Bookstore for example or working in the cafeteria at the U Dub Hospital would find the additional hourly-adjusted toll rates outside the limits of their budgets. And what do regular people do when they can't afford something? They don't buy it. In this case, commuters who can't afford the additional cost of the 520 bridge tolling are going SOME OTHER WAY!!

That means that the rosy financial picture painted by the above named committee about how much the tolling will bring in is . . . well . . . a crock. I won't say a crock of what, I suspect you can fill in that blank. At this rate, the money the state expected to come in

to replace the bridge isn't going to be there, either. When that happens, will the state say, "Hey, wait a minute. We can't afford this bridge." No, since they're spending other people's money, they'll simply go ahead and build the bridge anyway and raise more taxes to do it.

So here's a modest proposal: The state, at great expense and far later than expected, finally managed to get the variable toll readers in place and working. (More or less working, with a few hiccoughs here and there.) But the truth is, they are variable. They can be adjusted. All it would take is flipping a switch on the overhead signs.

How about this? How about lowering the tolls to a less prohibitive rate--say fifty cents or even a dollar in either direction at any time of day? That way the mechanic going to work at his day job at a gas station and the folks coming home from the Seattle Opera would both be paying the same rate. (Guess which one is getting screwed under the current program?)

Say they tried this for a month--long enough for people to readjust their driving habits.

I'm a liberal arts major, not a traffic engineer or an economist, but I'm guessing this would immediately have several beneficial effects. It would reduce traffic on three major highways--I-5, I-405, and I-90!!! Yes, traffic on 520 would be more like it used to be, but the amount of income generated by the increased number of cars paying the lower rate would raise tolling income enough to come closer to the original projections. And maybe the money sucking bridge would become less so for everyone concerned.

I'm making this suggestion, but I doubt anyone will listen.

After all, how often have you heard a politician of ANY stripe say, "Hey, I was wrong; maybe we should rethink that!"

In other words, don't hold your breath.

Having the Last Laugh

Friday, March 16, 2012

Years ago, a friend, a fellow teacher from Sells, went to Bisbee with me to visit my parents. Mealtimes at our family's house was always a lot like living in a perpetual Toastmasters Club. With nine people at the table, all of them vying for air-time, it was important to grab your little corner of conversation and run with it. If you stood around stammering 'um' or 'er' or forgot your punchline, you also lost your turn, because before you could pick up your train of thought, someone else took over.

After sharing lunch with my folks, the teacher friend turned to me and said, "Were meals at your house ALWAYS like that?" And the truth is, they were.

I remember one particular meal when my mother's parents were visiting. When dinner was over, Grandpa jumped up from the table to clear it. When he came back, he stuffed a cold wet dishcloth down the back of my shirt and told me, "Now you're a wetback." The irony of that is that he really was one. A few years later, when he went to Sweden with my mother to visit his remaining brothers, his daughters discovered that he had never become a US citizen and had to travel there on a Swedish passport

Both my parents loved practical jokes. My mother came by that honestly from her family, see incident listed above. I'm not sure about my how my dad found his sense of humor since he was raised by a pair of parents who were, as near as I could tell, essentially humorless, but once he met up with my mother they were a matched set.

As newlyweds, poor and living in Twin Brooks, South Dakota, the cheapest rent they could find was in a house next to the railroad tracks. Each night, just as they were eating supper (Remember, people in South Dakota eat SUPPER not DINNER!!!) the train would come rumbling through and blow its whistle at the nearby crossing. One night my mother decided that when the train blew its whistle, she was going to act like she was scared to death by diving under the table. When she did so, she came face to face with my father who had decided to pull the same stunt.

At our son's wedding in Seattle, my father loved exhibiting what he told guests was his "diamond clip" which turned out to be a dime with a paperclip on it. When he finished with that particular guest, he would mosey on to his next victim while our mother would come up and ask if the first hapless guest if he or she wanted to see her hammer toe. Which turned out to be her . . . well . . . surgically removed hammer toe, jerked in the sun, which she carried around in her purse inside an Altoid box with a soft cotton lining. It's been close to twenty years since then. Some of Evie's unfortunate hammer toe victims have yet to return to our home.

A couple of weeks ago, we lost my mother's next younger sister, our Aunt Toots, who died at age 100 plus. She spent a total of eight days in Hospice. Several days into her stay, one of the hospice workers came tiptoeing into Aunt Toots's darkened room intent, I'm sure, on checking to see if the old gal was still breathing. Just as she arrived at the bedside, Toots yelled, "BOO!!" and scared the poor woman to death.

A few days later, as my cousin was relating that story to others in Toot's hospital room, she smiled at the joke, and passed on with a smile on her lips and a joke in her heart.

I believe that's called having the last laugh.

What a way to go!!!

Losing A Friend

Friday, March 23, 2012

During the years I was a librarian on the reservation, I told 26 stories a week in K-6 classrooms. Because I was tall and often wore a bright green dress on storytelling days, the kids called me the Jolly Green Giant.

Some classes were better than others. My favorite class was always the one where Lois Taff was the teacher. She was a lady in her sixties back then, with a gun-metal gray bob and a charming west Texas drawl. No matter what class she had, they were always "the BEST kids!!" And while they were in her classroom, they believed it. Unfortunately, when those very same kids moved on to the next grade and to a teacher who thought the same kids were "the WORST kids!!", they believed that too.

But when I went to Lois Taff's class to tell stories, the kids listened with rapt attention. I loved watching her with the kids--the way she spoke to them, listened to them, and cared about what they had to say.

Eventually, I left the reservation and Mrs. Taff retired, but from time to time, I'd stop by her place in Tucson and we'd go to a nearby restaurant for a cup of coffee.

The world of Women's Liberation was big back then. It was easier for me to be mad at all men in general than it was to be mad at the particular man I had chosen, so I joined up. I even burned a bra once. (It was a nursing bra. I tossed it on the barbecue AFTER I cooked dinner, so you could say it was a bit of a mixed message.)

When I came back to Tucson in the late seventies, I served briefly as the president of the local chapter of NOW. Let's just say for the record that NOW has changed a lot since then, and so have I, but that year, we held a parade in honor of Susan B. Anthony. If we had been smart, we would have staged the march on her birthday, February 15, but we weren't. We staged our seven mile walk on Broadway in Tucson--from Park to Wilmot--in the middle of August which, it turned out, was a whole lot warmer and not nearly as symbolic. But Tucson was smaller in those days. The march received some news coverage and, as president at the time, I was one of the people interviewed on camera.

A few weeks later, finding myself with some spare time due to a canceled insurance appointment, I stopped by Lois Taff's house in West Tucson and invited her to coffee. When she came to the door, she looked at me and shook her head. "In fifty years of marriage," she said, "you're the one thing my husband and I don't agree on, so I won't be able to go to coffee."

I was thunderstruck. For one thing, I had never even met the man. I have to believe that the basis of his problem with me was whatever I had said in that interview on TV a few weeks earlier. There are a lot of other side issues that have gotten tossed into the pot of feminism along the way, things that have taken it far away from its roots, but the basic principle of equal work for equal pay is one that I believed in then and continue to believe in to this day.

I stood at Lois Taff's front door, rejected and astonished. I mumbled a quick apology and left as she slammed the door in my face. I never saw her again.

Yesterday, flying over the wilds of west Texas on our way to Virginia, I remembered Mrs. Taff's west Texas drawl. I also remembered the shock of losing her friendship nearly forty years ago. It made my heart hurt all over again.

I'm older and wiser now, and I'm wondering what else wasn't allowed on the other side of that closed door. If she wasn't allowed to have friends who disagreed with her husband's belief system, she may have needed my friendship far more right then than I needed to walk away.

Maybe I should have fought harder.

Writing - An Inexact Science

Friday, March 30, 2012

Let's face it. Writing isn't rocket science. You can't count on a set number of chemical chain reactions to send a book on its way, roaring into the stratosphere.

After all, books are written by people. Earlier this week, a woman, claiming to be a great fan of mine, who is disappointed in one of my series, wrote to say that I must be A) senile or B) have hired someone "untalented" to do my writing for me. It didn't help her case that she **MISSPELLED MY NAME** in the body of her e-mail. Talk about untalented!!! I seem to remember my mother saying something about motes in eyes, but let's not go there.

I write my own books and I write my own blogs to the best of my ability. The books and blogs are published as I wrote them. Complaining about a book after the fact doesn't accomplish a whole lot. It's not as though I can go back to the computer and rewrite the 100,000 words contained therein to satisfy the complainer's inner editor. (I believe there used to be a set of books like that. Wasn't there a series once called Write Your Own Adventure, where the reader could make choices along the way and have the book end HIS way?)

But most books aren't like that. My books aren't like that. And people who are readers--who are the bread and butter of my business--get to have their own opinion about my books. And they get to let me know what they like and don't like. Most of the time I can be philosophical about the critical comments. Here's my mother again: You can't please all the people all the time. And I know that's true.

I usually try to respond promptly and politely to all e-mails--good, bad, or indifferent. My standard reply to critical e-mails is to say that I'm sorry they were disappointed--because I am. But if they send me a second e-mail with even more vituperative complaints, I have no compunction about deleting that one without even reading it. (Note to readers: If you're complaining about a book, be sure to take all your best shots in the **FIRST** e-mail!)

Occasionally, however, when someone sends me a note like that--an e-mail filled with the kind of stuff that no one would have nerve enough to say to someone's face--I can't shrug it off. I'm reminded of the e-mail correspondent named Melissa G, who wrote to me years ago, telling me that since I was so incredibly ugly she hoped that when I went on tour I would wear a bag over my head so I wouldn't frighten people. Yes. That is what she said--verbatim! And those of you who are close readers of my work may recall that I used that **VERY** e-mail in one of my books. (This is how writers make revenge!)

I'm afraid that the lady who called me senile the other day got my goat, too, very much like Melissa G. It happened that her note arrived at a time when I was having a particularly bad e-mail day. I suspect that I responded with a bit more heat than I should have when I suggested that sending insulting e-mails to complete strangers might be an indication that she has some possibly age-related mental deficiencies of her own.

Yes, next time I'll take a deep breath, follow my mother's very good advice about motes and eyes, and stick to "Sorry you were disappointed." We'll all be happier that way.

On Reading Aloud

Friday, April 6, 2012

I've written before about the impact reading books made on my young life, but some things are worth repeating: The elementary school teachers who read books aloud to us in their classrooms every day sent my imagination soaring to other times and other places. They set me on a path to being a reader which, in turn, set me on a path to being a writer. I'm always a little surprised when I hear from people who want to be writers but who are happy to tell me that they don't read. (Their loss!!)

I'm a big fan of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. That wasn't true initially. For one thing, due to book publishing schedules, I was often out on tour at the same time one of her books would make its US debut. Talk about feeling insignificant. I remember sitting in a restaurant in Boston when a couple came in with two little girls, probably age nine or so. While the parents enjoyed a wonderful dinner and a bit of adult conversation, the two girls tucked contentedly into their four-hundred page books and stayed there for the duration.

As a writer of recreational reading, I was grateful that J.K.'s Harry Potter was turning out an entire generation of enthusiastic readers, but I must admit that I was also more than a little jealous.

Then came the national calamity of 9-11. In the aftermath of that, in October of 2001, we had to make a cross country trip from Seattle to Nashville. At the time we were supposed to be making flight arrangements, the airline industry was still in a state of mass confusion. Ultimately we decided to drive. Even for people who love road trips, driving cross-country is a daunting proposition. As we drove, the country was still in shock, locked into its first ever experience of truly 24-7 news coverage. The ruined buildings in Manhattan were still smoking. As we traveled, no matter where we went on the radio dial, the content was still the same.

One afternoon, we found ourselves somewhere in the middle of Texas and desperate for something to listen to that wasn't news, so we whipped into the nearest Barnes and Noble and bought our first Harry Potter book--on tape, actually--because our vehicle at the time wasn't built for CDs.

As soon as we turned it on and heard the narrator, Jim Dale, recreating J.K. Rowling's wonderful characters, we were utterly enchanted. We'd stop at restaurants where people were still discussing 9-11, but we'd spend our mealtime happily trying to understand the finer points of quidditch. (If you don't know about quidditch, you haven't been paying attention.)

By the time we finished driving back home to Seattle, we had "read" the four books that were available in the series at the time. In fact, on the next to last night of the trip, we sat in the parking lot of the hotel in Boise waiting to finish the last line of that fourth book before we went inside.

And that's how we read the books--by listening to them--until now.

Last winter, our six-year-old grandson was into all things Star Wars!! There was nothing that couldn't be turned into an imaginary light saber, but somewhere along the line, it occurred to me that Colt might be interested in Harry Potter, too. For his birthday, we bought him a complete set of all seven books, and then Grandpa and I began reading them to him in the mornings before school, passing the books back and forth and taking turns reading aloud. At first Colt had some challenges sitting still and listening, but eventually he got caught up in the story. As soon as we finished reading that first book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, we watched the movie together--on DVD. As soon as the movie was over, Colt was ready to start the next book.

I had intended to finish reading the second book before letting him watch the second movie, but I caved. The post-Christmas snowstorm came. Colt and his mommy were snowbound for a week with NO SCHOOL, which Colt happens to love. To give her a break, I let him watch the second movie BEFORE we finished reading the book.

Then Bill and I left for Arizona. Did the reading stop? No. It happens we use the same cell phone provider, so minutes between our two phones don't count. As a consequence, I've been reading to him over the phone, having what Colt calls "H.P. time," mornings and evenings. (It only happens in the mornings if he finishes his breakfast in time. His mother tells me that the threat of losing H.P. Time is the most effective disciplinary tool she has at her disposal.) And I can tell you that doing H.P. Time when we were in Virginia and he was in Washington was a time zone challenge.

For those of you who sneer at Harry Potter as being "just for kids," get over it. Yes, the stories are fun, but the vocabulary isn't "See Spot Run," by any means, and I can see the advances in Colt's comprehension and in his ability to listen and consequently learn every single day.

We're now in the middle of book three, the Prisoner of Azkaban--page 281 out of 432--a little over half way. A week or so ago, my phone rang at 2:30 in the afternoon with a Bellevue, Washington, number I didn't recognize. I was surprised when the caller turned out to be Colt. When I asked him if his mommy had already picked him up, he allowed as how he was still at school, but could he have some H.P. time? I asked him what phone he was using. He said the school's. I asked him if it was all right to have H.P. time on the school's phone. He said it was, but when I asked to speak to a teacher, we soon found out that was NOT the case.

Last night there was a meeting at Colt's school so parents could discuss details of an upcoming summer camp. When Colt called in the middle of it to ask for HP Time, I was happy to comply. I figured it would give his mommy a chance for a little adult conversation. When she came back, she discovered that Colt was listening to the story and so was one of the camp counselors who was also clearly an H.P. fan.

"How did you get your phone to do that?" the woman asked my daughter. "Is that a recording?"

"No," she said. "It's G. reading to her grandson."

This morning, after H.P. Time, we all had a good giggle over that. And my grandson went off to school with a lightning shaped scar drawn on his forehead with makeup from his mommy's handy make up kit.

Colt is going to school with his imagination fully engaged. He's ready to go to London and see Platform nine and three quarters. He knows about invisibility cloaks and wands. He also knows a lot about good and evil. Come to think of it, I haven't heard a word about light sabers in a very long time.

Tomorrow he and his mommy will be here for their Spring Break. I'm sure we'll finish reading Prisoner of Azkaban while he's here, and I have a DVD in the bedroom for him to watch when we finish.

And then we'll be off on book four.

Revenge of the Easter Eggs

Friday, April 13, 2012

The eggs were pretty--green and yellow
Coloring them made us mellow
And then we hid them in the yard
Where finding them was not too hard.

I do not think it was too hot
There were no eggs where there should not
But something was not right with them
And sent our insides into a spin.

After cooking now for a day or two
I know Easter Eggs are things to rue.
So blogging will be light today
It seems I don't have much to say.

I'm sure we'll all be better soon
And live to see another moon.

A Golden Anniversary

Friday, April 20, 2012

Fifty years ago, I was about to graduate from Bisbee High School. Once school was out that summer I rode along on one last family road trip, seven people in a GMC pickup truck with an oversized camper stacked on the back. With my father driving and my mother serving as co-pilot and chief navigation officer in the front seat, and with five kids stowed in the back, we headed to Denver for the Kiwanis Convention. While in Denver, my father unaccountably got his gyros tumbled, and I remember some tense moments with my mother trying to convince him that we were going in the opposite direction from what he thought. At that convention, my father voted for women to be allowed to become members. The proposal lost. (We have come a long way, baby.)

After Denver we headed northwest to Seattle and the Seattle World's Fair. It was my first time ever in Seattle, and I was enchanted the moment I saw the then much smaller city skyline with the newly constructed Space Needle standing in solitary splendor at the top of an area I had no idea was the Denny Regrade.

I loved the soaring white "space gothic" arches of what would eventually become the signature architecture of the Science Center. My cousins took me on a ride on the monorail. I loved the fountain. I loved the crowds. I loved the excitement.

Our whole family was standing in line to have lunch at the Space Needle when one of my younger brothers was felled by an especially bad allergy attack. My parents left me in line on my own. I ended up sharing lunch with three retired school teachers from Ohio.

Sitting there with those three strangers, watching the cityscape unwind beneath the restaurant, I had a sudden sense that there was something about Seattle that had my name on it; that part of my future was to be found in the bustling metropolis far below. It was a real glimpse of the future, although it would be twenty more years before I made Seattle my home and where I ended up living in a high rise less than three blocks from that very restaurant.

So the hoopla surrounding the Golden Anniversary of the Space Needle is striking very close to home for me. It was the thing that first welcomed me to Seattle, and it still does, every time I return from my latest set of travels.

