

My Blog

Have yourself a Merry Christmas

Friday, December 22, 2006

It's been a week and a day since the Big Blow through Western Washington. Our power came back on on Monday, and I wrote a "whew we made it blog." There's only one problem with that. We STILL don't have our Comcast telephone, television or Internet up and running. My retired but very talented electronics engineer husband has managed a "work around" solution to our Internet issues, one that doesn't include Comcast, so the blog will be updated today.

Our son's power came on on Sunday, ours on Monday, and our daughter's on Tuesday. The problem is, her power went back off on Wednesday night and, since she'd had power for a day, she's back to the bottom of the heap and probably won't have power until Sunday or Monday. So she and our grandson and her two dogs are back at our house. Again.

So we're not exactly having an uneventful, serene Merry Christmas around here. A Complicated Christmas? Yes. A Challenging Christmas? Absolutely. But it is Christmas still. So Merry Christmas to all.

Last night was our wedding anniversary. We came downtown and had dinner at El Gaucho. For wine, we chose a bottle of Stag's Leap Ne Cede Malis, and it was exceptionally nice. This morning we looked it up and found that the name comes from a Latin quote: Ne cede malis, seal contra audentior ito. Translated that means: Do not yield to misfortunes; on the contrary, go more boldly to meet them.

Somehow, considering what we've been through the last few days, this is entirely appropriate.

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Li'l Jul Aften Traditions

Monday, December 18, 2006

In the early sixties, when I was dating my first husband, I learned that he spent Christmas only one way--at home with his mother. Since I was included in that requirement, my mother soon figured out that meant that spending Christmas with my family was at an end.

Being a wise woman, she recalled or possibly invented an "old Swedish custom," Li'l Jul Aften (Little Christmas Eve) which happens the Sunday before Christmas. And, over time, that became the time to celebrate Christmas with my family. That meant my husband and I were then free to go wherever for Christmas day itself.

Once I was divorced and the kids had to go with their father to his mother's for Christmas, Li'l Jul Aften transformed into Christmas with my kids. And once there were other kids with their in-laws and out-laws, the tradition continued, allowing people to be wherever they needed to be on Christmas.

So today was Li'l Jul Aften. Except things didn't work out quite the way we anticipated, because this is the year the Grinch Stole L'il jul aften. In preparation for celebrating the holidays in our new home, we purchased a brand new tree with 2500 multi-color lights. We brought in food. We were prepared to cook a feast for twenty plus people. But on Thursday night, a wind storm blew through town.

As of tonight, Sunday, we've had no power since Thursday night at ten PM. Some heat due to having gas log fireplaces, but no hot food. No hot showers. No Internet. NO HOT COFFEE!!!! Our daughter-in-law just called to say their power is now on in West Seattle, but we're still in the dark. They're saying it could be seven to ten days from NOW.

This is not good. Why did we leave Arizona to come home for the holidays?

The truth is, no trees fell on any of our houses. We can go places and buy food. And we have money to do so. In that regard, we're way better off than people who live in third world countries. But still, it's a shock to reach for a light switch and not be able to turn on the lights.

Today Li'l Jul Aften was one for the record books. Half the guests didn't come--they couldn't get here. Our daughter bought the food from stores in Silverdale, ninety miles away--where the winds were bad but not as bad as here. She brought them to our condo in downtown Seattle where our West Seattle son met up with them, assembled and cooked, and then brought them to the house here in Bellevue.

It was a sunny Sunday here today--bright and cold. Everyone left for home before it got dark. I'm now writing this post by candlelight. No idea when I'll be able to log on to post it. The news is just now reporting that 300,000 people are still without power. That's us folks. Dancing in the dark may be fun. Writing in the dark isn't.

PS Monday 10:00 AM The power is on. Life is good.

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Christmas Cards and Good Will

Thursday, December 14, 2006

I love Christmas. I love Christmas cards. I set aside time to read them. I want to know what's been going on in my friends lives the previous year, and Christmas cards are a treasured way to do it.

But this year the blush is off the rose. One of the first cards that came in 2006 arrived laced with a political screed. I don't mind that people have become galvanized enough to work in the political process. I do that, too, and it's what makes this country great. We get to vote. We get to have a say. We get to be involved.

However, one thing that remains clear to me is that regardless of my own political beliefs or opinions, I share them with approximately half the people in this country--only half. That means that approximately half the people in this country disagree with me--respectfully, one would hope.

The person who sent me that card evidently lost sight of that 50/50 division. She blithely assumed that no one who disagreed with her would have nerve enough to be on her Christmas card list in the first place. She ended up stating in her card that everyone on the opposite side of the political spectrum was automatically a corrupt, evil liar. Yours truly included.

The holidays are a time for Peace on Earth to Men and Woman of Goodwill. Calling half the people in this country evil is EVIL. This is a time to remember the troops who are serving in harm's way, the ones who have sacrificed life and limb to protect us and to keep us free.

So I guess the Christmas card list will go down by one next year. And the person who sent me the card will never have any idea why she doesn't hear from me any more. She has no idea that her card hurt my feelings, but it did.

Her loss.

And now that I have that off my chest, I'm going to sit down and read the REST of the Christmas cards. I'll rejoice in the good news and mourn the bad. And I'll be glad that sending Christmas cards gives me a way of keeping treasured people in my life.

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Loving and Losing

Sunday, December 10, 2006



Eight and a half years ago, Bill and I drove out to Puyallup, Washington, to choose a puppy. From a sea of thirteen golden retrievers, I plucked one ball of fluff and said this will be Aggie--after Agatha Christie. Then, as we walked toward the car, a second puppy chose Bill, first by untying his shoe lace and then by falling asleep on his shoe. So he chose her and she became Daphne, after Daphne Du Maurier. And so we had two puppies instead of one. They looked so much alike, that the man who owned them tied a pink ribbon on Daph and a green one on Ag. They've had

pink and green collars ever since.

We brought them home and they were inseparable. They got into trouble together and they played and swam together. Aggie hated lightning and thunder. She could open (but never close) sliding doors.

Last month as we drove back to Seattle from Tucson, Aggie was in her preferred position, standing behind Bill, peering out over his shoulder, watching traffic. No matter how you slice it, the drive from Tucson to Seattle entails twenty-six hours of driving, and that's a lot of standing. This time Aggie did lie down a few times, and some of the time she sat on Daph, but mostly she stood.

We stopped off for two days in LA where I had an appearance to do and also an appointment for cover photos. We stayed at the W-Hotel where dogs were welcome--and treated like honored guests, complete with beds, dishes, and the whole shebang. At one point, I mistakenly left the bag with the dog treats lying open, and Aggie helped herself. In eight years it's one of the few times Aggie was ever bawled out for being naughty.

Then there was the cover photo shoot. The dogs were invited and included. Thanks to Touchstone and Simon and Schuster, two of those photos is here. Even though both dogs are full sisters and exactly the same ages, Aggie is the worry-wort--hence the grizzled white face.

The shoot took several hours. For a while, Aggie tolerated the situation, but about an hour into the program, right after the second photo, Aggie was done. She took herself

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off the bench and marched inside the house where she crawled into Bill's lap and told him, "You won't believe what they're doing out there." She had had enough of being a star, and no amount of coaxing would bring her back outside.

Once at home in Bellevue she settled in once more. Then, last week, she seemed to be off her food. By the end of the week she was coughing. By Monday she was hospitalized with pneumonia. And now she's gone, a victim of lympho sarcoma. We were with her when she went.

Daph is lost and so are we. Eight and a half years isn't nearly long enough. (photos courtesy of Mary Ann Halpin Studios)

Worried and Waiting

Tuesday, December 5, 2006



It's just over a month before Web of Evil goes on sale. I should be focused on that. But right now I have something else to think about.

Aggie, one of our two goldens (on the right), started coughing over the weekend. She's currently at the animal hospital being treated with IV fluids and antibiotics. She may have a bacterial infection, a fungal infection, or cancer.

So pardon me if I can't think about a book tour about now. I can't.

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Back in the Rainy Northwest

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

Home sweet home. After the better part of a week on the road, we're back home in rainy Seattle. We spent three days in LA doing a cover photo shoot and some marketing meetings. Aggie, one of our two red dog goldens, has limited patience when



it comes to photographers. She and her sister, Daphne, were part of the first cover experience. Daphne hung in for the duration. Aggie, on the other hand, stayed for the better part of an hour. Then she got off the park bench, turned up her nose, and walked inside. And nothing would convince her to come back out.

Then we drove north. I've never come through northern California at this time of year. The fall colors were beautiful. And then, once we crossed into Oregon, we also crossed into the rain.

This isn't news to the people who've been here for the duration, but for someone who's been hanging out in sunny Tucson, it's been a rude awakening.

Now, with only four days on the ground, we need to be ready for Thanksgiving. So I'd better stop writing and start cooking. The grandkids and granddogs are coming, and we need to be ready.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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New Car Day!