As I was writing this, I couldn't help smiling at another Needle remembrance. A good friend's two elderly aunties were making a pilgrimage from New York City to Seattle to visit her. As my friend was getting ready to make hotel reservations for them, she asked if they had any particular preferences. "Only one," her aunt told her. "We want to be close to the Pin."

Welcome Home, Snowbirds

Friday, April 27, 2012

Last weekend the temperatures Tucson passed the century mark. We did what any sensible snowbird would do--we headed north.

We used to make the 26 hour, 1659 mile drive in three very long days. Now we've come to our senses--we did it in four, four-hundred mile days which turns out to be much better pacing not just for us, but also for Princess Bella who spent most of the time sacked out on an immense dog bed in the back seat.

Dog walking on the road is always problematic, especially since Bella feels no urge to comply unless both of us are in view. Her abandonment issues dictate that she's a lot more anxious to get back in the car than she is to do anything else. So she didn't feel any necessity to get serious about getting busy while we were in a sprinkle of a shower. Oh, no. She had to wait until we were at the Country Cousin in Centralia where the urge finally hit in the middle of a torrential downpour

And the rain continued once we got home. We scurried into the house with thunder rumbling overhead.

We're glad to be here. Yes our blood must have gotten thin while we were in warmer climates, because 58 seems quite cool to us today. The fireplace is on, and I'm cuddled up nearby.

We arrived home in time for the publication of *Beaumont # 20, Betrayal of Trust*, in paperback. Paperback readers have always been an important segment of my readership, so get out there and get your copy.

Joanna Brady in *Judgment Call* will be out in hardback at the end of July.

The Story of Snowflake

Friday, May 4, 2012

When it's time to write this blog, I usually try to come up with something light and airy--something that might brighten a rainy, northwest Friday afternoon or a gloomy Saturday morning. But this time I'm going to write what's in my heart, and if you're looking for happy endings here, you could just as well move along to something else.

My daughter and grandson lost their two family golden retrievers last year, Angel in March and Kensie in November. Both of them died of sudden onset health issues for which there were no veterinary remedies. Since then, there has been a hole in their hearts waiting for another rescued golden retriever to walk into their lives.

And they thought they had found one. A woman who was selling golden retriever puppies through ads in the *Seattle Times* said she had a golden who, at age six, was too old for another litter of puppies and was now ready to go to a forever home. Snowflake was billed as a "great family dog" who had been raised on a farm. (This should have been our first clue: Now that she couldn't have any more puppies for our puppy mill, we're ready to get rid of her!) The photo they sent showed the dog in a wooden shed of some kind, but it was roomy, clean, and dry. The dog was a pretty one with a face that looked like a cross between Angel and Kensie. And since she and Angel shared the same birth date, October 27, it seemed like a good fit.

So this past weekend the family made the long (four hundred mile) trek to retrieve their new retriever, and it was not a success. The dog freaked. When they stopped for the night at a hotel, Snowflake literally chewed through her leash and escaped. Once our daughter was finally able to recapture her, Snowflake peed in the car on the way home. She wouldn't eat for two days and then when she did eat finally, she gobbled her food as though someone was going to grab it from her.

In other words, she has NOT been socialized. She doesn't know how to be somebody's pet because she has been too busy being a puppy factory. She has evidently never been walked on a leash or lived in a house. To call a spade a spade, she's a feral dog. Her puppies may have been cute and gone for top dollar, but I'm sure they weren't any more socialized than she is.

For the past twenty years or so, dogs and grand dogs in our family have gone through training at the Academy for Canine Behavior, and that's where Snowflake went on Monday. On Thursday the head trainer--a woman with 22 years of dog-training

experience--called with the bad news. She said that Snowflake has so many social deficits that she most likely will never make a good family pet, especially in a family with a small child. A frightened dog is a dangerous dog, and Snowflake is frightened of everything--of loud noises, of getting in cars, of meeting strange people. She might be able to manage in a household with adults only, but even then it might take years to repair the damage.

Poor Snowflake. This is not her fault. And it's not my daughter's fault, either, but she's afraid that if she surrenders the dog, she won't be able to be considered as a possible match for another rescued golden.

I've been in touch with Joyce, one of my Golden Retriever Rescue contacts in Arizona. She said the same thing the trainer did--that this is an all too familiar story--the other bad part about puppy mills. She told me that it takes years of effort and untold hours of time to rehabilitate dogs like this. My daughter is a single mother. She wanted an adult dog because she knows how much time and effort it takes to train a puppy.

Snowflake is still at the Academy for what they're calling "an extended evaluation." On Monday they'll let us know if they think there's a possibility of turning her around, but they were less than hopeful on the phone on Thursday.

So what to do? Do we take her back to the farm and tell the people there that she's their problem? Do we try to find a rescue group to tackle this? Or does she go to the rainbow bridge?

As I said, this is not a story with a happy ending, but it's a story other people need to hear so they can be forewarned. And I have a feeling someone running a puppy mill is going to come to a very bad end in one of my books.

No, wait. That already happened!

The Story of Snowflake 2

Friday, May 11, 2012

After last week's blog, I know people are waiting with bated breath to hear what's going on with Snowflake. Which is to say, the jury is still out.

The trainer from the Academy called this week to say that the dog seems to be making real progress. After last week's grim phone call we had lost hope.

The first time our daughter turned on a television set in the dog's presence, she freaked out. She had obviously never seen a television set because she was busy being a puppy factory rather than a family pet. It took our daughter fifteen minutes to corral the dog and get her into a car. My guess is that the only time she went for rides was to go to the vet. (If the only rides I went for were to go to see my doctor {much as I love Dr. Garrison Bliss of Qliance} I wouldn't want to get in the car, either.)

The Academy for Canine Behavior says they've never had someone pick up a dog one day and bring it to them the next. Snowflake has evidently spent much of this week in the reception office, seeing countless people and dogs come and go. Socializing!

Seeing how people and dogs work together. Yesterday her trainer took her for a ride, one with no vet visit at the other end.

In other words, Snowflake went to the Academy as a blank slate where they seem to be teaching her good things. My daughter and grandson will be making their first visit this afternoon. The trainer has suggested that they may try to bring her home for the weekend, so she can begin getting to know her place in their family.

This story may have a happy ending after all, and if it does, I will be posting photos. And if it does have a happy ending, maybe it will suggest a possible path for other people who pick up dogs in this kind of situation.

So please, continue to keep fingers crossed, etc.

Mine are.

A Snowflake Update

Saturday, May 12, 2012

Today our daughter and grandson went to see Snowflake. She went straight up to them in the greeting room at the Academy and tried to crawl into Colt's lap. The trainer said, "How long did you have this dog before you brought her here?" When she heard the answer--less than 48 hours--she shook her head in amazement and said, "You must be dog people. She really bonded."

And that's what's happening--bonding. After almost two weeks of observation, Snowflake has been deemed safe to be with Colt and safe to be with other dogs. She's being sent home on a two week furlough to get used to her new home and her new family before coming back for the full five weeks of Academy training.

She's a sweet dog, long on fur but short on muscle. She needs food and walking and playing.

Jeanne T. and Colt have been told that while she's with them, if Snowflake does something inappropriate in the course of the next two weeks--think of Bella's occasional "deposits"--they are to let it go and not scold her for any reason. At this point the dog is easily overwhelmed, and any kind of negative feedback will cause her to shut down.

If she sits, they are to say "Good sit" even if they didn't ask her to. Ditto if she lies down. This evening when they came home, she got out of the car and was eager to go into the yard and into the house. She did NOT try to bolt in the other direction. She ate her dinner. She used the doggy door. Tonight she'll be watching television, probably for the second time in her life.

The trainer says she's like a six week-old puppy in that she knows NOTHING! It's a big scary world outside the boundaries of her former little shed. She's got a lot of learning to do and a very loving family who is willing to teach her. Even so, it's still going to be a very long road.

Thank you for all your kind thoughts and good wishes.

Going to the Birds

Friday, May 18, 2012

Today the topic is birds.

For the past two days we've awakened to find ducks in our swimming pool. This is not a good thing. If they're going to hang around, I would much prefer them to be in the pond rather than the pool. For reasons that are entirely obvious on the bottom of the pool. Bella, who is great for keeping birds out of the yard in Tucson doesn't seem motivated to guard the pool from ducks in the same manner. She is, after all, a dachshund rather than a retriever. It's not her job. Besides, the ducks are as big as she is.

But if the ducks took to the pond, would that be bad for the goldfish that wintered over? Do ducks eat goldfish? (What I don't know about wildlife fills volumes.) Our 100 or so ten-cent goldfish have grown to three and four inches now, and there has been some blending shall we say, in a birds and bees sort of fashion. Where there were only gold goldfish originally, now there are some black ones and white ones as well as a few two-toned black and orange and white and orange, respectively.

By the way, here's an update for those of you wondering about the fate of the rescued "God fish" my grandson brought home from a church sponsored fair last fall. When we went to Arizona for the winter, Emperor Palpatine moved to Silverdale to live with our granddaughters. He has been renamed "Fred." They are considering going to the pet store and getting him a companion. My daughter and son-in-law say the companion would be named Ethel, but that only shows they come from a different century. The granddaughters, both knowledgeable in the ways of Harry Potter, want the companion to be named George after Fred and George, the Weasley twins.

But back to birds. How did I get off on the subject of fish? Oh wait, now I remember. Ducks eating goldfish.

Occasionally I've heard the old cliché "eagle-eyed" trotted out. In the course of thirty years of writing, I may have even used it on occasion. But this week I had an up close and personal lesson in eagle-eyedness and now have a whole new appreciation of what it means.

During Monday's round of golf, as we left the 17th green on the way to the 18th tee box, we looked up in time to see a bald eagle with a six foot wingspan circling high over the Bellevue Municipal Golf Course. As I stepped up to tee off, the eagle swooped down out of the sky and nailed a mouse on the fairway about ten yards in front of us. He then took off again, carrying the mouse and being chased by the flock (murder) of crows (probably ravens, in reality) who regard the course and all untended food items in carts therein as their own personal buffet. They obviously felt the same way about the poor little mouse, and the air war that followed was fascinating.

And now one more eagle story for the day. Years ago, we were in Arizona researching a Joanna Brady book--Outlaw Mountain, I believe--and driving around the backstreets of Tombstone. We drove by a yard where natural fencing was provided by a hedge of agave. Inside the yard was a birdbath and in the birdbath was an EAGLE, taking a

bath. We were agog. Had the eagle been able to speak, I'm sure he would have said, "Hey this is a bird bath and I'm a BIRD!"

In this day and age we would have had cell phone cameras available and the experience would have been photographed or videoed and then posted on YouTube for all to see. Instead, I have it stored in one place only--my little gray cells--and now through the miracle of words, I'm sharing it with you.

I'm willing to bet that the mental picture of that eagle in a birdbath will stick in all your brains for a very long time.

Now if I could only get the ducks in the swimming pool out of mine.

A Split Personality

Friday, May 25, 2012

We're hosting an auction dinner at our house tonight, so I was up early to bake rhubarb pies. I was also keeping an eye on the pond. The ducks have disappeared--probably sitting on some eggs in someone else's yard at the moment--but last night a gigantic heron, one with a wing span that stretches from one side of the pond to the other, showed up in our back yard, making our surviving goldfish even MORE of an endangered species.

So this morning, between baking pies, I've been on a heron watch, more than expecting to go out and shoo him away if he showed up again. And then, with the pies done, I walked down to the lower yard to do a fish spot check.

It's been raining for days around here. There was water standing on the third step from the bottom, and away I went in another one of my signature pratfalls. I landed three steps down--a three point landing--tail bone, elbow, and head. (This sounds like one of those segments from America's Funniest Videos!) Fortunately for me, the scrunchy holding a knot of hair on the back of my head, provided a little safety shield between the edge of the third step (the rest of me ended up on step one) and the back of my noggin. Once again, I had to pull my handy-dandy cellphone out of my pocket and call Bill with an "I've fallen and can't get up!" SOS.

Pride's hurt, but I'm fine. My formerly clean robe is in the laundry. My shoulder is yelling at me, and I'm going to have a doozy of a bruise on my back side, but I've taken some Aleve and I'm sure I'll be ready to rumble by the time the guests arrive tonight.

That being said, it's about time for me to go to work on the blog posting I was going to write originally. And here it is:

This may be the END of Police Week rather than the BEGINNING of it, but it's still Police Week.

I write police procedurals. I am not a police officer. I have never been a police officer. I make things up. So it's always gratifying and more than a little amazing to hear from fans who do the real work of law enforcement. That's especially true when they praise my work.

I'm sure there are plenty of occasions when I get stuff dead wrong. Weaponry issues are always particularly dicey. But the men and women who write to me mostly overlook and/or forgive my many law enforcement shortcomings. I think part of that is due to the fact that most of the officers portrayed in my books are honest, caring, and hardworking people. In that way, they reflect the population of law enforcement officers at large. Most of them are good guys.

When a bad apple does turn up in the ranks of law enforcement, the media goes nuts and we hear about it ad infinitum. We don't hear about the others, the quiet good ones who go to work day after day without ever once drawing their weapons. They're the men and women who take the drunk drivers off the streets and pull over the road-ragers who endanger everyone around them. They're the ones who wade into domestic disputes and try to keep feuding relatives from tearing one another's eyes out. They're the ones who comfort little kids whose parents are so timed out on meth or booze that they don't know up from down.

The fictional world is full of gun-wielding guys and gals who seem to be larger than life, but it's not true. They're smaller than life, because REAL cops are the REAL deal.

So next time you see a cop, thank him or her. And don't wait around for Police Week to do it. They're looking out for us every day, and we should be thanking them every single day.

PS: We've just learned that the website link, www.jajance.com, has been broken for the past several days. After spending an hour on hold today, I believe it is fixed. Thanks to everyone who did a work-around, including resorting to snail mail, to let me know about the problem.

A Journey Back

Friday, June 1, 2012

The first book I ever published was a tiny chapbook of poetry, *After the Fire*, which came out in the fall of 1984. It was a collection of poems I wrote over a dozen years while I was married to and eventually divorced from a man who died of chronic alcoholism at age 42, a year and a half after our divorce was final.

As I wrote the poems, I thought I was doing "art." It wasn't until much later than I understood those little scraps of poetry were a writer's way of dealing with the essential issues at work in my life. Unfortunately *After the Fire* is no longer in print, but I've heard from readers over the years who have told me that their experiences mirrored mine and how much it helped them to know there were others out there who had or still were dealing with similar problems.

As I said, the book came out in 1984, two years after my former husband's death at the end of 1982. I was living in Bay Vista, a downtown high rise, at the time, and a the proprietor of a flower shop that operated in the lobby of the commercial space in the building took some copies to sell on consignment. He sold one of them to a customer named Diane Bingham.

Diane was a Vietnam War era widow who, along with a friend, had started a grief support group called Widowed Information Consultation Services of King County. (WICS) She took her copy of *After the Fire* to the support group she was currently leading where she handed it to a guy named Bill whose wife had recently lost a long battle with breast cancer. He glanced through it, decided it was a feminist diatribe, and handed it right back. He wasn't wrong. Some of the poems dated from my much earlier bra burning days (Nursing bra on a barbecue grill AFTER I cooked dinner!)

Months passed and then, working through the flower shop owner, Diane Bingham contacted me. She told me about WICS and invited me to come do a poetry reading/creative grieving workshop at the WICS-sponsored annual retreat in June of that year. The retreat was being held on a weekend at a YMCA camp, and my agreeing to go to a weekend camp is about as likely as my winning a Miss America Contest, but I said I would go and I did.

I was nervous about it. To my way of thinking, all the other people there would be far more qualified than I was. After all, they were still married when their spouses died. I was divorced, so I felt as though I hadn't quite punched my ticket and hadn't earned the right to be there.

The people at the registration table greeted me warmly and made me feel welcome. They told me that if I felt like grieving, this was the place to do it. The truth is, although my former husband had been gone for two and a half years at that point, I hadn't done much grief work. When he died, the guys at work had looked at me as though I had two heads and said, "Well, you divorced the guy. What are you upset about?" So I had stuffed the feelings of grief and gone on about my life as though nothing had happened.

But of course something HAD happened. And that weekend, I finally did some of that very necessary grieving, getting the feelings out and talking about them not only during my poetry reading presentation but also later at an evening grief workshop. It turned out that Bill, the guy who DIDN'T like the poetry was there at the retreat, but he also didn't come to the reading. Instead, he went for an afternoon walk on the beach. And although someone (acting as a matchmaker) had tried introducing us at lunch, I had been too nervous to pay any attention.

We met again at the evening session where Bill and I discovered that our first spouses had died on the same day of the year, two years apart. (They both died a few minutes before midnight on New Year's Eve.) We struck up a conversation based on that coincidence, and six months later to the day, we got married. That was almost 27 years ago.

Last month someone from WICS called and asked if I would be a guest at this year's retreat. Yes, WICS is still in the grief support business, and yes, they still have annual retreats. I wasn't sure I should accept. The last time I didn't think I qualified because I was divorced before my husband died. This time I didn't think I qualified because my husband ISN'T DEAD!!! Yes, Bill and I are still together, alive and kicking, twenty six years later.

But it turns out WICS wants both of us there, and we will be attending together. I suspect Bella will be along, too, smuggled in the back of the car. We won't be spending

the night. I'll be talking about life after WICS and how coming to that long ago retreat was a first step for both of us as we moved out of our old lives and into a new one together.

So now I'm going to leave you with the title poem from After the Fire.

I have touched the fire.
It burned me but I knew I lived.
It seared but it made me whole.

He called me.
I went gladly though I saw the rocks,
Fell laughing through the singeing air.

I have known the fire.
I'll live with nothing rather than with less.
The flame is out. There's nothing left but ash.