Thursday, November 9, 2006

In 1980 when I decided to get a divorce, I went out and bought myself a car, a second-hand 1978 Cutlass Supreme Brougham that my first husband said I never should have



bought and that I'd never be able to pay for. (This is the same husband who told me in 1967 that there was only going to be one writer in our family and he was it.) It was two-toned--maroon with a white vinyl top.

The Cutlass remained in our family for more than a decade and worked its way through some very hard times, including a pre wedding night fender bender with one daughter and time spent with each of three "young male drivers" as they

say in the insurance biz. While being driven by the last of the three, the Cutlass was stolen briefly but the thieves abandoned on the side of the road a few blocks away. I told you it went through some VERY HARD TIMES.

Then there was our Ford Fiasco. That was a Windstar van, a forced purchase we made on a rainy Sunday afternoon in Valencia, California. Our other Windstar, fully loaded for a six month stay in Arizona, complete with luggage and two golden retrievers, had given up the ghost on the far side of I-5's infamous Grapevine Pass. After a hair-raising seventy-mile ride in a tow truck, we and the smoking remains were dropped off at the local Ford Dealership. The van we bought that day was a shot-gun wedding affair, and neither Bill nor I ever even remotely liked that car. It got us to Tucson that year, but it also was traded in on a Chrysler mini-van with Stow-and-Go seating at the FIRST opportunity.

Other than that, however, our vehicles are pretty well permanent. The stable currently includes a 1994 Suburban, a 1996 Lincoln Mark VIII, a 2000 Porsche Boxster, and a 2005 Chrysler Caravan. (Serviceable? Yes. Utilitarian? Absolutely. But sexy it's not!)

So day before yesterday, J.A. Jance went car shopping. You'll see my new wheels pictured above. (Or wherever my webmaster happens to post it.) And I can tell you that Barolo Red is definitely my new favorite color.

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Database Blues Done Got Me!

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

Yesterday was the mid-term election. Today some people are crowing while others are eating crow. What we all need to remember is that our right to vote has been bought and paid for with the blood, sweat, and tears of the brave men and women who have served in our military for as long as our country has been a country. If you see someone in uniform, take the time to tell them thank you.

Driving back and forth to the Tony Hillerman Writers Conference in Albuquerque was a treat. The problem with attending conferences like that is that they're full of talented, motivated people, all of whom want my job. Makes me want to stay on my game.

And speaking of my game. It's time to talk about the business of writing. Many of the people who visit this site are long-term fans who have been listed in my e-mail notification list for a long time. Let me assure you, if you're in the list, it's my list and no one else's. I do NOT farm it out to someone else to send out the book announcement notices. My publisher offered to "do that" for me, but I didn't just fall off a turnip truck yesterday. It occurred to me that my publisher has lots of other mystery writers. The people in MY list are MY fans. Period. I didn't share and I won't.

When I'm going to be in various areas of the country--for the Southern Book Festival in Nashville, for example, or for the library event I did last week in Albuquerque, I try to send out notices to people who live nearby. The problem is, LOTS of the people on my list have provided only their name and e-mail address. It would be REALLY helpful to have your city and state as well. Not your snail-mail address or your phone number. I don't need those. And I'm not going to send you spam faxes, either, so please don't send your fax number.

What brought all this up is the fact that we're trying to move from one database format to another, and it isn't easy. Some things have to be moved manually, one at a time. That means I'm going through the whole list. As I do so, I'm removing any names for whom I don't have a working e-mail address. So if you didn't receive an announcement this summer when *Dead Wrong* went on sale, it could be your address and perhaps even you have somehow fallen off the list. Please resend.

And if you don't want to be on the list, please let me know. I send out the announcements to people I believe are interested in knowing about upcoming books, but whenever someone asks to be removed, I do so immediately. With emphasis on the "I" part!!!

So yes, this isn't the Chatty Kathy kinds of things I've posted on other occasions, but when you're knee-deep in database difficulties, you deal with it.

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Oops! Here is a PS:

It's clear that some of the e-mail addresses I have are work related. If it would be more appropriate to send the announcements to another address, please provide it. And if your e-mail provider lets you enter a list of people who may send e-mails to your account, you should list both this address, jajance@aol.com and also jajance@jajance.com. Individual e-mails come from one. The announcements usually come from the web site address.

Oh, yes. If you retire or move, please let me know.

Ghosts and Goblins Stayed Home...

Wednesday, November 1, 2006

What happened to Halloween? Yesterday I read somewhere that interest in Halloween was way down in France, a result, the article said, of growing anti-American sentiment.

"So what? I thought. "This isn't France; it's Tucson." I remembered last year when we had tons of trick-or-treaters--and ran out of candy long before the evening was over. Even with a Walgreens within blocks, it's tough to find extra Halloween candy when the costumed hordes are beating a path to your door.

With that in mind we were PREPARED. We bought not one but two immense bags of mini candy bars from Costco. As the sun went down, we opened one of them, placed a bowl of candy next to the front door, turned on the porch light, and waited. And waited. And nothing happened. One lonely kid dressed as a ghost arrived about eight-fifteen but that was it! Period!

At first I thought it was just a Tucson phenomenon, but then our daughter called. She, too, was ready for action. Here total was three. THREE!

I know it was cold in Seattle overnight, but the weather here in Tucson was balmy. No excuses there. So as I was thinking about this, I remembered another "no show" Halloween. That one was "weather related."

It was sometime during the late Fifties. My sister and her good friend, Ginger, had planned an elaborate Halloween party in a part of Bisbee known as Huachuca Terraces. But it rained that week, unseasonable torrential downpours that left roads washed out and gullies running.

About seven or so, my sister called my parents' house in tears. It was time for the party to start and apparently no one was coming. Would we at least come out and help eat

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Back to Bisbee..

Sunday, October 29, 2006

Yesterday was the grand opening of a new Smithsonian related display at the Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum, and I was asked to be a part of the festivities. As a result, I've had a clear lesson on that old adage: Watch out what you wish for--you may just get it.

I knew going in that the day was going to be daunting. It started with a ten AM talk to a group of forty plus people on the terrace (chilly terrace) of a local B & B. Fortunately, they had a microphone and, since the sun was shining directly in my eyes, one of my fans lent me a cowboy hat for the duration. I spoke for an hour and a half, then we broke for lunch. Unfortunately, the questions continued unabated.

These people were fans, by the way, who knew what happened in which books. (This is especially disturbing when I'm having trouble keeping them all straight.)

Then, about 1 PM the bus showed up, a Greyhound-sized behemoth donated by Cochise College. Knowing there were going to be forty-plus people on the bus--all of whom had paid good money to be there for a "tour of J.A.Jance's Bisbee--I had asked for a bus with a microphone. What I didn't ask for was a bus with a WORKING microphone. Big difference!

Three hours later, my voice was wrecked and I was a rag. Then after a couple of hours, we went to the dinner/reception at the Copper Queen Mine Tour Building where I once again spoke. Much to my relief, this time there was a working sound system.

Being there gave me an opportunity to express my gratitude to my father and all the other fathers from Bisbee who labored in the mines hoping to give their children an opportunity at a better life.

The men who worked in the mines in Bisbee and the teachers who taught in the local schools gave me a rich background along with a good education, one that has made my career as a writer possible. Going there yesterday and doing my bit for the community was a way of paying back.

Yes, working without a microphone may have been challenging, but compared to working for eight hours as a mucker or a hard-rock miner in the stopes of the Cole Shaft, it was nothing.

I'm glad I could do it. I'm glad I went. And I think I'll go fix a cup of hot tea. My throat will be better for it.

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Then a Door Closes.....

Friday, October 27, 2006

Years ago after a book signing in Gig Harbor, WA, the people at the store gave me a gift--a copy of Agatha Christie's autobiography. As I read it I noticed that we had several things in common including the fact that our choices for "first husband" material weren't exactly stellar and that we both did much better in that regard "the second time around."

We also shared a common writing problem, what I refer to as a kind of literary postpartum depression that tends to fall over me--and over Agatha as well--shortly after finishing a manuscript and while wandering in the wilderness waiting to start another one.

Agatha described coming into the room where her second husband was reading a newspaper, throwing herself down on a couch, and declaring, "I shall never write another book. I have quite forgotten how to do it."

Her husband, who rather enjoyed living in the manner to which he had become accustomed, was quite concerned. A while later, however, days or weeks, she didn't specify, a door closed somewhere in the house. Agatha heard it and suddenly realized what needed to happen in the next book.

This scene repeated itself so often that the husband eventually reached a point where he barely looked up from reading his paper when Agatha made her despairing pronouncements.

So yesterday I had what I've come to think of as an Agatha moment. I've been struggling with the beginning of the next book, now called Hand of Evil, which is due to be the third Ali Reynolds book--daughter of Web (of Evil) due out next January and granddaughter of Edge (of Evil) which came out last January.

Starting a book is always difficult, especially when the main character goes AWOL on the story. Yesterday, though, Ali straightened up and got herself into the book. The door closed and I know--at least I think I know--where I'm going.