Ending and Beginning

Friday, June 8, 2012

This morning should be the calm after the storm. The book that has kept me stymied for weeks, the next Ali book, went to my editor in New York yesterday. When I say stymied, I mean I went to sleep thinking about the book; I woke up thinking about the book. And for a lot of the time in between, I tossed and turned thinking about the book. Because this is one of those things where, if it is to be, it is up to me. Usually.

This time I went to my engineer husband for help. Engineers fix things. Bill said, "Why are you doing this the hard way? Why not do it the easy way?" And guess what? Doing it the easy way worked. Finally. But not until I had put myself through the rigors of hell first.

Does that mean I'll ask him for help sooner than later? Probably not. Stubbornness is evidently a big part of my DNA. So this is a time to say thank you to the guy who is always willing to give me advice when I ask for it and to leave me alone when I don't. Smart man.

This morning, before I had time to finish my first cup of coffee, I had an e-mail from my publicist in New York reminding me of my ten o'clock interview for the Joanna Brady (Judgment Call) tour that starts next month. She told me the interview was at ten. In New Mexico. Where the interviewer was. Unfortunately I'm in Washington, so the interview was actually at nine o'clock my time. The fact that Arizona is sometimes on Mountain Time and sometimes on Pacific Time is one of those mysteries that New York publicists are never going to decode, so we just have to be prepared to run with it.

But when the interviewer started talking about my "new" book, I had to take a step back because the "new" book for her wasn't the "new" book for me. That's the one I just finished. And last night, when my grandson sent me a note asking about my "next" book, I thought he meant the one I'm just starting to think about and I suspected my husband of putting him up to asking the question. In fact, Colt, like the interviewer on

the phone, wanted to know about the "next" book due on the shelves of his neighborhood Bartell Drug Store.

So what I've learned this morning is this: Sometimes 9 o'clocks and 10 o'clocks turn out to be the same thing. And so do "new" and "next."

It's a great life, if you don't weaken. And now when I go to sleep at night, I'll be thinking about J. P. Beaumont.

Breakfast of Champions

Friday, June 15, 2012

This week we're having one of the world's summertime breakfast treats--Wheat Chex and fresh peaches and raspberries. Generally speaking I am not a mixed fruit sort of person. That goes for mixed fruit jellies (Are you listening Smuckers?) and for mixed fruit pies. (Rhubarb pies? YES! Strawberry/Rhubarb pies? NOOOOOOOO!)

But cut up fresh peaches with a few raspberries on Wheat Chex or even Honey Nut Cheerios? Either one of those works for me, because they take me right back to summer time in Bisbee, Arizona, in the Fifties. Not that we had an abundance of fresh raspberries back then. Those didn't make it to Pay and Tote in Lowell. And what passed for lettuce back then, brownish soggy stuff, turned me into a confirmed LLA (Lifetime Lettuce Avoider.) I would guess that Pay and Tote's fresh peaches weren't any better than the lettuce, but we never bought peaches at the store. We grew them.

Our house on Yuma Trail had a yard full of peach and apricot trees as well as a single nectarine. The nectarines never managed to ripen because the tree was easy to climb and we ate them early and often. Fruit on some of the other trees there was less inviting. There were two figs trees, but as far as I know, a ripe fig never crossed my lips. And there was an enormous mulberry tree. That one was very exciting to climb, but the only thing the berries on that were good for was turning our bare feet purple over the course of the summer.

Does it sound like our yard was an oasis in the desert? Yes, it was. And why was that? Mine water! Around the outside fence of the property ran a pipe that carried water that never went inside. This was the brackish, mineral-laden stew that had to be pumped out of the mines. Rather than waste it, the company (Phelps Dodge) sent it out to the community for free. I can tell you that the fruit trees and grass in town LOVED it.

Back then, free mine water made it possible for Bisbee's Vista Park in Bisbee to be a tree lined grassy lawn. Once the company figured out that they could use the mine water to leach copper out of the tailings dumps, they took their mine water back. The town's fruit trees which had thrived on mineral rich water, shriveled and died on a steady diet of fresh and very expensive potable water. If you go visit Vista Park today, you'll find something that is mostly a xeriscaped wasteland.

But back to the fruit trees. Each summer my mother canned quart after quart of peaches and apricots from the trees in our yard, and we sold some as well. There's a picture somewhere of my Dad and me, sitting together under a freshly harvested tree with a bushel basket heaped with apricots parked between us.

The peaches from our yard--the ones that didn't get canned or sold--got peeled and cut up, chopped more than cut. My mother's utensil drawer had an old tin can which my father had cut off with the tin snips at both ends. That's what she used to chop up the peaches--the sharp end of that tin can. And that's how peaches came to our summertime breakfast table--chopped into tiny delectable pieces.

During the school year our father made hot cereal every morning--oatmeal, Cream of Wheat, Malt-o-meal, Zoom, Chocolate Malt-o-Meal, and what he called "Whet-meal," which was my father's own peculiar mixture of Malt-o-Meal and Cream of Wheat. He made it on the stove in a four quart Wear-Ever aluminum sauce pan. While he was doing it, the man was in his element, wielding a slotted wooden spoon and singing "It's nice to get up in the morning, in the good old summer time" at the top of his lungs in his particularly tuneless voice. (We always said, "There are 88 keys on the piano, and Daddy sings in the cracks!")

The rest of the daily meal planning and cooking for our family of nine were designated as Evie's problem, but school year breakfasts belonged to Norman. Actually there's one more mealtime exception to that Mommy-only rule. On Sunday nights, we had cocoa and toast for Sunday Night Supper, and my father made the cocoa from scratch in the same four quart sauce pan.

During those long ago pre-air-conditioning summers, cooking hot cereal for breakfast every morning must have seemed like a bad idea. I'm also sure buying cold cereal for that many people was an expensive proposition, but it worked.

At most mealtimes, we ate what our mother served (A little bit of everything, and everything on your plate!), but for summer breakfasts allowances were made for individual tastes. My father preferred Wheaties--the Breakfast of Champions. I'm not sure how much he liked the flavor, but he certainly enjoyed reading the stories of the athletes featured on the boxes. My mother and I went for Krumbles. (I'm not sure if it was spelled with a C or a K, and since no one makes the old fashioned Krumbles anymore, there's no way to look it up.) Other people cast their votes for Rice Krispies or Cheerios. (My mother never ponied up the cash for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes.) Whatever we chose, however, it was served with a dollop of my mother's chopped up peaches and cold milk which was delivered fresh to our doorstep twice a week by generations of milkmen.

I guess it's understandable how, in the week leading up to Father's Day, the simple act of eating breakfast has taken me on a long trip down memory lane. I've spent the last hour recalling the two people who spent 68 years together being good parents on all the other days that weren't officially designated as Father's Day or Mother's Day.

So here's to you, Norman and Evie Busk. You done good.

The Runt of the Litter

Friday, June 22, 2012

I was six feet tall by the time I was in seventh grade. Believe me, in seventh grade this was NOT a good thing. I was taller than Mr. Norton, my rotund seventh grade teacher, and I was taller than every boy in school. This was something on the DNA that came from my father's side of the family because both his mother and his grandmother were six feet tall as well.

My mother, somewhere in the neighborhood of 5 foot 7, saw a looming problem, if you will. I was self-conscious and went around with my shoulders hunched, trying to be shorter. My mother said, "Straighten up." "Stand straight." "Shoulders back." She didn't say all those things at one time; there were variations on the theme. And she also said, "By the way, would you please get down the Lazy Susan." That particular piece of holiday serving equipment was stored in an underused cabinet--the top corner cupboard--in the kitchen, and I was the only one who could reach it without having to climb up and down the kitchen stool.

Something else went along with being the tall one. My feet are appropriately sized for someone of my height which means I have size twelve feet in a world where standard shoe sizes for women mostly don't go beyond size 10. I remember going into Ortega's shoes in Bisbee as a teenager and being told by a very short-lived shoe salesman that my feet were like "gunboats." (No, I didn't kill him. Mr. Ortega fired him, and as my old neighbor, Sophie Kazitski used to say, "Good riddance to the bad rubbish.")

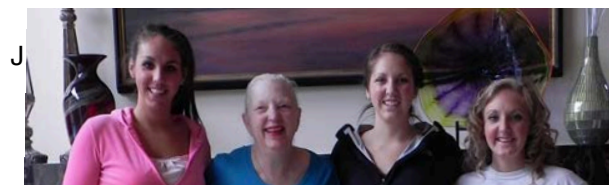
I can't tell you how my life changed when I hit Seattle and discovered the shoe sizes available at Nordys. Now there's the miracle of Zappos!!

Being six feet tall and a teenager was not fun. When I married my first husband, I walked down the aisle in ballerina slippers (Hard to find in size 12!) because the groom didn't want me to be taller than he was. Twenty seven years ago when I married my second husband, I wore heels even though I was several inches taller than he was in my bare feet, but I finally found a guy where the difference in height didn't make a bit of difference.

When Bill and I married, we had five kids altogether. He had two sons and a daughter, and I had one of each. Bill J., the older of Bill's sons, is six four. Whenever we're out in public together, it's easy for people to look at our relative heights and assume that I'm his "real" mother, but I'm not. His birth mother lost a seven year battle with breast cancer long before I came on the scene, but after twenty-seven years, the idea of "real" or not is pretty much moot.

Eventually Bill J. married and, the way the world works, he now has three daughters. Remember what I said earlier about DNA?

It was clear early on that Lauren, Emily, and Rachel would take after their father in the height department. Once they hit high high school, I told them that if they were ever invited to a prom, I was the fairy grandmother they needed to call because I understand all those tricky shoe size and dress length issues. Last year, when Lauren was a senior, that "Fairy Godmother" call came in. We



were all in Tucson for Spring Break. In two hours of purposeful shopping, we managed to find a gorgeous blue floor-length formal for her. During the fitting, I overheard the sales clerk ask her if she would be wearing flats or heels with the dress. Lauren said, "Flats." WRONG ANSWER!!

Once we were back in the car, I gave her the full benefit of my "ballerina slipper" lecture which is to say, if you're with a guy who has a problem with how tall you are, he's probably the WRONG guy! When we got back to the house, I handed her a computer with the Zappos website already tuned up. Lauren ended up going to her prom in the blue dress and with a pair of silver high heeled sandals on her feet. She was gorgeous!! (And yes, I am prejudiced!)

This past weekend, the girls were here for a visit. Lauren was showing off the new 4.5 inch heels she bought to wear on next week's Disney Wonder Cruise. Once she had the shoes on her feet, the three girls and I lined up for a family photo opportunity. I am proud to report that in that photo, I am the runt of the litter!

That was something I NEVER saw coming. I may not be a blood relative to those three lovely girls, but sure you can't tell that by looking.

Thank You

Friday, June 29, 2012

We're in Skagway, Alaska, at the moment on a Disney Wonder cruise with the kids and grandkids, so blogging this week will be short and sweet--almost to the point of non-existent.

This is a very real vacation. Yesterday we saw the magnificent Sawyer Glacier with enough sunlight and seals to make it all worthwhile. Today we rode the White Pass Railway--yes, the same one that's in Birds of Prey. At the moment it's too cold for grownups to sit outside, but Colt is out swimming in the 90 degree kiddy pool.

With only occasional Internet or cell phone connections, I'm taking the time to read OTHER PEOPLE'S BOOKS when we're not actively doing something with the whole group. (The older girls will be doing a Zip Line event in the next day or two. G. will NOT be joining them for that!!!)

This is a kid-centric cruise, and that's as it should be. I'm glad we're able to go. I'm glad we could take the kids. As for all of you out there who read my books? Thank you. You're the folks who made it possible.

JAJ

Back Home

Friday, July 6, 2012

We're home. It's hard to tell what day it is. I'm going to write this while memories of the cruise are still fresh in my mind. It's interesting to be back to being just the two of us and our little brown dog after spending a week being a party of twelve. (Our little brown

dog, by the way, spent the whole week making her displeasure known, if you know what I mean!)

The wonder of the Disney Wonder was that there was plenty to keep a very diverse group occupied and engaged. We weren't the only grandparents there on a three generation holiday, and it was fun. We all went gold panning in a freezing rain. We huddled under a tent next to propane heaters in the same freezing rain for a salmon bake. We have photos of the six grandchildren, the older ones and the younger ones, roasting marshmallows together around a roaring fire.

And we had one sit down meal a day with everyone together. Having an early dinner seating made it possible for the little kids to eat before they gave out completely at the end of the evening.

This was an Alaska cruise, so the weather wasn't warm most of the time. That didn't keep the kids from swimming and having a blast in the 90 degree pool, but it wasn't nearly as much fun for the parents who were huddled under blankets on the deck watching over them. (It reminded me of the old days of standing freezing on the sidelines of Seattle soccer matches. The kids out on the field were never cold. The parents? Well, that was another story.)

On the cruise, Colt lost a second tooth, and, magically, the Tooth Fairy was able to find him, even in the middle of the ocean. Not surprising I guess since it was a Disney cruise after all! The head waiter in our section took a liking to Colt and showed him a couple of magic tricks with napkins. And napkin folding decorations as well as the folded towel creatures we found in our cabins each night were a source of delight to all.

But partway through the cruise, the Bad Grandma bug bit me. First, I have to give you a piece of history. I'm not sure of the exact date, but it's in the neighborhood of fifty years ago because I believe I was still in high school when my now fifty-something nephew was in kindergarten. He was in the bathtub one night and told his mommy that he had three knees, "A right knee, a left knee, and a wee knee." She came washing out of the bathroom laughing, more amused than appalled, and told me the story. It lodged there in my little gray cells until some time in the middle of the cruise when I decided to share that joke with Colt.

He loved it. His mommy did NOT love it. She told him that whenever he tells that joke, he has to preface it by saying "Here's a joke my Grandma told me."

But that's okay. Isn't that what grandparents are for?

PS

An update on Snowflake. While we were off on the cruise, Snowflake was back at the Academy for Canine Behavior for her second attempt at board and train. Her trainer called this afternoon with a glowing report. He says it's hard to believe it's the same dog. She's barking and playing and having fun with a roomie dog.

So miracles do happen.

Keeping the Stories Straight

Friday, July 13, 2012

Sometimes you step in a hole with no advance warning--as when I was looking at the fruit on the grapefruit tree in our side yard in Tucson, missed a step, and fell into a bed lined with river rock. In that instance the straw hat on my head saved my brains from scrambling. Other times, you can see the hole coming at you and there's no way of avoiding it.

Case in point:

I'm currently writing a Beaumont book that features Beaumont at his Special Homicide Investigation Team age and also at the age he was when he first went to work for Seattle PD. Sounds easy enough, right? WRONG! That means I have to pull people from all the other books along the way and put them into the story as they would have been back then. Which means that this morning I went looking for some of those old characters, including Sgt. Watty Watson, who was the Homicide desk sergeant in lots of the Beaumont books.

Imagine my surprise when I couldn't find Watty Watson in the earliest Beau books. That's because back then he was Watty WATKINS!! When people ask me how I keep my characters straight, I often tell them that's my JOB! But in this case, I have clearly screwed up. It's my fault. No one else writes my books. And the change happened somewhere along the way BEFORE I wised up, around book ten or so, and started keeping a name file.

So what to do? One of Bill's favorite sayings is this, "You can have it cheap, quick, or good. Pick any two."

In this case I'm going to pick one. Since Watty Watkins is the original name of the character, that's the one I'm choosing, but I already know that a year or so from now, I'll receive an e-mail from someone who has just read ALL the books in order and who let me have it, saying, "By the way, did you know that Watty had one name in the earlier books and a different name in the later ones?" When that happens, I'll simply say, "Why yes, I did know that," and then I'll refer them to this blog update to prove it.

And speaking of e-mails from fans. This morning I heard from a lady whose husband works for the BNSF--the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad. She had just finished reading Web of Evil and was kind enough to point out that the Santa Fe and Burlington Northern Railroads had merged in 2007. She wasn't mean-spirited about it, but she wanted me to be aware that what I had written was wrong. The problem is, it was RIGHT when I wrote it. Web of Evil was published in 2007. It was written in 2005 and

2006. So, unless I was able to look into the future and sort out the corporate tea leaves, I would have had no way of knowing or writing about a merger that had not yet taken place.

Here's the deal. I've been writing for a long time--thirty years and counting. My characters have evolved over a long time, and so has the world. So let's all understand that I make mistakes. This is fiction, people. I'm writing for entertainment. I'm not writing for the Encyclopedia Britannica. Oh, wait, aren't they gone, too? Who would have seen that coming in 1985 or even 2001?

And the next time you catch me out in an error, I'm going to go for the literary equivalent of an Alford Plea and say I was using my Literary License.

Thank goodness mine is still valid.

By the way, for those of your reading this on some site other than Facebook, the Judgment Call book tour schedule is now posted on the website, www.jajance.com.

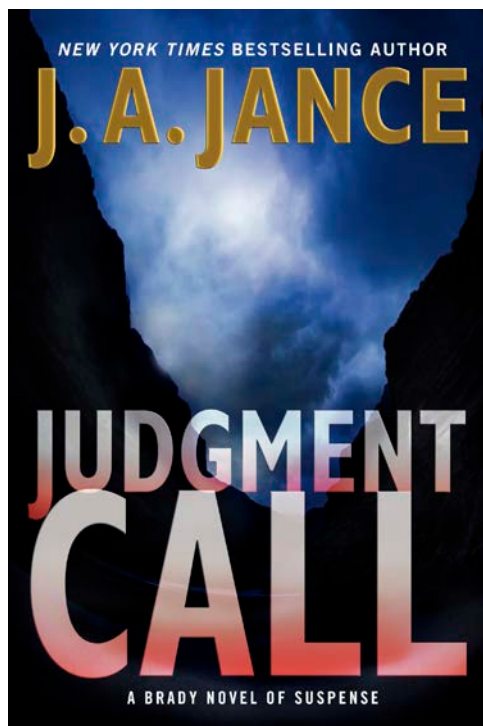
Judgment Call Announcement

Friday, July 20, 2012

Since some of the blog readers may not be included in my new book notification list, I'm including the letter that went out to those folks this week below. If you expected to receive an announcement and did not, you may have been among the bounces. The new book notification list is maintained by ME, and it is a list that is shared with NO ONE!!! After sending the list, we ended up with a bounce percentage of 0.002 %. I think that's remarkable.