Bill can now read his newspaper in peace and stop worrying about paying the bills

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Time is a river

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

It's a sunny fall day in Tucson, but I seem to be feeling my age. A few minutes ago a van from the University of Arizona arrived to take my "papers" (Bill has always called them the Judy Boxes.) to Special Collections at the University of Arizona. The real irony, of course, is that the U of A is eager to have my papers for their archives even though I wasn't allowed in the Creative Writing program there in 1964.

What was in the Judy Boxes? What my publishers call "Dead Matter" which consists of copy-edited manuscripts. Other items consisted of years' worth of fan mail, clippings, promotional material, book tour schedules, and all the other things that go into the making of a writer.

My my first computer--the dual floppy Eagle with 128 K of memory also went along. I used the very expensive (\$50000 computer and a long dead printer) to launch my writing career by working in a now obsolete processing program called Spellbinder. (I had to have that one.) I sent the computer and its operating manuals along because some of my "beginning writer" stuff that was never published is only available on those original five and a half inch disks.

No, my original computer was not of the steam-driven variety, but close. Once Spellbinder was loaded in, there was only 15 K left in the workspace. That meant the chapters in the first books had to be short and punchy or the cursor would freeze up. My Eagle also was and still is quirky. It runs, but for some strange reason, it has to be booted up twice or the cursor will freeze--just like it did when I first purchased it back in 1983.

So as I stood watching the boxes get loaded, I felt like I was watching a big chunk of my life going away. And it was true. I started writing on that computer in March of 1983. I started doing the hand-written material in some of those boxes a year earlier in March of 1982.

At the last minute, I opened one box and retrieved the two bound copies of my high school newspaper The Copper Chronicle . Our senior year my once and still best friend, Pat McAdams Hall and I were co-editors. I told Bill I wanted to have those available for my fiftieth high school reunion which is coming up in a few years. He said, "You're not that old."

But I am. It's 2006. My 50th Bisbee High School reunion is only six years away. Yes, as I said to begin with, I'm feeling my age this morning.

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Sometimes Bytes Bite

Tuesday, October 10, 2006

We have lived through another computer upgrade. Which is to say, it has happened without murder and mayhem. My husband is still alive and so am I.

When it comes to electronics, I'm a blonde. Well, a former one anyway. I come complete with a toggle-switch mentality. In other words, I want to be able to turn things on and off and actually have them work. Since most computers come with Windows, you can see why that might not always be such a good idea.

My husband is an electronics engineer. If you're using a cell phone, he was one of the team at Motorola back in the Sixties who built that first hand-held phone. Remember, the one that looked like a gray brick? It worked, too, and the fact that it did so without benefit of integrated circuits is due in no small measure to the smarts of one Bill Schilb. When it comes to electronics, he knows how things work, why they work, and generally speaking, how to fix them when they don't--work that is.

Do you see a conflict here? When we have computer difficulties in our lives, things generally go down hill in the following manner. Something stops working on my computer for, as far as I can see, no apparent reason. In an attempt to trouble shoot, Bill is likely say either, "It's dead simple." which it is not, or to ask, "What were you doing when that happened?" In our 21 years of marriage where we've managed to raise a batch of teenagers, remodel houses, and do wallpaper together without ever coming to blows, "dead simple" or "what were you doing" are both likely to result in fighting words.

We've gone through a series of unfortunate computer related events . Once I once put my thumb through the screen of the laptop (BAD) on the morning I was leaving on tour. (Hat's off to Jim Bray of Northwest Computer Support!) Once I knocked the laptop off a counter when I was actually printing a manuscript to send to New York. (Equally BAD.) And, as smart as Bill is, he's not entirely blameless. Once he ended up mistakenly copying blank files to our foldershare account instead of the files with actual information in them. And once, when a computer died, we lost six months of database updates. (Now we back that file up every single day!)

So each time we upgrade computers which should be a good thing, we end up uncovering all the differences in how we think about and work with computers. I work with lots of windows open. This drives Bill nuts. He always expects me to know more about what I'm doing than I do. (See Former Blonde comment above.) But eventually, we get around all the difficulties and, miraculously, we're still friends.

So now I'm working on a new Toshiba Satellite. It's a long way from my first computer back in 1983. That one was a dual floppy with 128 K of memory. I've worked my way

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through dual floppy laptop Toshiba's to this new one. (I had worn out the keyboard on the previous one. That's how I knew it was time to move on.)

So this blog is just a way of saying thank you to Bill for getting me up and running. And why should my website readers care about it? You want me to write another book, don't you?