After sending out the notices, any number of people responded, and I spent the better part of two days replying to the ones that required a response. Thanks for that. And now is as good a time as any to repeat the message that I generally don't respond to comments on Facebook or in the Seattle P.I. If you want to send me a comment and receive a response--from me, not some e-mail answering troll--please check the e-mail addresses in the blog posting below.

And for those of you who already received this? My apologies. Sorry for the rerun, but if you had answered as many e-mails as I have in the past two days, your brain would be fried the same way mine is. So, instead of blogging, I'm going to go back to Second Watch. What's that? The Beaumont book I'm working on. I trust I'm forgiven.



It's nearing July 24th. That means that Joanna Brady #14, Judgment Call, is about to go on sale. (Yes, my first instinct is still to put that extra E in the word Judgment, but firmer editorial heads prevail!)

Desert Heat, the first Joanna book came out in 1993. As far as characters go, she is actually my third born because Diana Ladd and Brandon Walker beat Joanna to the punch, but it's been twenty years of writing about her while watching her grow and change. The two books in which she and Beaumont interacted were especially fun to write, but for my money, Judgment Call is special. Please do not read anything into this. This is NOT the last Brady book; it's merely the most recent.

The tour stops are now posted on the website, www.jajance.com. Yes, the tour is shorter--Bella the book tour dog is happy about that--and so are we. I love going on tour--I love meeting and greeting my readers--but I also recognize that the physical stamina it took to go on month long tours

years ago no longer exists. As in, "The Old Gray Mare ain't what she used to be."



If I'm not coming to your area and you want signed books, please contact the Seattle Mystery Bookshop. They're set up to do sign and ship in a way that some of the other retailers aren't. You can contact them at staff@seattlemystery.com. You can also contact the Poisoned Pen in Scottsdale at sales@poisonedpen.com. They will be happy to help.

For those of you who have become avid bookmark collectors, now's the time to send those SASE--business

sized, please--to me at P.O. Box 766, Bellevue, WA. 98009. After the 24th, do NOT hold your breath. I probably won't get around to signing and sending them until after the tour, but they WILL BE SIGNED!!!

We've been having some challenges with email at jajance@jajance.com. If you send something to that address and it bounces, try sending it to jajance@gmail.com. It's been an intermittent problem and we're trying to fix it. There's something about being told that my address has "permanent fatal errors" really bothers me!

See you on the road.

JAJ

Going Back To Bisbee

Saturday, July 21, 2012

This first section is an aside to my fans in southeastern Arizona. Next Sunday evening, July 29, I'll be appearing at the Bisbee Royale Theater in Bisbee, Arizona. The event is being sponsored by Atalanta Books. Joanie Werner, the owner of the bookstore, is renting the theater. Her store doesn't really lend itself to doing events or talks, so most of the time the signings for her have been just that--signings only. This will give me the opportunity to do a real program for a community that gave me my start in life. The title of this blog is a hat-tip to Richard Shelton, a former English professor from the University of Arizona whose book by that same title is a reminiscence of the years he spent as a teacher in Bisbee. (He was actually teaching there at the same time I was in grade school and high school, but at a school I didn't attend. We didn't meet until I was a student at the university with a part time job working in the English Department.)

But back to the Bisbee Royale appearance. There isn't a ticket charge for this event as such. I usually don't request that people buy books at events, but this time I'm making an exception. If you're in Sierra Vista or Benson or Douglas or Tombstone or even Tucson, consider coming for the day and visiting Joanna Brady's home turf, and cap it off with the event in the evening. But if you bring along OTHER books, besides the ones you purchase from Atalanta, rest assured that I'll sign those, too.

Thus endeth the first part of the blog.

It's Saturday morning. I'm thinking about my cousin Polly Johnson who died at age 24 in 1963. Once you hear the story, you'll know why I'm thinking about her today.

Polly lived in Rapid City, South Dakota, and was a star in our family. By the time she was sixteen, she had her own live TV show in Rapid, a Saturday evening country western show called The Hoedown. (That was a long time ago, when local stations still did some of their own programming.)

Eventually Polly had a falling out with her manager. She got saved and moved to California where she became a gospel singer. The last time I saw her was the summer before I went away to college. She came to Bisbee with her guitar in hand and spent several days sitting in my sister's living room, strumming her guitar, and recording hour after hour of music into a Wollensak reel-to-reel. I can still hear her in my mind's ear singing El Paso, Bimbombay, Five Brothers who left Arkansas. It was an incredible gift, and one I still savor--and thanks to my late nephew, David Lane, I can still listen to Polly's music--her clear voice, her utterly true pitch.

Time passed. Months. Polly was living in Lodi, California. She was scheduled to go to Washington, DC to receive some sort of Congressional award for her work with youth. In the days before she was supposed to leave, rather than packing for the trip, she sat down and composed long letters to any number of people, including my sister in Bisbee. On the way to the airport that day, she picked up an ARC (Advance Review Copy) of her upcoming album, I Found the Answer.

By now, you've figured out where this is going. The plane Polly boarded was one of the first hijackings in this country, carried out by some stupid jerk who blew himself and a plane full of other people over northern California so his family could get the insurance money. I do not remember his name, and I'm not going to try looking it up. As the plane exploded, the record album was blown out of the aircraft, and the record itself was sucked out of its sleeve. It was found miles from the main body of wreckage. It had floated downward and landed, unbroken, in a recently plowed field with only the title showing--I Found the Answer.

And I think Polly had found her answer. In the days after her death, envelopes containing those last handwritten letters showed up in Post Offices all over the country--in Bisbee and in Rapid City where her brother-in-law worked as a mail carrier. Those notes were a final loving gift from Polly to the people who loved her, and the gospel singer who appeared in Beaumont # 4, Taking the Fifth, was my small tribute to Polly, a way of bringing her back.

Now you know why I'm thinking about Polly this morning--because of that other young woman in Colorado who, after literally dodging a bullet at a theater shooting in Toronto a month ago, lost her life in the tragedy in Aurora. Like Polly, Jessica Ghawi, was twenty four years old. Like Polly, she was a rising star. Like Polly, she stayed in touch with the people she loved in life-affirming blogs, tweets, and e-mails even though she had some kind of inkling that something wasn't quite right--that life was precious and might come to an end at any time.

My hope for Jessica and for the other victims is that forty years from now, they will still be recalled with love and respect while the shooter's name and the ugly smirk on his mug shot are long forgotten.

Via con Dios, Jessica and Polly.

Don't Take Yourself So Seriously

Friday, July 27, 2012

When Bill and I got engaged in 1985, we celebrated by having a party with some of our friends at a private showing of our favorite local show at the time: The Texas Chainsaw Manicurist. I believe somewhere I may have a very fuzzy VHS tape of the show, but lines from the songs in that review by Scott Warrender linger in my head: "What could make a good cosmetologist go bad? She was the Texas Chainsaw Manicurist." "We're all watching Dynasty." "We'll be together in reruns, in reruns." "Up, up, up with the people of the world." "My Barbie was the slut of the neighborhood." "All I wanted in life was a Spirograph." "When you lose the one you love."

Obviously I could go on and on and have already done so ATL, as we say in our family which is code for "At Tedious Length!"

But this week I've been humming a few bars from Life is Funny. And here, with Scott Warrender's permission is the whole verse.

Don't take yourself too seriously
There's a lot to be said for humor
So laugh it all away my friend
the tragedy or nasty rumor.
And so, taking a lesson from that, here's a place where the joke's on me.

A number of days ago, I sat down to write the announcement letter that goes out to all the people in my new book notification list. Because of the half books, the Beaumont/Brady dual appearance books, the numbering is a little glitchy. What to do about say, Joanna 11.5. Just to be sure I had it right, I went to the counter, picked up my newly arrived hardback, fresh from the publisher, opened it to the previous books page, and counted the Joanna books listed there. The number turned out to be 14. The problem is, when I went back to write my announcement, I failed to count the book that was in my hand.

In other words, the many people in my database have an announcement from me saying that Judgment Call is Joanna #14 when it should say Joanna #15. As of this morning, I've had e-mails from two readers pointing out the error. Thanks to both of them.

Not only is the egg on my face, it's also on the printed bookmarks. Those, too, say Brady #14. I'll be signing the books and the bookmarks properly, with the right information.

But only up to a point. I think I'm a little tired. Earlier today, when I was supposed to be signing and dating books, I remembered not to sign Ali, but on one book, instead of saying 7/24/12 I wrote 7/12/24. We'll just call it a pre-dated signing.

But I'm laughing about all of it because, as the song says, I'm not taking myself too seriously.

Why I Answer My Own Email

Friday, August 3, 2012

Sometimes people seem to be under the impression that I'm not the one reading and responding to my e-mails. This one should put that idea to rest. I'm removing Marcia's e-mail address but let me tell you Marcia is my size (six feet) and she's great!!!

If you can read this, thank a teacher. If you're an adult reading this for the first time, thank a literacy volunteer.

JAJ

I would like to tell you how I felt when I met my favorite author, J.A. Jance. One day, when my tutor Trish and I were at the library for class, she was helping me decide what kind of book I might want to read, I told her I was not sure. I really did not want to start a new book, it would take me a long time to read it and I had to use a piece of paper or something to try to keep my eyes from jumping back and forth from one word to another, I have dyslexia. It takes me a very long time, because by the time I would finish one sentence I was not sure what I had read. One day while she was teaching me how to find books at the library, she asked, "Do you like mysteries?" I told her I do like murder mysteries. Trish pointed at some books and told me that she had read one of these books once. That was when I picked up my first copy of a J.A. Jance book. It was an Ali Reynolds story. After I had started reading the book I noticed how much I was enjoying reading it. I had so many questions in my mind about what I was reading. I was addicted and did not want to put it down, that was the first time in my life I had ever felt like that. I finished and I could not wait to pick up the next Ali Reynolds book. I found that I enjoyed reading them so much that was all I wanted to read. I also noticed I was remembering what I had read. By the time I started to read the Joanna Brady mysteries I had become a bookworm and I loved it. I was having so much fun reading; I can still remember when I used to see people carrying books around with them where ever they would go. I could never understand why. I used to ask myself, "Why are they reading books when there are so many movies?" Now I am the one carrying a J.A. Jance book to all my appointments and depending on what courthouse I am working at that week, I take a book with me. I remember one day after I finished a book I sat and just looked at the book in my hand. I never dreamed I would be a reader. I can't tell you how it made me feel. Now I understand why those people had their books because I am now of those people.

One day my tutor called me and asked me to check my e-mails. When I did, I was not sure how to feel. I was in shock and I just cried. She had e-mailed my favorite author J.A. Jance and told her about me. I was very surprised when I saw that Mrs. Jance had sent me an e-mail and she sent me a message about reading. I knew then that I wanted to meet her in person to let her know what reading her books had done in my life. One day I checked to see if she was going to be in Tucson for a book signing and she was. I made sure to mark my calendar because that was going to be the first time I was going to meet her in person. On this day it happened to be my day off from work. I was glad about that; I did not want to show up right after work in my uniform to meet Mrs. Jance for the first time. I was so scared standing there in line. I was looking at a real writer; someone who can write books and that just frightened me to speak to someone like that.

It took me some time to get the courage. I stepped out of line a few times until I was the last one. I was trying to decide if I should just go get my books signed or if I had the strength to ask her if she remembered the e-mail that my tutor had sent her. It was my turn and I did it, I walked up to the table. She looked up at me and said, "Hello." I then took a deep breath as she asked me what my name was. I told her my name and she asked, "Which way do you spell it s-h-a or c-i-a?" I told her with c-i-a.

I told her she would probably not remember but my tutor had sent her an e-mail about me and I wanted to thank her in person. At that moment I thought to myself

O.M.G. I spoke to a real author. She then stood up and came around the table and gave me a big hug as the two of us cried. At that time so many things went through my mind, I had just let another adult know about my secret. Here I was telling a very famous person that at my age, I had not really grasped the whole thing behind reading until I picked up my first copy of one of her books. I just wanted to tell her, "Thank you, Mrs. Jance, if you only knew what this had done for my life thank you again and again."

What Marcia didn't tell you is what she whispered into my ear when I stood up to hug her in the bookstore. "Thank you," she said. "Thanks to your books, now I can read and now I can understand what I read. You have no idea how that has changed my world!"

In other words, thanks to literacy volunteers everywhere.

The Tour's Over

Friday, August 10, 2012

Yesterday I did one last presentation at a private venue in Seattle. After that I came home and spent several hours personalizing and autographing bookmarks for the people who had requested them. All those stamped SASEs are sitting in the outgoing mail slot. That means the official part of the tour is over, and we can all take a very deep breath.

As usual, the tour itself was both rewarding and tiring. By the time we hit Salt Lake, the next to the last city, I was done. I did an afternoon presentation, had an early dinner, and then fell into bed and into sleep both at seven pm. I didn't open my eyes again until twelve hours later. Sleeping for twelve hours in a row is something I have never done in my whole life!

Bella made it through the tour without a hitch. Several of the nights on the road, we stayed at the Ritz Carlton in Phoenix. I may be the so-called celebrity on the road, but I am also the chief dog walker. For some reason, Bella hit a stubborn streak. Whenever I took her out, she maybe did number one but not number two. Friday? Yes. Saturday? No. Sunday? No. Monday? No. Tuesday? No. The parking valets at the Ritz all know Bella by name, and the head guy, Rick, got tired of seeing me trudge back and forth across the driveway with my empty plastic bag in hand. On Tuesday he finally took pity on me. And on Bella, too.

He did some research on the Internet and discovered that canned pumpkin was often a good remedy in such situations. We were back in our room when he appeared, a dish of mashed pumpkin in hand. Bella didn't eat much of it--she's a small dog after all--but it did the trick. Wednesday at 11:30 AM we had SUCCESS!

I understand Bella's situation. We go from quiet days here at home to days of non-stop people. The first day at the Ritz, Bella spotted a car in the driveway that was the same make, model, and color as the car we drive back home. She was determined to get into THAT one. dragging me at her Dachshund best, toward the car. After that, she focused on which rental car we had and always knew which was the right one as soon as the parking valets brought it around.

The day we did Sun City, Sedona, Flagstaff AND DROVE 200 MILES!!! was a killer. (That was two days before my twelve hour hibernation!). That day Bella interacted with several hundred people, and by the last event she wanted to be in Bill's arms and nowhere else. But she's a trooper, and she's also an important part of the J.A. Jance charm offensive. Whenever people said to me, "I thought you had Golden Retrievers. That's what's on your book covers," I explained that Bella was a full grown Golden when we rescued her, but Bill put her in the dryer while she was still wet.

I'm always amazed by the stories people tell me on the road. There's the woman who said I saved her son. He had gotten in trouble and was sent to prison. While he was incarcerated, even though he had never been a reader, he started reading my books. His mother said she sent them to him four and five books at a time. He has now been released, is doing well, and his fiancé was there to take a photo of me with her future mother-in-law.

Another woman told me that after her stroke she used my books--listening to them and reading along--to relearn how to read.

And then there's the guy who gave me a can of salmon made from a fish he caught himself. His tee-shirt made me smile. It advertised a small town on the Lake Huron side of Michigan by saying it was "A nice little drinking town with a fishing problem." In an aside, he told me how much J.P. Beaumont's sobriety issues in the background of the books meant to his own sobriety.

Someone at the event yesterday asked me if I loved going on tour or hated it. I didn't have to think twice. I love it. Going on tour is a blessing and a challenge for all the above reasons.

And thanks again to Rick at the Ritz.

Thanks for the Memories

Friday, August 17, 2012

I've been writing for a long time. I sat down to write my first novel in the middle of March of 1982. That's more than thirty years ago. My first books were original paperbacks that sold for \$2.65. My royalty rate on that price was a quarter a book. It took years to pay back my first royalty advances of \$2000 a book, a thousand dollars each on signing and another thousand on delivery. By the way, for you hardback purists, that's why you can't find hardback copies of those early books. There weren't any!!

This past week, in with my new e-mails, was a note from a woman who was a senior editor with Avon Books back when my first books were being published by that particular house. She is now the executive director of a nonprofit in Ohio and was asking about a possible appearance. This week's e-mail also included a note from a soon-to-be published author, thanking me for offering her encouragement and inspiration. Her message reminded me that I need to thank those early supporters as well. The upshot is that if we can work out the scheduling difficulties, I'll be doing an Ohio appearance sometime early next year.

But in the process of replying, I was reminded of two other stories from back then. And since I can write whatever I want in this blog, I'm including them here, in no particular order.

There was an almost two year pause between the time the first book was sold and the time it hit the shelves. The contract was for publication with Avon Books, a paperback house, where the print run would likely be in the 30,000 range as opposed to a hardback house with a possible print run of 5000 or so. With the hope of seeing my books on the racks at QFC, we opted for door number one--the low-brow world of original paperbacks.

Based on the amounts of my advances, listed above, I wasn't exactly rolling in the dough back then. When it came time for that year's Pacific Northwest Writer's Conference, I wanted to attend in the worst possible way, but the price-tag for admission was well beyond my limited means.