Enough said.

The Leaves are turning

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

Fall finally hit in Seattle. After weeks and weeks of blue skies and sun, the clouds have returned. But do we really want to escape the drizzle by going to Tucson where it was 95 degrees yesterday? All that remains to be seen.

But all those years of going to school--of getting back to work after summer vacation--seem to be holding sway in my psyche after all. I've gone back to work, too. I've started writing the next book. It's the next Ali Reynolds book. It doesn't have a name at the moment, but it does have a single chapter and 3,728 words--but who's counting? The truth is, I always count. I know the book is supposed to have 100,000 words. That means I only have 96,000 to go. By the inch it's a cinch. But it would help if I had some idea about what should happen next.

Yesterday I sent out notices to nearby people in my database letting them know about my appearance at the Southern Book Festival in Memphis next Friday at noon. Yes, I know it's Friday the Thirteenth. Fortunately I'm not superstitious.

We've finished on major construction job on our new house in the Seattle area and have several more projects underway. For one thing, the previous owners had an apparent love affair with Ralph Lauren Brown. Brown! Brown! Brown! So let the painting begin! Can we have everything done in time to have a construction free holiday season in Seattle? That remains to be seen, but with a whole flock of grandkids due to be there to celebrate, we're hoping to be in reasonably good shape.

Now, off to get our flu shots.

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Home Again...Again!!!

Monday, September 25, 2006

Home from the tour. Home from the cruise. Home from South Dakota. Home in Seattle where the sun is out and the skies are blue. (The bluest skies you've ever seen are in Seattle. If you know that line we're both dating ourselves.) Home for a while and glad to be here.

There was a time in my life when I used to take people to the airport and wonder if I'd ever be able to go anywhere. Well, you really do have to watch what you wish for. Because, although I'm home today, I've spent an hour or so on the phone with my publicist at Simon and Schuster planning the January tour for the new Ali Reynolds book, *Web of Evil*. (We should be posting the cover for that sometime relatively soon.) Once the tour starts coming into focus, we'll be posting that information as well.

I think over time people tend to develop a ho-hum attitude toward book signings. I want you to know that I enjoy being out on the road and meeting my readers. That's not to say that I don't get tired by the end of a month long tour, but I still enjoy it. Readers make authors--not the other way around. If it weren't for those loyal readers--including the ones who "only read paperbacks" or "only get my books from the library" are still readers and valued fans, and they're more than welcome to come to signings.

So let's think of the *Web of Evil* tour as a fan appreciation tour. Yes, fans may be there to have their books signed, but meeting the folks will give me a chance to say thank you in person.

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Home again...for a week!

Monday, September 25, 2006

It's the first day of fall and I've just had a very telling lesson in--the jet stream. I've never thought that much about the jet stream before--it's just never seemed that important. Then, this summer in Seattle, something astonishing happened. We had summer. From June on. Even on the Fourth of July when we didn't have to watch the fireworks while freezing to death, swathed in blankets. We had pool parties at our house where it was nothing short of pleasant in the water and downright hot on the deck. And why did this happen? Because the jet stream went north.

How do I know that? Because two weeks ago, when I was in Anchorage to finish up the book tour, people were complaining that they'd had NO summer in Alaska this year because. . .you guessed it, the jet stream.

I heard this "no summer" news with a good deal of concern because I knew that the next week we were due to go on an Alaskan cruise up the Inside Passage on board the Carnival Spirit. We left home that first day in a steady drizzle--the first measurable rain in months--and drove to Vancouver, BC where we boarded the ship. It rained the whole time we were parking the car, but once on board, the rain stopped and the clouds began to break up. By the next morning the skies were clear because--the jet stream went south. And stayed there the entire time we were gone. For a whole week!!

The seas were calm and the weather glorious. It was picture perfect in Glacier Bay where the ship's naturalist told us it was the first time they had seen the surrounding mountaintops since early June. We watched calving glaciers dropping tons of ice into glassy water. It was hot, hot, hot in Skagway one day and only a bit of a sprinkle in Ketchikan the next day.

In other words, it was a wonderful trip weatherwise, but it was a wonderful trip for other reasons as well. I was there as the guest of honor and fundraiser for the Timberland Regional Library. The trip had been on the calendar for over a year, long before this summer's family crisis.

A few days before we were to leave, our daughter contacted Carnival to see if there were any cancellations so she and our grandson, Colt, could go along on the cruise. She told us she planned to pack for the cruise and drive to Vancouver. If a cabin opened, she'd go along. Otherwise, she and Colt would drive back home.

And that night, someone did cancel. Bill and I worried about where she'd park her vehicle. We'd made reservations in advance, but she was able to park in the same lot without them. Then we worried about her luggage. Ours had been checked through to our cabin, but since she didn't have a ticket or a cabin assignment, hers had to come along with us. Fortunately my brother and sister-in-law from Alabama were on the

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cruise and available to help drag luggage. When Jeanne T. opened the back of her Suburban and hauled out a baby-stroller camouflaged as a tiny-red and blue sports car, I admit to being astonished and dubious both, but I was wrong. Colt spent a week grinning from ear to ear and being rolled around the cruise ship in his sporty little car. Everywhere he went, he was treated like visiting royalty.

Boarding wasn't trouble free in view of the fact that Jeanne T. had actually picked up her husband's birth certificate instead of her baby's, but she managed to talk Colt's way through customs and off we went.

When my mother used to attend book signings, it was sometimes tough to be out in public appearing as both the author and the daughter at the same time. And I worried that being both author and grandmother would also be fraught with peril. I shouldn't have been concerned. The people connected with the Timberland Library couldn't have been more understanding of the situation or more welcoming even when Colt came commando crawling and squealing across the stage during my opening remarks. And the staff on the cruise gave Colt so much individual focus that he'll probably go into a severe case of attention deficit disorder now that he's home with just his mommy and the two dogs for company.

This was an Alaskan cruise after all, so babies weren't plentiful, but there were babysitting services available--also a collection of aunts, uncles, and grandparents, so Jeanne T. got to have fun. She treated herself to a number of massages and spent several late nights dancing at the disco with a 78 year old buddy, a widower, from the library group. By the end of the cruise, I even heard her laugh.

Today I'm on my way to South Dakota for the South Dakota Book Festival--with the sun out because the jet stream is once again where it belongs--in the waters off Alaska.

My Blog

Rain, Raccoons and Flamingos

Sunday, September 10, 2006

For all of those who have walked the Relay for Life Walk with the Cancer Fighting Flamingos, here's news from the front. I'm just back from Anchorage. With the donations that were dropped off there and with ones that have come in by mail since the end of the tour, the CFFs have now met their very ambitious goal of raising \$75,000 in Five years (Well, five years and one week!) for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. I thank you. Jeanne T. thanks you. Colt Stephen Jance thanks you. And so does Jon.

Several people have written asking if the raccoons have made a return visit to our house. The answer is: not recently. We saw one strolling down the middle of the driveway in broad daylight a few days before the swimming pool episode, but we haven't seen them since then. That's not to say they won't come back. But I also think they won't need to. The Seattle area is the site of a garbage strike that may grow larger. It's in some municipalities at the moment with the possibility of it moving on to others as well. If that happens, the local raccoons will have smorgasbords everywhere and it won't be necessary for them to be checking out open patio doors.

It's Sunday and sunny in Seattle. We're due to leave on Wednesday for an Alaskan cruise sponsored by the Timberland Regional Library. I suspect that the weather is going to turn on us, but in the meantime, we've had a glorious summer in Seattle. (According to the people I talked to in Anchorage, the same has not been true for Alaska.) As for Tucson? They're within .06 of an inch of having the fifth wettest monsoon season on record. People in Tucson are quite happy about all that rain which means it's all a matter of perspective.

My Blog

Watch Out for Traffic!

Tuesday, September 5, 2006

Lives turn on small decisions. Sunday, after a day of running errands, we stopped by the Seattle Mystery Bookshop to sign some books. Yes, Yolanda, Heather's book is signed and ready to ship.

Afterwards, we turned right on Second Avenue and headed south. At James and Second, we paused for a moment of indecision--would we go across Lake Washington on I-90 or would we turn north on I-5 and cross the water on Highway 520 instead.

That moment of indecision saved Bill's life for sure and probably mine as well. Our light had turned green, but because we hadn't decided which way we were going, we didn't move forward immediately. A guy driving a Ford Expedition at what we estimate to be 50 mph charged through our intersection and his red light without even taking his foot off the gas pedal.

Are we lucky? You bet. Are we thankful? That too. And was someone else's hand guiding us at that intersection? Yes.

My Blog

Don't Hold Back!

Friday, September 1, 2006

One thing I've noticed about the people who write to me--they don't hold back. In the past several days there have been a series of e-mails that are similar but different. Half of the correspondents love J.P. Beaumont and really don't care for Joanna. And the other half see things the other way around--they love Joanna and are bored to tears by J.P. And then there are the readers who like the Brandon Walker books better than any of the others.