You may have seen those guys standing near stop lights at intersections with their hand-lettered signs, "Will work for food." The PNWC gave me the same option. If I would work as a volunteer, I could attend their conference for free. What a deal! In the end I was assigned to go to SeaTac to pick up an arriving editor from New York who was flying in for the conference. My job was to meet her at the airport and then take her to the Pacific Lutheran campus southeast of Tacoma. Doing what I was told, I met the woman at the airport and loaded her bags into the back of my aging 1978 Cutlass Supreme that I had bought, used, in 1980.

On the way to the conference she told me in a rather snippy fashion, (Snippy, by the way, was one of my mother's favorite terms!) that "original paperbacks are where anybody who wants to get published can get published."

Well, thank you very much! That turned out to be the first time I heard original paperbacks so thoroughly dissed by a member of the literary elite, and it wasn't the last, either. Doing a slow burn, I drove my somewhat rude guest to the conference where I unloaded her and her luggage in front of her assigned dorm. I have no idea how she got back to the airport. It wasn't my problem. For all I know she's still wandering lost in woods surrounding Pacific Lutheran.

The lesson here is simple: Do NOT annoy original paperback authors. This caution also applies to people who make disparaging remarks about the world of "genre fiction" which is usually thought to include Romance, Mystery, and Science Fiction. Those of us who labor in the literary vineyards of "popular fiction" may be considered beneath contempt by some of those "in the know," but we do have our ways of getting even! I'm still grinning about a recent Dean Koontz book in which he took apart a highfaluting literary critic!! And, let's not forget the evil professor of Creative Writing who turns up in my Walker books. Yes, literary revenge definitely works for me.

As I mentioned above, for the better part of two years, I lived in that strange limbo where I was a "sold but still unpublished" author. During that time, I was living with my sister and my two kids in a condo in Bay Vista at the corner of Second Avenue and Broad. (If you think that sounds a lot like Belltown Terrace in the Beaumont books, you're right on the money. I often make use of disguised real places in my books

because I'm far too lazy to make up EVERYTHING! That would be too much like writing Dune and having to start out by inventing an entirely new universe.)

The early eighties was a time when Murder She Wrote was one of the most popular shows on TV. Somewhere along the way, the producers of Murder She Wrote made arrangements to use the recreation floor at Bay Vista as a substitute for filming a hotel scene. For a period of weeks, the building was overrun with television production folks.

Bay Vista was built to comply with Seattle's then "mixed use" requirements. The first five floors of the building are devoted to commercial and office space, the sixth floor is the "common area" for the condo units, and then the condo tower rises above half of that. In high-rises, the price of units goes up as you move higher in the building.

There's a reason our unit was on floor seven, only one level up from the common area.

One day, leaving my computer behind to attend my weekly noontime Toastmaster's group, I got on the elevator and pressed the down button. The elevator stopped again on floor six and a whole crew of TV folks, on their way to a lunch break, got on board with me. When the doors closed again, there was a five floor drop before we reached the lobby. As the elevator descended I said into the collective silence, "You know there's a real mystery writer living in this building, and I'm she."

One of the television people, a very well dressed woman with glasses perched on her nose, turned to me dismissively and said in a distinctly NYC accent, "Oh yeah? Who's your publisher?"

"Avon," I said.

"Really," she replied snippily. "I didn't know they did books!"

There are times when my mother's words are really the right ones for the job. And all these years later, I'm still laughing.

Avon Books, as opposed to Avon Ladies, went through some tough times over the years. I stuck with them and eventually we all ended up in the HarperCollins end of the publishing world.

I still occasionally encounter the literary snobs who feel obliged to tell me that they NEVER read mysteries. I especially like it when they mention that to me at book signings. I spent ten years selling life insurance and learning not to take NO for an answer. That's what the Life Underwriting Training Council did for me. Taught me to take ten NOs and still get the appointment and another ten NOs and still get the check. Compared to that, selling books is EASY!!

I'm sure those folks are always surprised when they leave the book store and go out to the parking lot where they discover they are holding a mystery personally autographed by me for their Aunt Mimi who really DOES read mysteries!

And I'm still laughing about that, too.

So here's to the ghost of Avon Books. Thank you for taking a chance on an unknown author way back then and giving me a start in the world of publishing. And thanks for thirty years of memories.

The Latest From My Spam File

Friday, August 24, 2012

An e-mail just came in offering me a "surefire way to double my money." I'm not biting because I've already discovered something that offers an unbelievable return on your investment. And because I'm such a good person, I'm going to share the news. Wait for it . . . Buy GOLDFISH!! And I'm not talking about the salted Goldfish snack food, either. I'm talking about REAL GOLDFISH!!

Last year, when the back yard garden and pond finally came together, we went straightaway to our local Petsmart and invested in goldfish. We bought two dollar goldfish. All the rest were of the ten cent variety. One of the dollar goldfish disappeared that first night and the other one stayed out of sight for a very long time.

When we went south for the winter, I figured the goldfish were goners, that they would perish over the winter. Not true. They go dormant in cold weather, so they don't need to be fed until the water warms up again in the spring. By that time, they're ravenous, and they mow through algae and fish food with equal enthusiasm.

But in the intervening time, the surviving goldfish had grown like crazy. If you went to Petsmart to buy similarly sized fish, they would be of the dollar variety. And as for our sole surviving fish that cost a dollar originally? He is now officially the Big Guy in the pond and clocks in at a good six inches.

In other words, for return on your dollar, you can't beat goldfish. But they're also good for entertainment.

This summer, we've taken to going down to the pond to feed them every evening. There are three distinctly separate schools in the front pond and another one in the back pond. The ones in the front, including the one with the Big Guy are a bit more social and eager to show up when its time for grub. They come right to the surface and stay there until the handfuls of food are completely gone, a process that generally takes ten minutes or so.

Bella, our mini long haired dachshund, has joined in on the Feed the Fish program with a good deal of enthusiasm. She watches the fish with complete concentration. For a long time we thought her interest was entirely harmless, but last week one of the goldfish--one of this year's twenty-five centers, came too close to the edge. Bella pounced and nailed it. Bill grabbed Bella, pried the fish from her relatively toothless little gums, and threw the fish back in the water. He lay there for a bit, stunned and traumatized, but then he swam off. Since no dead fish have shown up in the filter, we're assuming he made it. But now we keep a much closer eye on Bella. We may be feeding the fish: she's hunting them.

And that's where we were until this past weekend when we had a swimming party in the pool. One of the guests showed up with a huge--six foot long--inflatable whale. The grandkids were all delighted and climbed on board. Bella, on the other hand, went nuts. She ran circles around the pool, hackles puffed up like a little red porcupine, barking her head off. I'm sure she was saying, "Fish! Fish! Fish!"

In other words, not only were those goldfish a good investment, they've also given us our money's worth in laughter, too.

And laughter really is the best medicine.

A Salute to the G's

Friday, August 31, 2012

The last part of August is a time for remembering my parents. My father's birthday was on the 21st, my parents' wedding anniversary was on the 24th, and my mother's birthday was on the 30th. At the time my parents married, she was twenty-two, two years older than my father. She refused to be a "cradle robber," so she set a wedding date for a day that was four years after he turned twenty. They were married for sixty-eight years. And seven kids.

They were farm people from northeastern South Dakota. They understood the value of hard work. My father had managed to have a year of normal school after high school. He had a teaching certificate, but he couldn't make enough money teaching school to support his family, so they had a farm with seventeen cows that had to be milked twice a day. And my mother put up a minimum of 300 quarts of canning every year. When my father was bedridden with rheumatoid arthritis, the milking was up to my mother who already had three small children.

When the doctor in Milbank suggested a move to a high dry climate, my mother hauled out her tattered old geography book. My mother had only a seventh grade education, but geography had always been her favorite subject. She opened the book to a map of Arizona, pointed to Bisbee, and said, "That's high and dry. We're moving there."

And we did--with that year's worth of canning stowed under the bed in the trailer they pulled behind their '49 Ford.

Of course, the decision wasn't quite all that cut and dried. With their farm experience, my parents had a chance to buy a dairy at the corner of Camelback and Scottsdale Road!!! They decided against it because it seemed "too risky." Instead, we went to Bisbee and my father went to work underground in the copper mines while his legs were still so crippled that he had to use his arms and shoulders to get up and down the ladders. With his year of normal school, he had more education than a lot of the other underground miners. They other guys ended up calling my father "the professor," and put him in charge of dynamite. (That probably contributed greatly to my father's hearing loss in later life.)

Through some bit of serendipity, this was the week when a computer disk full of family photos somehow wended its way through the new computer on Bill's desk. There were school pictures of my folks and their brothers and sisters and wedding pictures as well. There were pictures of my folks through the years, often with a new baby added to the group. There were pictures of my older sisters and me, setting off for school in the dresses our mother sewed on her treadle operated Singer sewing machine while waving at our younger brother--the oldest younger brother--who was still too young to go to school.

And then there were wedding photos of my brothers and sisters. My first wedding dress--bought for what seemed like an exorbitant sum of \$123--reappeared in two other weddings, worn by two of my sisters-in-law. That brought the average cost of family wedding dresses WAY down!

But the photo that took my breath away, was one that was taken in 1986. We were in Arizona for my parents' 50th Wedding Anniversary, the Busk Bus and Truck show as it was billed. The folks told us they were spending our inheritance by renting three buses and taking the whole bunch of us on a tour of northern Arizona--the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert, the Petrified Forest. When the tour was over, we went back down to Bisbee for a couple of days. And, because it's always been one of my favorite places, we made a pilgrimage to the the Chiricahua National Monument, aka The Wonderland of Rocks.

And that's where the photo was taken. It shows my daughter and her grandmother sitting on a tree branch in a tree they had both climbed!! My daughter was 14. My mother was 72!!!

My mother was always a tomboy. When my father couldn't quite get around to starting a home remodeling project, my mother enlisted my younger brother, age five, into helping her knock down a block wall which effectively got the remodel under way. At age 75, she told my father that she wasn't helping with roofing any more. That same summer, the folks were in the process of installing a deadbolt on the door of their garage. Somehow, the door went shut and locked with them inside. They were due to leave on a cruise the next day. No one would have missed them for days. That was when my mother hauled out a brace and bit--carpenter's tools her father had taught her how to use--and effected their rescue with a little Evie Busk ingenuity and a lot of Evie Busk determination. They got out, managed to retrieve their passports from a small town bank whose manager opened the safety deposit box on a Saturday afternoon. And off on their Australian cruise they went--where my father, at age 73, climbed Ayers Rock!

When my father retired from the insurance business in 1980, my mother said, "You're retiring? I'm retiring. The kitchen is closed." And after cooking three hot meals a day for nine people for years and years, she made that one stick!!

My parents spent sixty-eight years laughing and loving and working side by side. They raised their kids together. They always presented a united front. What one said, the other one backed. They insisted that we kids do chores--mowing the lawn, washing dishes, cleaning the house--but those chores were always accompanied by equal amounts of singing and laughter.

So the last week in August, I miss my parents. But I honor them, too.

Here's to you, G's. You done good!

Return to Cannon Beach

Friday, September 7, 2012

We're currently in Medford, Oregon, having a picnic lunch at the RoxyAnn Winery. We spent the morning playing nine holes of very bad golf at the Oak Knoll Golf Course in Ashland. Tonight we'll dine at the Dragonfly and then see the Merry Wives of Windsor in the Elizabethan Theater.

This is what vacation looks like--a full week of days like this.

But on the way down to Ashland from Seattle, we stopped off for four nights at Cannon Beach, Oregon.

Our daughter has been taking our almost seven year old grandson to Cannon Beach for the last weekend in August since before he could walk. The first lesson she learned in Cannon Beach was that strollers do NOT work in sand. Until last year, they were accompanied on their beach excursions by their rescued golden retrievers, Angel and Kinsie.

Those of you who have followed this blog, know that both Kens and Angel crossed the Rainbow Bridge last year. In April our daughter and her son picked up Snowflake, a golden who was billed as a "great family dog" but who had spent all six years of her life in a wooden shed being the mommy dog in a puppy mill.

Snowflake's pick up point was in the wilds of southwestern Washington only an hour or so from Cannon Beach. And since the other dogs had enjoyed going there so much, our daughter decided to head there to spend that first night. What's not to like?

It turns out, the answer to that is there was a LOT not to like!!! Snowflake did NOT like riding in cars. I'm sure those were for vet trips only. When they got to the hotel in Cannon Beach, as our daughter was trying to unload the car, Snowflake bolted in sheer terror! It's a miracle that she was able to be caught and talked back into the car.

Our daughter knew that a dog who literally freaked out at everything and couldn't even be walked on a leash was beyond her ability to cope. The very next week she sent the dog off to the Academy for Canine Behavior in Woodinville where, after two weeks of evaluation, even their professional dog trainers weren't sure Snowflake could be rehabilitated. But after several months which included five weeks of Academy training, Snowflake is a far happier and more confident dog. She can walk on a leash. She is no longer petrified of things like hairspray and TV sets! So last weekend, my daughter, with some trepidation, returned to Cannon Beach with Snowflake in tow.

The dog is still not thrilled about riding in a car, and she managed to escape her back seat harness within the first ten miles of leaving home. But she now looks to our daughter for guidance. She dogs our daughter's heels, and checks her face to see if whatever is happening is okay or not.

So that first evening, when they went to the beach, Jeanne T. kept Snowflake on her leash. For those of you who aren't in the know, Cannon Beach is a very dog friendly place, and so is the BEACH at Cannon Beach. Snowflake was able to walk on

sidewalks fully stocked with people and dogs of all kinds and not go into total meltdown mode.

The second night on the beach, our daughter took the plunge and let Snowflake off leash. She loved it. She played in the water. She chased the waves. And she stuck to our daughter like glue. Whew!!

But now, unfortunately, let us turn to the SECOND rescued dog in our family--Princess Bella, the abandoned Dachshund we found on a street in Bellevue in October two years ago.

It was when we arrived at the hotel, that Snowflake and Bella had their first official meeting. It was a tentative meeting, but not a problem. Our grandson had given Bella, the fish chaser par excellence, a new dog toy, a stuffed goldfish, to play with. But a stuffed fish is not as much fun as a real fish, so when Bella dropped that and made a run for Snowflake's new stuffed seal, Snowflake responded in attack mode, as in "THAT IS MY!!! TOY!" However, once we got them focused on their separate toys, all was well.

Later that evening, we decided to go to the beach with Bella. On her new extendable leash. Having no experience in using extendable leashes, I clipped it onto the wrong ring on Bella's collar. The leash was on the tag ring not the real ring. For those of you who might be tempted to make this mistake, here's the deal and a word of warning. It's a BAD idea! Those rings are made like springs for good reason--so new tags can be put on and also so old tags can be taken OFF!

So we went walking on the beach. We went into the water. Snowflake is a lot taller than Bella. Water that Snowflake was happy to lie down in, was much too tall for Bella. And when the first wave washed over her, she was not thrilled. As I was walking her out of the water, disaster struck.

Across the beach, Bella saw something she didn't like--two recumbent four-wheeled beach-cycles moving along on the hard sand just away from the water. Bella's eyes narrowed, her nose focused in on those, and she was GONE!!! She bolted to the end of the leash and took off like a shot, with her disconnected tags rolling loose in every direction.

One of the stories I used to tell on the reservation, Mollie Whuppie, has a line in it where the evil giant is chasing Mollie, the story's plucky heroine. The line goes like this. "He ran; she ran; he ran; she ran; until they came to the bridge of one hair, and she got over and he couldn't." There was no hair anywhere in evidence at Cannon Beach, but Bill ran and I ran. To no good effect. Bella caught up with the cycles, barking her head off. When they proved uninteresting in the long run, as it were, she looked around for another suitable target, and then took off after the nearest GREAT DANE! I don't believe Bella has any self-awareness as far as relative size is concerned. The bigger the better!

By then, our daughter had unleashed HER secret weapon, our grandson, Colt. He took off like a gazelle. Once he closed the distance between us and Bella, he managed to chase her back in our direction. We were finally able to lay hands on her and attach the

leash to the proper ring. Once Bella was safely back under control, we all took a very deep breath and headed back to the hotel. Undaunted, Bella spent the whole trip back to our room clearing the beach of all seagulls and crows, most of which were also larger than she is. We now refer to her as the Beach Bitch which, in literal terms is exactly what she is.

The following evening, we went back to the hotel early, leaving Jeanne T., Colt, and Snowflake on the beach. After taking Bella to do her duty, we went into the room where we were surprised to discover that Snowflake was already there, holding tightly to Bella's toy fish. Bill wrested the fish away and the dog made a larcenous grab for Snowflake's stuffed seal. That's when we realized that the golden retriever in question was actually an interloper from the unit next door--an escapee named Bailey whose owners were very relieved when we returned her to them.

On Sunday, Bella headed home with our daughter and grandson while we headed south to Ashland. But maybe next year we'll be able to bring her along to Ashland. We've already signed up for a dog-friendly room on the third floor of the Ashland Springs Hotel.

So next year, we'll see how Bella does with Shakespeare.

Books With No Socially Redeeming Value

Friday, September 14, 2012

For years when I toiled in the vineyards of "genre fiction" original paperbacks, I used to say that I wrote "books with no socially redeeming value whatsoever--the kinds of books you can buy in better bus depots everywhere." Or in airports, for that matter. I suspect there are a lot fewer bus depots these days than there were back in the early eighties before Greyhound became the last bus company standing.

Over the years I've mentioned some of the stories from readers who have taught me that my books do have some redeeming social value, and from time to time I've shared some of those stories here--stroke victims using my books as a tool to relearn how to read; the woman struggling with dyslexia who used my books to learn how to read to begin with; the people who have told me that Beau's struggle with booze helped them in their own efforts to get sober; the people who have told me they used my stories to get through the dark days when a loved one was hospitalized with a serious illness or to get through the sleepless nights after the loss of a spouse or a child. Those stories always touch me, and I treasure every one.

But this past weekend in Lincoln City, Oregon, a reader shared a story that took the cake and made the hair rise on the back of my neck.

I've previously mentioned that I'm currently at work on a Beaumont book for next year. For those of you who keep track of such things, you're just going to have to trust me when I tell you that Chapter 8 of that book was written long before I went to Lincoln City.

Because the local turnout to my scheduled appearance was more than the venue would hold, we scheduled two seatings, 6:30 and 8:00. It was warm in the auditorium during the 6:30 event, and it was VERY warm on the stage--so warm, in fact, that as I neared the end of the first performance, I was feeling woozy. Little wiggly white lines

were passing in front of my eyes. My makeup was melting off my face, but I'm a stubborn old bat, and I was determined to finish in my usual fashion by singing Janis Ian's iconic song, Seventeen, in what she laughingly refers to as my "Key of R."

The problem is, four lines into the song, I forgot the words!! This is a song I've known and loved for years, and forgetting the words in mid-song was NOT a good sign. I took a deep breath, or at least what I thought was a deep breath, and persevered, but I noticed I was holding onto the lectern as I did so. Bill, sitting in the back, thought I was doing the song in a different, "breathy" sort of way. What I was really trying to do was finish!! When I did, I staggered off the stage, white as a sheet, and went out into the much cooler lobby where I was supposed to sign books. There was already a huge line. Unfortunately, my hand was shaking so badly I could barely sign my name to say nothing of writing other people's names.

It happened that during the first talk, there were three VIPs in the front row--the lady to whom Judgment Call is dedicated, Loretta Tucker, a recent graduate of a hospital chaplaincy program, her son Aaron, and her "almost son," an EMT and Marine veteran, Adam. (Notice I didn't call Adam a "former Marine" because once a Marine, always a Marine.) Loretta could see I was in trouble as soon as I forgot the words to the song. While she bustled off to find me fruit juice, jerky, peanuts, and a damp towel, Adam positioned himself at my side and stayed there!! Bill, who was stuck in the back of the room, captured by people in the audience, didn't know anything was amiss. By the time he escaped his admirers and came out to check on me, I was well on the way to recovery.

So that's where we were. I started signing books and by the time the signing was almost over, I was in much better shape. By then someone had set up a fan on stage for the second performance, and I was confident I was well enough to do another round. That's when the miracle happened.

A young man approached the table and introduced himself as a fan from Newport, Oregon, explaining that he was a Marine who had, a month ago, had a dual knee replacement. I learned later that he now runs three miles a day on the sand at the beach, hoping to be able to recover enough to return to duty! After thanking him for his service, I introduced him to Loretta, a Marine widow and to Adam, a fellow Marine. The sincerity of their mutual "Semper fi" greeting blew me away.

Then the young man asked me if he could come to the event at Springfield because he wants to bring me a special book, the first book of mine he ever read, Rattlesnake Crossing. He wanted to show it to me because the book has three bullet holes in it. He had it with him in Iraq, and it was due to his having my book that he was able to have knee replacement surgery rather than losing his leg.

Whoa! If I'd thought I was blown away before? Wrong. His story truly gave me goosebumps and if it didn't do the same for you, you're not paying attention! Later, during the Q and A for the second performance, he told me that if he goes back to Iraq, he wants to take a whole bunch of my books with him. I told him I'll see to it, and I also told him I'll make sure he has an unblemished and autographed copy of Rattlesnake Crossing!!

As for what's in Chapter 8 of the next Beaumont book? I guess you'll have to stay tuned for that, but I can truly say that at least this once, one of my "genre fiction" books was a real life-saver.

Who knew?

The Exciting Life

Friday, September 21, 2012

Twice this week, people who were introduced to me and learned I was a writer said that same thing: "How exciting!"

Exciting? Really? Ask my husband. Being around a writer who is in the process of writing a book is about as exciting as watching paint dry. Maybe watching drying paint is better. Drying paint doesn't require periodic infusions of coffee.

As exciting as last weekend when I spent both Saturday and Sunday copy-editing a manuscript? That was two ten hour days when I didn't get double time for working on the weekend. I spent the whole time trying to decipher the copy-editor's tiny red-penciled notations that were liberally sprinkled through out. Doing copy-editing is a lot like being sent back to high school with Mrs. Medigovich pounding on the blackboard and saying, "Hell's bells, you hounds. Can't you do anything right?" By the way, Mrs. Medigovich was also a killer when it came to red-penciled corrections on papers!

As exciting maybe as sitting in the chair with my fingers poised over the keyboard waiting for J.P. Beaumont to say something to me and tell me what he's up to? Let me point out that Beau is an imaginary character. In the real world, if you're an adult carrying on conversations with imaginary characters--as I once did as a three year old with my stuffed lamb--people might think you're nuts. And maybe I am.

I spend a lot of time on the keyboard. I figure in the last thirty years I've typed a good seven million!!! words, one word at a time. If I wanted to do something really exciting, I could probably turn to some criminal enterprise because I'm convinced I no longer have any legible fingerprints!

But I'm also scratching my head here. Why do people think that grinding out 100,000 words at a whack 47 times in a row is "exciting?"

But they do, and it must be true because I know lots of people who are doctors and cops and teachers and engineers and insurance salesmen who REALLY want to be writers some day.

And I don't know any writers, this one included, who want to be anything else.

Traveling I-5

Friday, September 28, 2012

Bill and I have been traveling the I-5 corridor for 26 or our 27 years together. The first trip, in honor of my parents 50th Wedding anniversary, was memorable for any number of reasons. Let's just say that staying in a hotel called The Chalet in Needles, California, was a bad idea! It might have improved since then, but we haven't gone back. And traveling back up the road from Tucson to Seattle that trip, we arrived in Redding too late to get a good hotel. We ended up at a disaster called The Americana where one lamp switch-on too many caused a: an electrical short and b: a mattress fire. For years my mother regaled friends and relations with *her* version of how the newlyweds set their mattress on fire. Of course, her story bore no relation to the REAL cause of the fire, but I guess my storytelling genes had to come from somewhere. And ever since, Bill and I have pulled hotel mattresses away from walls to make sure there are no frayed wires behind them.

That was only the first of our many I-5 adventures. Let's see. There were the blizzards, most notably Mount Shasta and Vancouver and Central Oregon. The last one left us stranded unexpectedly at the Hilton Hotel in Eugene on New Years Eve. Someone had made plans for a big party. When none of the invited guests could get there, everyone in the hotel, us included, ended up being invited instead.

I believe that I may have mentioned in another post that the US of A is a "tall country." It is. Driving from Seattle to Tucson takes 26 hours of wheels on the ground and pedal to the metal. We generally break it into three days, Seattle to Ashland, Ashland to Bakersfield, Bakersfield to Tucson, and we follow the same pattern in the reverse. Those are three long days on the road with time off for gas and maybe a Whopper Junior.

There are events along the way that can make trip a day or two longer. There was the ice storm in Portland that left our dogs and us stranded for two days at the Riverplace--a very nice place to be stranded. And then there's the inevitable car trouble.

For our first stint of genuine snow-birding, we were headed south in early December, driving in a used Ford minivan that we had taken off our son's hands as a financial favor when he got a job that included a company car. As far as we knew, the car was in good shape when we loaded it for the trip to Tucson. When we had left Tucson months earlier, we had removed the back seat and created a wooden luggage rack in the back of the vehicle. During the next trip down, we were loaded for bear, with our two Golden Retrievers, Aggie and Daphne, riding with the luggage in the back.

In Bakersfield while getting gas, Bill checked the water and oil. All good. But as we hit the first steep part of the Grapevine, something gave way. There was a puff of smoke and we lost power. We limped along for another mile or so in the right lane before we finally managed to exit at a place called LeBec. No phone. No gas station. No fast food joint. We called AAA. They had a hard time locating LeBec, but eventually a tow truck, complete with a crazed driver, showed up to fetch us. He drove like a maniac for the seventy miles between there and the Ford dealership in Santa Clarita with us

crammed into the seat beside him and with Ag and Daph sitting wild eyed in the front seat of the minivan. (They must have thought they were driving themselves.)

We spent the remainder of that Sunday afternoon buying a car. It had to be a minivan because that was the only way we were going to get to Tucson with our dogs and all our stuff. The dealership had one, but the problem is, you don't get much of a deal when your trade-in is hauled onto the lot by a tow-truck with the engine still smoking. So it was the opposite of the old car salesman routine of "What's it going to take to get you in this car today?" Instead, we were saying, "Please let us buy this car and get back on the road!" Hours later, we struck a deal, but even though they were giving us next to nothing on the trade in, the manager insisted that we had to bring back the missing third seat. The one that was in Tucson. And so, with it starting to rain (Yes, it does rain in southern California!) we removed the third seat from the new minivan, loaded our worldly goods into that one, and took off for Tucson where, upon arrival the following day, we had to immediately reverse the process and return to Santa Clarita with the missing seat.

We never liked that car much--shotgun weddings are like that. We owned it for a couple of years before we traded it in on the Dodge Minivan we have now. But for as long as we owned the one we bought in Santa Clarita we called it our Ford Fiasco for obvious reasons.

But those are the LONG trips on I-5. For 26 years we've also driven back and forth to Ashland for the plays. That trip is usually a single eight hour day with a stop in Sutherlin for the Whopper and/or coffee and a stop at the Country Cousin in Centralia for either breakfast or fried chicken, depending on whether we're coming or going.

To get to Ashland you have to drive the whole length of Oregon because the town is only sixteen miles from the California border. And along the way, you will see countless misleading highway signs announcing "Ocean Beaches" or "Crater Lake." From the signs, it's easy to believe that the ocean and the lake are just out of sight, sort of like the motels and restaurants that are listed on the highway signs but aren't right at the intersection. It turns out this is false advertising. Yes, the ocean is there, but it's a lot like grandmother's house--you have to go over the river(s) and through the woods and mountains to get there.

After countless years of whining on my part, we've finally broken that code. Several times now, on our way to and from Ashland we've managed to visit the Oregon Coast--Cannon Beach or Lincoln City. And we've enjoyed them, but the one Oregon stop that seemed forever out of reach was Crater Lake.

This week we cracked that nut, too. You don't end up at Crater Lake accidentally. It's a long trip, but it's spectacular when you get there. The thought of one cataclysmic blast blowing up the mountain and leaving that huge crater is astonishing. It was beautiful. It was daunting. And it left me wondering if the animals living there had some advance knowledge of the coming disaster like animals seem to know in advance about tsunamis.

So we're taking five days to make the trip to Tucson this time around--five whole days. We drove from Seattle to Eugene, Eugene to Ashland via Crater Lake, Ashland to Stockton, Stockton to Pasadena, and today we'll do Pasadena to Tucson.

Maybe, as my mother would say, we're getting older AND smarter.

R.I.P. Larry Dever

Friday, October 5, 2012

When Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever died in a single vehicle accident a week or so ago, people who read my books were quick to let me know. Although I wasn't close friends with Larry, he was a man of real integrity, and I mourn his passing.

Someone sent me a note yesterday, asking if Sheriff Dever had been in attendance at one of my signings in Scottsdale. No, he wasn't at one of those, but he did show up for one in Bisbee. That signing occurred in the dead of summer, and even though it's a "dry heat" the people standing in that very long line were suffering with it. In fact, one lady fainted dead away. And who was there to help and summon an aid car for her? None other than Sheriff Dever.

I know he took a lot of good-natured razing about his fictional counterpart, Sheriff Joanna Brady, with people asking him if he happened to be wearing his pantyhose that day. He got the joke, and he laughed along with everyone else.

Several years ago, I did a benefit for Tohono Chul which included a bus tour of Bisbee. On a Sunday morning, Sheriff Dever met us at the Justice Center and guided us on an in-depth tour of the complex. Later, he sat us down in a conference room and gave us all a disturbing lesson on how the border wars are affecting Cochise County. The county shares 80 miles with the international border. His department, 120 employees total, sworn officers and not, was at that time dealing with 350,000!!! illegal border crossers a year. In Cochise County. Let me repeat that--350,000 with a police force of 120 expected to stem the tide. He told us that not only were his officers outnumbered, they were also outgunned.

Sheriff Dever's take on the situation was to have sympathy for the old style illegals (Yes, that's what they are--illegal border crossers) who were coming to the US in hopes of finding jobs and chasing the American dream. He had far less sympathy for the gun, drug, and people running thugs who are currently turning the landscape of Cochise County into a gigantic eighty mile long garbage heap.

I'm sorry Larry Dever is no longer with us. I'm sorry his recently appointed successor is now having to deal with the brutal murder of a young Border Patrol officer west of Naco just this week. Talk about a trial by fire!

So this is my personal hail and farewell to Sheriff Larry Dever. Gone but not forgotten.

Larry Dever RIP Redux

Friday, October 12, 2012

I wrote last week's blog about the passing of Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever on Thursday night. On Saturday morning the local media outlets were reporting that tox screen results showed that he was driving under the influence at three times over the legal limit, driving without a seat belt, and traveling a dirt road at 62 MPH. I'm sure this news further distressed his already grieving family, and it left a lot of people scratching their heads. Here's this very good man who's been sheriff for eight years, a pillar of the community who was running for his third term in office. How could this have happened to him? How is it possible?

Maybe my own all too similar story can shed a little light on the matter.

In the mid-seventies, my first husband and I, along with our two small children, were living in Pe Ell, Washington. I had been a teacher in Arizona, but where we were living at the time, there were no teaching jobs available. And so, in order to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads, I got a job selling life insurance. My District Manager's office was in Longview, sixty plus miles away from where we lived.

Things were not exactly perfect in my life back then. For one thing, I had two children under the age of four. My marriage was in big trouble due in part to my husband's drinking. And I was suffering from what turned out to be an almost fatal case of postpartum depression.

I wasn't smart enough to put that particular name to it. All I knew was that each and every day, after I got dressed to go sell life insurance, I cried my eyes out as I drove from appointment to appointment. When I got to the next call, I would sit in the car and fix my makeup, then I would go inside, do my job, and then start crying again, the moment I was back in the car.

One night, after an evening meeting with my manager, I went to the bar in the Huntington Hotel in Longview, swilled down three stiff drinks, and then got in the car to drive home.

I mentioned earlier that Pe Ell was sixty plus miles from Longview--that's if you drive up I-5 and turn left at Chehalis. But there was also a shortcut that wound on backroads through the backwoods.

If you look on a map, you'll see that Longview, Chehalis, and Pe Ell form a rough triangle. I'm an English Major. I made it through Mrs. Winters' Geometry class at Bisbee High School by the skin of my teeth. (Losing a week of school that year to an appendectomy didn't help my grasp of Geometry.) I can still say hypotenuse, and I know what one is, but do NOT expect me to be able to tell you how to estimate the length of same. It's the square root of something times something else, and you math majors are more than welcome to figure it out.

In this case, it wouldn't work anyway, because the back road route between Longview and Pe Ell is anything BUT a straight line. And that's the way I went, three sheets to the wind in a driving rain. Those back roads, logging roads primarily, are mostly unpaved. They're also full of wildlife--deer and elk--and they are lined with trees. It goes without saying that there are plenty of steep hills and tight curves.

Fortunately, I did not run off the road and crash into a tree. I did not take out a passing elk. I did not run head on into someone else's car. I made it home in one piece, but the next morning, I got up, looked at myself in the mirror and said, "What the hell were you thinking??!!!" Because if I hadn't made it home safely that night, what would have become of my children?

So that very day, I took myself into Centralia and had an appointment with a counselor. I spilled out my guts about what was going on in my life. The counselor listened to what I said, calmly wrote out a prescription for antidepressants, and sent me on my way. And even with antidepressants, I spent the next week crying my eyes out as I drove from one appointment to another.

The following week, when I went back to the same counselor for my next appointment, I asked him what was wrong with me. "Well," he replied, "there's your husband's drinking, of course, and your Women's Lib. You know, you're VERY ambitious."

"What is it," I asked, "a disease?"

It turns out that in 1974 in Centralia, Washington, it was. At least as far as that particular counselor was concerned.

I still remember the bolt of pure fury that passed through my body when he told me that. I drove straight home, dumped his prescription of antidepressants in the toilet, and flushed them away.

It was a miracle! In only two sessions, the man managed to cure my depression completely! In the almost forty years since, I've never been clinically depressed. What I actually think happened is that that surge of anger, coursing through my body, somehow rebooted my body chemistry.

But that's only because I lived to get that angry. That's only because I didn't wrap myself around a tree on the way home from Longview the week before when I was drunk as a skunk.

So, yes, I think I have a pretty clear understanding of what was going on with Larry Dever when he died. Too much pressure! No way to relieve it.

I continue to send my heartfelt condolences to Larry Dever's family. They have suffered a terrible loss.

And the rest of us have, too.

A Writer Is Someone Who Has Written Today

Friday, October 19, 2012

In early 1983, even though I had never published anything, I decided to make an investment in my future as a writer. I went to a small computer store near Lake Union, The Word Processor Store, and plunked down what seemed like a fortune back then, right at \$5,000, to buy a computer and a Daisy Wheel printer.

When I brought my initial purchase home and tried to make it work, I was sadly disappointed. In order to create the kind of double-spaced, page numbered format I wanted, I would have to plunk down additional money--\$300 or so--to buy a separate program. I believe that one was called Peachtree, but don't quote me.

A fellow writer from the Seattle area, another newbie named Stella Cameron, had been in the same store on the same day and made the same purchase. She called me back a day or two later and said that she had encountered the same difficulties I had. She had gone back to the store and returned her computer, exchanging it for an Eagle, and she urged me to do the same while I still could.

The Eagle wasn't quite steam driven, but it was close. It was a dual floppy (five and three quarters) and had a whopping 128k of memory!!! This was two years before I had the great good fortune of marrying an electronics engineer, so at the time, the Eagle's big advantage for a new computer user who was also a liberal arts major was those 24 function keys across the top which made it possible to make the computer work without my having to know anything about it. I'm one of those impatient people who would rather things simply work without anyone having to do something drastic--like read the directions!!

One of the store's employees, who jokingly called himself "Bits and Nibbles" came over to help me install my new word-processing program. (By the way, it was after I married the electronics engineer that I finally got the joke!)

I loved the word-processing program from day one for no other reason than its name "Spell-Binder." For someone who wanted to write mysteries, that was perfect. It still had some problems with page numbering and formatting, but I was willing to work around them because Spell-Binder came for free with the computer.

On the day "Bits and Nibbles" installed Spell-Binder he fixed it so that whenever I booted up the computer, the words that flashed across the screen were these: A writer is someone who has written TODAY! During the next two years as I struggled to go from being a wannabe writer to being a published one, those simple words gave me a daily dose of hope and encouragement.

Because of the difficulties I faced in being admitted to a college level Creative Writing program, I'm a big supporter of Writers Conferences. They supply a back door to the world of writing when the front door is slammed in a would-be writer's face.

About ten years ago, I spoke to the Society of Southwest Writers Conference here in Tucson, and last week I did a return engagement. They gave me a "going away" gift, a small battery-powered clock that they had had manufactured to give out occasionally as a prize. On it are printed those words I passed along to them years ago: A writer is someone who has written today.

So today the clock is sitting here ticking, and the words are telling me it's time. Time to quit blogging and start writing, because the two are not the same. Writing books is my real job, and I need to go do it.

A Case of Mistaken Identity

Friday, October 26th, 2012

Last night I was scheduled to speak at an Altrusa Club meeting here in Tucson. I was told to arrive at six pm for a six-thirty dinner.

The meeting was due to be held at a hotel. I arrived there at the appointed hour and snagged what I thought was a great parking place. When I went inside and asked a desk clerk where the meeting was, he told me I needed to go to the meeting rooms at the far end of the hotel and that the meeting I was looking for was upstairs in the "Pima Room."

As I took the long walk to the far end of the hotel and watched dozens of cars jockeying for parking spots at that end of the building, it occurred to me that maybe my parking place wasn't such a bad idea after all. Once in the part of the hotel designated as "Meeting Rooms," I took myself upstairs in the elevator and approached the two gatekeepers parked outside the door marked "Pima." The table was covered with name tags. I announced who I was, and the keeper of the name tags gave me a questioning look. At that point, her fellow gate-keeper stood up and grabbed me by the hand. "I know who you are," she said. "I'll take you where you're supposed to be." Without relinquishing her grip on my hand, she did so.

Back down we went in the elevator with the nice lady telling me how she and her whole family, many of whom are in law enforcement, enjoy reading my books. Once back on the ground floor, she led me through the hotel's restaurant, through the bar, out through an open patio, and into a crowded reception room. There I was introduced to and had my photo taken with not only retiring Arizona Senator Jon Kyl, but with any number of other guests as well. The whole time it was happening I kept thinking, "I had no idea Altrusa Club was this BIG!"

As I said, it was hot in the reception room. I could feel my make up starting to melt which is NOT a good thing when you're a dinnertime speaker. So I bailed on the reception room and went outside to await the return of my guide. A woman sat down nearby and began calling people and telling them they needed to come down from their

rooms because it was almost time to go to dinner. I looked at my phone. Sure enough. It said six-thirty on the dot. So without awaiting my hostess, I retraced my steps from the patio, through the bar and restaurant, and back toward the elevator. I was almost there when a woman came rushing out from one of the ground floor meeting rooms. "There you are," she exclaimed. "I was afraid you weren't coming. I've been out here waiting for you the whole time."

Yes, she had. I had seen her in the lobby outside the elevator, talking avidly with someone else, on both my previous trips to and from the elevator.

Once I found the correct room, there were no retiring senators in the bunch. Instead, there was a roomful of ladies who do any number of good works, many of them targeting literacy issues.

I think I've heard it said that sometimes the most important thing in life is just showing up. Last night I did that. TWICE!!!

And I'm still giggling about it this morning.

A Blog Update - Because It's Friday and I feel Like It Friday, November 2, 2012

I finished writing a book this week. That means I'm dealing with a moderate case of postpartum depression while I wait for the final set of edits to come in so they can be installed and sent off to my editor in New York on Monday. After last week's storm, Monday is the first day my editor will actually be in her office. She's been at home with power and internet, and with her kids as well, with no school to send them to. Sending her a manuscript this week would have been a waste of effort on both our parts.

But writers write. This particular writer is rather cranky when she's not writing, and this is what's in my heart today.

If you're in the Seattle area within reach of KING 5 News, you may have seen yours truly on the tube in the past few days or in your election pamphlet doing a pitch for treating the job of voting seriously. In a mail-in election, having someone writing in Mickey Mouse's name on a ballot is not a favor to anyone, and most especially not to the people charged with counting the votes.

You may be wondering how that happened. A few days before we were scheduled to leave town, someone called and asked me if I would be willing to help out with an election public service announcement. My answer? Well, duh!! Of course. Why? Because voting is IMPORTANT!!!

We live in a democracy. We have freedom of speech; freedom of religion; and, for someone who is a writer--freedom to write what we choose. Throughout our history, the costs of maintaining those precious freedoms have been paid for by the armed forces of this country. And what are the rest of us expected to do? We're supposed to VOTE. Every second or fourth year, on election day, we're supposed to put our collective heads

together and decide these are the best men and women to put in charge of running our government. And, as Clint Eastwood would say, if they don't do that job well enough, we should also put our collective heads together and fire them.

Regardless of which side of the political spectrum is yours, the truth of the matter is, approximately half the people in this country disagree with you.

I don't know about you, but I'm more than a little tired of all the name calling and finger pointing. That's so . . . well . . . grade-schoolish. So is tearing down yard signs and keying someone's vehicle for having what someone chooses to regard as the "wrong" bumper sticker.

Let's all grow up a little. Let's all go vote. And then, win, lose, or draw, let's roll up our sleeves and do all the things it's going to take to keep all those cherished freedoms.

God bless America. The home of the Free because of the Brave.

Sell, Sell, Sell

Friday, November 9, 2012

I didn't grow up in a family so much as a sales team. My father, brothers, and sisters were the sales force. Our mother was the Agency Manager.

What did we sell? Pretty much everything. One summer my older sisters made beaded jewelry--pins with sequins and beads pressed into cork foundations. I've always been a loser when it comes to arts and crafts. Whenever I would try to push the pins into the little cork foundations I would break off the fragile edges. I was finally banned from the production end of the business and put in charge of sales. That meant I hit the bricks, carrying a cigar box of jewelry and some change. I remember wandering the streets of Bisbee's Warren neighborhood, knocking on doors and making the sales pitch. And whatever I brought home got split three ways.

What else did we sell? Well, our father sold insurance for starters. For years our family handled the Arizona Republic delivery system in town--an auto route and two bicycle routes--so our mother was always on the lookout for new families moving into the area who might want to sign up for subscriptions. My younger sister did the same thing with TV Guide. She, too, was always on the lookout for new customers.

My brothers were in a Boy Scout troop that sold wreaths and mistletoe every Christmas. My sisters and I all sold Girl Scout cookies, year after year. The image of fictional a Joanna Brady dragging a Radio Flyer wagon full of Girl Scout cookies has some real basis in fact. I have the image in my mind, not in an album. Or on a Facebook page, for that matter.

Once the jewelry manufacturing gig went bust--because my sisters a: got better jobs or b: got married, I was left to my own devices. One year I sold boxes of All American Greeting cards--earning my very own Ansco camera in the process. I have a feeling the very name is antique, but let's face it. That was a lot of years ago.

Every time one of us undertook some new venture, there was our mother, encouraging us and telling us we could do it. That all we had to do was set our minds to it. That it takes a lot of nos to get a single yes.

That family background, one that made me feel at ease doing sales, made it possible for me to spend ten years selling life insurance. Enough so that I now receive a monthly pension from doing that work.

Fast forward to 1985. My first Beaumont book, *Until Proven Guilty*, was on sale. This was an original paperback so there was no publisher-arranged tour. If the books were going to sell, someone had to do the selling. What else did our mother tell us? Let's see. How about "If it is to be it is up to me!"

So we set up thirty some odd book signings at little bookstores all over the Pacific Northwest--little out of the way B. Daltons and Waldenbooks. Remember those? They would give me a table stacked with books at the front of the store and leave me to it. The days of "Would you like to buy some Girl Scout cookies?" morphed into "Would you care to try a mystery today?" One at a time the books got sold, and some of those early adopters--the people who bought those first paperbacks hand sold by me--remain fans today.

My parents loved to travel. My mother's favorite subject in school was geography, and she was a killer at geography questions on Jeopardy. While I was involved in that initial spree of book selling, the folks came to Seattle to visit. When I had to go to a mall in Federal Way for a signing, naturally my mother rode along, and while I was selling books, so was she. One couple had come to the mall and wandered into the bookstore while waiting for their movie to start. My mother pounced on them and strong-armed them into buying a book. Those folks are not only still fans--of my books and of my mother--they're in the Christmas card list, too.

So that's one of the skills I learned at my mother's knee--sell, sell, sell. It's something that has served me in good stead. It's something I try to let beginning authors know about. Yes, you have to write the book, but you're going to need to be able to sell it, too. You're going to need to be able to tell possible new readers what sets your book apart from all those other books on the shelves. You're going to have to convince them to give your book a try. And if you're terrified of public speaking? Too bad. Get your butt to Toastmasters.

What brought all this to mind? Last week I received an e-mail from someone I met in a green room at a television station during one of last year's book tours. While we waited to go on the air, I told her about the book I was promoting. I don't remember which one it was. I believe it was last winter's Ali Reynolds book, but it doesn't really matter. She told me in her e-mail that until we met, she had never read ANY of my books and now she has read FIFTEEN!!

Something else I learned on the book sales journey came from Holly Turner, my original sales rep for Avon Books--a lady who was taken far too early by ALS. She told me that one personal contact accounted for ten sales. I think that's true. It's one of the reasons I go on tour; one of the reasons I still do signings; one of the reasons I write the blog;

one of the reasons I answer every e-mail. Those personal contacts are important to me. They are also money in the bank.

I'm sitting here in our home in Tucson, listening to classical music piped in over the magic of the Internet, and being thankful that my mother, Evie Busk, was one terrific sales coach.

I Have A Little Shadow

Friday, November 16, 2012

I have a little shadow
That goes in and out with me
And what can be the use of it
Is more than I can see.

In this case, Robert Louis Stevenson could be discussing our little rescue dachshund, Bella.

For those of you who have followed the blog trail of Bella, the Book Tour Dog, for the past two years, the remainder of this paragraph will be a rerun. Here's a short recap of the Bella story. Two years ago in October, we found Bella abandoned on a street in Bellevue. She had no chip and no tag. After trying unsuccessfully to locate her owner, she became ours. At great expense because first she had to have 14 teeth pulled and then she went through training at the Academy for Canine Behavior. Neither of those come cheap, by the way.

Two months later, when it was time to go on a book tour, we attempted to leave her with our customary dog sitter. Bella not only said no, she said H E double hockey stick no! So she went on tour with us and has gone on every book tour with us since then, so far four and counting.

Usually we take her with us wherever we go, and that works for all of us because when she's not with us, let's just say she has her little ways of making her displeasure known. In our house hold those little deposits, and with a miniature dachshund they are miniature, are known as "deliberates" rather than "accidents."

So here we are in Austin, Texas, for the inaugural Circuit of the Americas Formula-1 race. At this moment, Bella is curled up in her bed, sleeping peacefully under my right elbow. But earlier, when I went to lunch with a lady who used to own a bookstore here and when Bill went downstairs to lunch, Bella raised enough of a commotion that the hotel called me. Bill had to abandon his lunch and come back upstairs.

The concierge is currently on the trail of a pet sitter. We'll see how that works. I'm sure it will sort itself out eventually.

But I can say, that ounce for ounce, this sweet little dog is worth her weight in gold. In every sense of the word.

Home for the Holidays

Friday, November 23, 2012

For those of you who follow the blog and are interested, I believe you'll be able to view photos of Bella's Austin Adventure on my author Facebook Page which is open to the public. You don't have to be logged in to see the Author Pages, but you do have to be logged in to comment. Yes, I guess I am definitely round the bend if I'm posting photos about Bella and her vacation and none about my grandchildren. I don't need to tell you what my adult children think about THAT!!

But the truth is, we had a great time at the Formula-1 race because we knew Bella was being properly looked after while we were enjoying ourselves at the track. Some of the photos are of her in the Omni Hotel lobby--a very pet-friendly hotel, by the way--waiting and watching for us to come back in through the hotel's sliding doors. I particularly like the ones taken of her while she was sight-seeing in Austin as well as during and after her discovery of the wonder of squirrels. I suspect her world will never again be the same.

A word about the Formula-1 race at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, COTA for those in the know. A day or so before the race, one of my fans in Texas wrote to suggest that I might want to rethink coming there. He said that on a radio program that morning he had heard a commentator saying that having "Austin host the Formula-1 was a lot like having Mayberry host the Super Bowl." He also suggested that the small four lane country road leading to and from the track would be a nightmare. (We avoided that problem by arriving early and leaving early. We departed the moment the race was over, without waiting around for the podium celebration.)

All this is to say that Bill and I were two of the 117,000 plus people who attended the three-day race weekend. We bought our tickets last March when the building contractors had yet to break ground on the racetrack. I can tell you that the results are spectacular! The steep hill leading up to the first turn is something, and everyone expected that first lap turn to become your basic crash car derby. Didn't happen. The whole 56 lap race ran without a single accident or caution. Two of the 24 cars broke down and had to be hauled off the track, but otherwise the race was flawless. The weather was perfect--chilly in the morning and hot in the afternoon. And dry. Our one venture to the Indianapolis 500 resulted in the race being rained out three days in a row. Formula-1 races happen rain or shine. As far as I'm concerned, shine is better.

Our tickets came with a parking permit and a shuttle ride to the track. Those of you who have met me know that I am a TALL person, but the step up into the shuttle was way too steep for even long-legged me. The first two days someone gave me a much needed boost. The third day, the racetrack folks had caught on to the problem, and overnight the shuttles had all been equipped with little portable steps. Yes, the racetrack is new, but the people in charge know what they're doing, and they're paying attention to the little things as well as the big things.

Would we go again? In a heartbeat.

So now we're back home in Seattle. Bellevue, actually, which is east of Seattle on the far side of Lake Washington. For people who aren't well acquainted with the Pacific Northwest, saying Seattle gives you a reasonable idea of our current location.

This is the time of year when we do our reverse snowbird routine and come home to spend the holidays with the kids and grandkids.

Home for the holidays. That phrase has a really nice ring to it. As I write these words, pumpkin for pies is cooking on the stove, but this year our coming home has had a complicating bump or two. For one thing, a couple of weeks ago, a pipe burst in our master bath. Since no one was home at the time, the leak wasn't discovered for several days. I didn't much care for the shag carpet in our bedroom, but that sucker soaked up a huge amount of water and probably kept the whole house from being flooded. Still the damage is there. Water went down into the crawl space, flooded all the duct work, wrecked all the insulation. Our damage isn't nearly comparable to what the poor folks in New Jersey are suffering. After all, we still have a roof over our heads. We also have the added advantages of electrical service, flowing natural gas, and guest rooms upstairs where we can sleep in comfort for the time being. We also have hot and cold running construction workers who come and go on somewhat irregular schedules. That means that some of us who are used to lounging around in our jammies are having to rise and shine and get DRESSED!!

So let's just say, this Thanksgiving isn't turning out to be the kind of perfect holiday I was envisioning a couple of weeks ago. I mentioned that to one of my friends in an e-mail yesterday, and she reminded me of some holidays past. And once I started thinking about those, I realized that often having an imperfect holiday is what makes it memorable.

My first Seattle Thanksgiving in 1981 was also the year of my first Washington State Holiday Windstorm. That's how we name our storms by the way. I missed the Columbus Day storm by a couple of decades, but I was on hand for what they called the Hanukkah Storm a couple of years ago and the Inaugural Day Storm a few years before that.

In 1981 the kids and I were living in a downtown high rise, and when the wind blew in off Puget Sound, I was astonished to see the street lights being blown sideways and horizontal rather than hanging perpendicular. Naturally the howling wind brought with it a huge number of downed trees, and power went out almost everywhere but in downtown Seattle. Those of us living in Harbor Heights joined forces and put on a communal Thanksgiving for our friends from the 'burbs who couldn't cook their turkeys at home.

In 1985, two days before Thanksgiving, there was an amazing snowstorm. We were able to get the kids to Sea-Tac to go spend the holiday in Las Vegas with their paternal grandmother. We got them on the plane and out of Sea-Tac, but it was days later before they could get back. Bill and I went shopping together in a deserted downtown that Black Friday when no one else could get there, and the sales clerks were only too happy to wrap things and have them shipped home. We had a snowball fight in the

middle of an otherwise empty Fourth Avenue. Yes, Thanksgiving on 1985. Who could forget it? The Thanksgiving snowstorm was followed in December by a cold snap complete with days of fog that made it impossible for many of our wedding guests to make it into town for our nuptials on December 21st.

And then there are the ghosts of imperfect Christmases past--starting with the windstorm of 2006. That's the one that turned the power off around here for ten days. We had a brand new Christmas tree with 2500 multi colored lights and we couldn't turn on a single one!!! That year we had Honey Nut Cheerios and champagne for our anniversary supper, and we came to the conclusion that candle light was vastly over-rated. The next year we got a generator.

Then there was the snowstorm of 2007. We have a very straight, steep driveway, and no one could get to our house for our traditional pre-Christmas party. The lefse (Think flour-tortilla made with potato flour) I had ordered from Montana rotted in the UPS warehouse in Redmond because the drivers couldn't make deliveries. The next year we bought a snowplow.

There was the Easter Sunday windstorm that turned off the power when we had 17 people coming for dinner. I cooked that one on an aging and almost totally rusted out gas grill. At the time the power went out, I sent a distress call to Bill who was down in the bottom of a boat doing some repairs. Wait a minute. Where did the boat come from? Let's see, Bill and a friend bought it as a salvage DIY project after a Christmas snowstorm dumped three feet of snow followed by several inches of freezing rain. That combination of rain-saturated snow was the death-knell for flat-roofed boat-houses all around here, sinking and damaging any number of boats. Bill and Captain Al bought one of those at an auction. By the following Easter they were doing repairs in the yard outside Captain Al's house when I called to report that the power had gone off at home. Bill's memorable reply to my desperate SOS was "I don't have any electricity in my pocket!" So much for sympathy. I cooked the dinner on the grill and heated the water to do the dishes afterwards in what can only be described as a state of high dudgeon!!! I think the grill worked that day for one reason only--utter terror at what would happen if it didn't. And, by the way, it never worked again after that.

And no holiday story would be complete without the aftermath. There's a good reason that the day after Thanksgiving is a boon for the Roto-Rooter people. Holidays are when the occasional cooks of the world try to put their best culinary foot forward. They pull out all the stops. They all make homemade mashed potatoes and then send the potato peelings down their respective garbage disposals, an action that is guaranteed to produce disastrous results. Don't ask me how I know this. And don't ask if I've made the same mistake twice, because I have.

So tomorrow we'll be having a potluck Thanksgiving. I didn't send the pumpkin peelings down the garbage disposal this morning, and tomorrow I won't be sending the potato peelings there, either!

Someone may be installing new cabinets in our bathroom on Friday, but Roto-Rooter won't be stopping by to visit. Believe me, that's something to be thankful for.

Happy Thanksgiving to all.

ps - here's the link to Bella's Austin photos on my Facebook Page... <http://ow.ly/fwEko>

Cleaning Out the Drawers

Friday, November 30, 2012

The good thing about drawers is that they hold stuff. The bad thing about drawers is that they hold stuff.

Sitting here sixty years after the fact, I can still remember the metal drawers--high tech for the time--that lined my mother's kitchen in Bisbee, Arizona. On the far right, just to the right of the sink, was the drawer that held dish cloths and dish towels. The high tech kitchen was not so high tech as to include any dishwasher other than the human kind. To the left of the sink was the utensil drawer--the drawer with spatulas, egg beaters, etc. That particular collection included a slotted wooden spoon that worked well for paddling recalcitrant kids when no fly-swatter was handy.

Next to the utensil drawer was the silverware drawer--although none of the silverware was actually made out of silver. And on the far side of that was the gadget drawer which held everything from a darning knob, can openers, bottle openers, a box of Band-Aids, and my mother's selection of screw drivers which was not to be confused or intermingled with my father's screw drivers which were kept in the garage. She also kept a small hammer in there that was hers and hers alone. That drawer also held her periodically depleted collection of Betty Crocker coupons. I have spent my entire adult life with my silver ware drawer stocked with Betty Crocker stainless steel silverware compliments of my mother's and later my own Betty Crocker coupons.

The interesting thing about my mother's drawers is that they always opened and closed properly. In the world of drawer-ness, that means they were never too full. My mother led a relatively frugal life. She didn't fill up her drawers with a lot of stuff that she didn't need or didn't use. That part of the DNA code obviously didn't make it out of the starting gate as far as I'm concerned.

The drawers in the kitchen are in fairly good shape. We generally know where stuff is although I can't for the life of me understand why our measuring cups and spoons are in a bottom drawer as opposed to a top layer utensil drawer--somewhere near the box of Band-Aids which is kept directly under the knife block--for good reason.

But the bathroom drawers are another story. One of the things that has made Bill's and my marriage work has been having first separate bathrooms and later, in this house, separate sides to our bathrooms. In this instance, both sides included any number of drawers.

The stuff in the drawers on my side are divided into three general categories--makeup, hair stuff, and everything else. But just because they are divided into three categories doesn't mean they go into the drawers that way.

Last summer I noted that as far as the top two bathroom drawers were concerned, I was close to the tipping point--that critical place where, if something else goes in, something else will have to come out. I stood there for a few minutes and considered all the possible ramifications of my actions. Then I simply opened the next drawer down and started filling it up with the same wild abandon that had filled the top two.

But someone was looking over my shoulder--my mother most likely, and she was keeping track. In other words, a few weeks ago, when our bathroom flooded, all the drawers were summarily wrested out of their damaged cabinet, lugged out of the bathroom, and stacked, willy-nilly, in the garage. I have spent this morning going through the contents of those drawers, emptying them out and filling any number of garbage bags. I've divested myself of any number of things--including a good deal of out-dated makeup, two electric curler sets, and a spray bottle of clothing wrinkle remover that I believe is a holdover from our first trip to Europe fifteen years ago.

I didn't throw away everything. After all, I need to leave some starter seeds for when we once again have new cabinets and new drawers in the bathroom. Then the process will start all over again.

It would be nice if the next time I clean out my drawers it could be on my own schedule. Preferably some time when I'm not supposed to be getting ready for Christmas.

Gloom, Despair and Agony on Me

Friday, December 7, 2012

Bill says that with me there's no such thing as a short story, so please, bear with me.

This morning I was going to tell a simple story about the current state of our disorganized affairs. I wanted to start it with a song which meant I had to tell another story first and then another one before that. So here goes

Not surprisingly, there are big differences between how people on either side of the country communicate. I write on the West Coast, the Left Coast as we call it around here, and my editors are all on the East Coast. Differences often surface when editors object to something in one of my manuscripts. The best example of that was when I mentioned a local club that featured country western music. My then-copyeditor sent me a notice saying it was country and western music. I wrote back saying, "If it were country and western, it would have to be s--- and kicking country and western music. But it isn't. It's s---kicking, country western music." (When I started reading Zane Grey books in fourth grade, I quickly managed to decode all the cuss words that were expressed as first letters only with appropriate dashes following. I'm sure you managed to translate the missing letters in that previous passage.) And, just to be clear, my version--country western music--is the one that showed up later in the printed book. In other words, Author 1/Editors 0!!

So I was going to start this post with a few words from an old country western song:

Gloom, despair, and agony on me.
Deep dark depression, excessive misery.
If it weren't for bad luck,
I'd have no luck at all.
Woe, despair, and agony on me.

And what's this all about? We're still dealing with the after effects of our flood. What happens to a house when 180,000!!! gallons of water wanders through places where it shouldn't be isn't pretty. The ServePro folks came and tried to dry out the crawlspace, but it turns out some of it wasn't dry-able. All the tile in the bathroom, including the shower and the shower pan had to come out. By then, water had wicked up through the wood on the outside wall of the house which promptly swelled up and wrecked the recently (two years ago) applied coat of stucco. Yesterday, that part of the outside wall had to be stripped off. A visitor who came by late yesterday afternoon said, "It keeps looking worse and worse. When is it going to start looking better?"

I keep asking myself that very question. When????!!

So last night, late in the evening, after all the worker bees left, Bill and I were going to share a late supper. I put a potato into the microwave and pressed cook. Ran like a charm--at least it seemed to. The light came on; the potato went round and round. Except, when the microwave turned off with the cheerful announcement that "Your food is ready," the potato was still stone cold. We knew right then that our twelve year-old microwave had finally bitten the dust. We had poured glasses of wine in anticipation of eating our evening dining experience. After putting the potato in the regular oven to bake, we went ahead and drank the wine. By the time the potato was finally done, it was after nine. We said "Fahgettaboudit" and went to bed, like bad little kids, without any supper. The wine was good, though.

So I was in bed, sleeping. Bill was awake, worrying and reading his iPad. He woke me up giggling, sometime around midnight. Because some of you may need a laugh today as much as we do right now, I'm going to include the link in the post he was reading. It turns out some of the things the auto-correct lady does on Instant Messages really are hilarious. For instance, this morning when I was trying to get Siri, the auto-correct lady, to direct me to Frederick's Appliances in Redmond, she wanted me to go to Rick's for some reason, instead.

Here's the link: <http://www.iclarified.com/26042/the-funniest-auto-correct-texts-of-2012-list>.

With or without help from Siri, we did manage to find our way to Frederick's and purchase a replacement microwave. By the way, did you know that microwaves from 2000 were built to slightly different size specifications than the new ones are? That means the hole in the cabinet--the laminated spot that supposed to hold the microwave--isn't quite the right size. It's a few silly millimeters too small. Great. Now I suppose we'll have to redo the kitchen, too.

Remember that country western song I mentioned above? I guess this counts as "same song; second verse."

Where's My Geometry Book When I Need It?

Friday, December 14, 2012

I've never been any good at Geometry. I barely passed Mrs. Winters's geometry class in Bisbee High School, and having my appendix removed in the middle of the school year didn't help my grade in that class, either.

Bill, on the other hand, thinks Geometry is cool. He knows stuff about Geometry that I never heard about from Mrs. Winters. For example, pi was invented so tax collectors could look at round grain silos and figure out how much tax was due. But Mrs. Winters never really touched on practical applications for all those theorems. We were simply expected to memorize them.

So this past week, our water bill for the previous month showed up in the mail--our bill for the 186,000 gallons that ran through our bedroom and bath when a pipe burst while we were out of town. (We're in the process of having leak detectors installed in ALL houses. You can file this under Barn Door/Missing Horse.)

Let's just say that 186,000 gallons is a whole bunch of water! Bill immediately pointed that the amount of water was six times the water in the our back yard pool, for example. And, because of his geometry skills, he also pointed out that 186,000 gallons is enough to cover one acre to the depth of six inches--deep enough that Bella would have to swim for it. The shag carpet in the bedroom collected the water in one spot until it got heavy enough to drain down through the heat vents and ducts. That's how the water ended up in the crawl space as opposed to filling up the entire ground floor of our house to a depth something greater than six inches. That would have caused a whole lot more damage.

So after a month and a half of de-construction, the house is finally coming back together. The day before yesterday the last of ServePro's heaters came out of the crawlspace. Water that had wicked up into the sheathing of the house had cracked the outside stucco. That has now been replaced. It takes two weeks for stucco to cure under the best of circumstances. A year where we're running 29% above Seattle's average rainfall for the year. Needless to say, being wet, wet, wet doesn't make for good stucco-drying conditions. That part of the house is now repaired but it has to be tented for an as-yet-undetermined amount of time. Today, workers are starting to lay new tile in the bathroom, and Bill and I need to go order the carpet.

Last weekend Bella and I went to see Santa. It turns out he really is a Jolly Old Elf. He helped pull me out of the home-repair doldrums. And the guys who are here early and late, are doing their best to make my Christmas wish come true--that the house will be back together, good as new.

The tree is up. The stockings are hung by the chimney with care. All's right with the world.

But I can tell you, math major or not, is that you don't have to understand geometry to know that 186,000 gallons is a lot of water.

It's also a pain in the you-know-what!!!

Liljulaften

Friday, December 21, 2012

My mother was a genius.

When I was eighteen, I came dragging home with a boyfriend that my mother regarded as a bit of a pill. That was an understatement, and she was right, of course, although it took me eighteen years to admit it and move on. When that happened, by the way, she had the good grace not to say that she told me so.

Two years into the process, when it came time for Christmas, I discovered that my then boyfriend/future husband/and eventually future ex-husband had to be home with his mother for Christmas every year, no exceptions. And, if I was going to be a part of his life, that meant I needed to be with HIS mother, every Christmas, no exceptions. Which meant that, for the foreseeable future, I wouldn't ever be celebrating Christmas with MY mother.

Evie wasn't someone who took that kind of thing lying down. She went searching in her bag of tricks and pulled out an "old Scandinavian custom" which she called Liljulaften. (The spelling I use here is entirely arbitrary and most likely incorrect, but this is my story, and I'm sticking to it.) However you spell the word, what it means is Little Christmas Eve, and it happens the Sunday before Christmas.

It doesn't matter if the Liljulaften tradition was real to begin with or if my mother simply invented it on the spot, but it's certainly real now, because we've been celebrating it for nearly fifty years now.

Here's how it works. The Sunday before Christmas everyone comes here. People can be anywhere they want to be on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, but they need to show up at the party here that Sunday. We have a feast--usually ham and whatever goodies come to mind. Lefse is an integral part of the menu. We used to get it from a bakery in Stanwood. After they closed, I got it from Granrud's Lefse factory in Montana. This year, we're having the best lefse EVER made and delivered fresh this morning by a fan from Lake Stevens!!! Thank you, Loren!!!

After dinner, everyone opens one present. Exceptions are made for people who will be elsewhere for Christmas Day itself. They get to open more than one. And then people go on to wherever they need to be and from my point of view, I'm home free.

Over the years, with kids, grandkids, in-laws, ex-in-laws, and outlaws, Liljulaften has become a way to cut down the pressure. Liljulaften feels like Christmas without actually BEING Christmas. If you happen to have relatives, like my original mother-in-law who has to run the show for Christmas Day, then Liljulaften gives everybody some wiggle room and reduces the competition between feuding "but-it's-my-turn" grandparents. (By the way, there's no rule that says Liljulaften HAS to be on Sunday. I'm sure any day in December would be just fine.

So if you want to exercise your inner-Scandinavian persona for one day a year, choose a day that works for you and go for it. You aren't even required to serve lefse. (By the way, if you're trying to figure out what lefse is, think flour tortilla made with mashed potatoes as the basis for the dough.)

And if you decide to do this, here's some more good news. If you run out of something you need for your Liljulaften dinner, the stores will be OPEN!! It isn't an official holiday for anyone else.

Have fun.

Merry Christmas, and thank you Evie. Every year during Liljulaften, we raise a toast in my mother's honor. After all, she really is the author of the feast.

A Busy, Busy Day

Friday, December 28, 2012

Thursday is the day I usually set the morning aside to write the blog update. Let me tell you about what happened on this particular Thursday.

By the time I came downstairs this morning, it was still dark out, but the one contractor was already pattering around in the bedroom remodel area on the ground floor before I got the coffee machine and lights turned on. He was followed shortly thereafter by the hardwood floor guys who spent the entire day sawing and hammering as they replaced the damaged flooring in the entryway. They were hard at work when my daughter and grandson showed up right around eight AM. It's Christmas vacation, and without daycare available, Colt is with us.

When it was time to do breakfast, I hit the first roadblock and the first major Grandma Fail of the day. I got out the OJ. I got out the Cheerios. I reached for the milk. No milk. The trip to the grocery store that was supposed to happen yesterday didn't happen. We ended up having New Year's Cheerios--that would be Cheerios with Egg Nog for breakfast. Colt said they were "Epically good." I was glad he was pleased. I was even MORE pleased that he used an adverb (Epically) to modify an adjective (good.) I told him his grammar was excellent. I don't think he understood a word I was saying but he knew he was definitely on Grandma's good side.

By the time breakfast was cleared away, the construction parade started up in earnest. The pop-up shed they've been using to shelter the tile saw had to come down so an unending line of guys could march in through that door and replace the water damaged insulation down in the crawlspace. Bella did NOT like the army of guys carrying huge rolls of insulation through the back yard. And she REALLY didn't like them being down in the crawlspace. She maintained a running, barking commentary, letting us know exactly where the insulation installers under the floor were at any given moment.

Then the architect, the contractor, and Bill had a long discussion about some bathroom tile installation issues--the necessity of a bullnose trim strip in one spot and a redo of some places where the grout is too wide and so forth. I was not part of those discussions because I was out in the kitchen with the dishwasher repairman who showed up at approximately the same time as the architect and the contractor. The

arrival of the dishwasher guy gave Bella someone altogether new to bark at, someone who wasn't an insulation installer. Did I mention that she has a very sharp bark that causes my hearing aids to buzz like crazy?

And Colt was here. He is a very good boy, but he periodically needs some directions. I strongly suspect that there are a few new apps on my iPad that weren't free, including a new, improved version of Angry Birds Star Wars. I still haven't figured out what Star Wars and birds have in common, but if you happen to be seven, it works.

We watched Harry Potter 4, Prisoner of Azkaban, and read some of Harry Potter 5, Order of the Phoenix. We had lunch. We had cough medicine. We had afternoon snacks. We found all jackets, sweaters and toys and gathered them in his to-go bag before mommy arrived at 6 PM to retrieve him.

I remember a funny poster I saw once. It was a poster of Golda Meir. She was, if you recall, not exactly a beauty queen, and the caption underneath her very dour photo said, "But can she type?"

So maybe you're wondering a variation on that same thing about me today: Did she actually do any writing? The answer to that question is: Yes, I did. I finished a Beaumont novella, currently unnamed, that will be available as an e-book before Second Watch, Beaumont # 21, goes on sale next summer.

So yes, I did write some. We had leftovers for dinner. The grocery store trip still didn't happen. Bill assures me that we have sufficient supplies on hand to make waffles for Colt's breakfast in the morning. We had Christmas Day dinner leftovers for supper.

Today this blog is truly a window on my busy, busy world. Now that it's finished, I see on the computer screen that it's eight-fifteen. I believe it's time to go upstairs to go to bed. I have no idea how early the workers will be here in the morning or which ones will show up, but I'm guessing there will be a full crew here tomorrow, and they'll be here at o-dark-thirty.

No, wait. Did I say it's only 8:15? Really? Maybe that's a little too early to go to bed. Scotch anyone?