My conclusion? To misquote Abraham Lincoln, You can please all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, etc., etc., etc.

Years ago a wise acquaintance, a woman of a "certain age," told me. "Honey, thank God we're not all just alike. Otherwise we'd all be married to the same man and drive a Mustang."

One of the dangers of writing a series is that eventually the author tires of always dealing with the same characters operating in the same milieu. Agatha Christie evidently had it up to here with Poirot before all was said and done. I was in a similar situation and close to wanting to knock Beau off when I was given the opportunity to write *Hour of the Hunter*, my first thriller. Lots of my regular readers actively disliked that book because it was so "different" from what they had come to expect from J.P. But when it was time for me to go back to Beaumont again, I was fresh--and enthusiastic. The same thing happened again when I had a chance to write the first Joanna Brady book. And now there's Ali Reynolds as well.

I've been writing about J.P. Beaumont for more than twenty-five years now. A quarter of a century stuck with a steady diet of him alone would have obliterated my creativity. And the same thing would have been true if I'd only been able to write about Joanna Brady as well.

So yes, my readers may like one character more than another, and that's fine. But don't expect me to drop one or the other of them on command--unless you want me to fold up my laptop and head for the hills.

Just kidding. I expect that decades from now they'll have to pry the keyboard away from my gnarled fingers. In the meantime, the next two books are written and I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do next.

My Blog

Baseball and JA Jance

Tuesday, August 29, 2006

I read my e-mail every day. For the past few weeks, the messages have overflowed with condolences and good wishes from all over the country. Yesterday, though, one came that made me laugh out loud. With the correspondent's permission, I am posting it below:

“Just wanted to let you know that you are now a part of baseball history at Coors Field in Denver, CO. On August 15th the Rockies and Diamondbacks played 18 innings, the longest in Coors Field history. By the 16th inning the crowd had thinned considerably. At that point, Todd Walsh of a Phoenix TV station came down to the seats and interviewed 6 remaining AZ Diamondback fans. I was one of them and, truth be told, I had been drifting from the game unlike the other staunch D'back supporters. I was reading " Long Time Gone". Smiling and holding up the book for all to see, the reporter noted that I was more engrossed in your book than the game but thought the title was appropriate considering the length of the game.

When we went to the next home game in Phoenix, friends who had stayed up to watch the 18 inning game on TV acknowledged my "15 seconds of fame" and of course the fact that I had been busted reading one of your books at a game.....again! “

Linda Hanks
Glendale, AZ

Her note took me back to growing up in Bisbee, Arizona, in the fifties. In those days, minor league baseball was still played at the town's baseball facility, the Warren Ballpark. (I believe Bisbee High School baseball is still played there, and that it's one of the oldest baseball facility's in this country that is still in use.)

As a child I often went to see the Copper Kings play. And, as Linda Hanks has previously noted, some games are longer than others. One night, I abandoned our seats in the bleachers and took myself to the top of the covered seating behind home plate. There I fell sound asleep. When my father came looking for me at the end of the game, he found me sound asleep with my mouth wide open and surrounded by a group of small children who were trying to toss peanuts into that very inviting target. It's one of the last baseball games I remember attending.

Yes, when it comes to baseball, J.A. Jance has a very checkered past.

My Blog

Next Ali Reynolds is finished!

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Our new house is in the wilds of Bellevue. I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but it's true. And last night, shortly after we went to bed, the two red dog goldens, Aggie and Daphne, went nuts. The cause of their distress turned out to be a racoon who had, according to the wet footprints, helped himself to a dip in the pool and then checked all the patio doors to see if he could get inside. I do NOT want to arise and shine some morning and find a little masked bandit hiding out in the kitchen!

The next book is finished. Web of Evil, (I laughingly think of it as Son of Edge of Evil!) is the second Ali Reynolds book, and it's due to go on sale from Simon and Schuster on January 9, 2007. Once I know tour details, I'll let you know.

My Anchorage appearance for Dead Wrong at Title Wave which was canceled has now been reset for September 5, 2006. Hope the people who were disappointed by my not showing up the first time have a chance to come again. And I really will try to send out notices this time. I failed to do so before, but, considering the circumstances, I think people understood.

Fans often ask me what I'm reading. The truth is, when I'm working on a book, it's difficult to read anyone else's. But right now, I'm between books, so I'm reading again. Yesterday I read the new Number One Ladies Detective Agency book, Blue Shoes and Happiness by Alexander McCall Smith. Today I started Fanny Flagg's Can't Wait to Get to Heaven. (Fried Green Tomatoes was one of my favorite reads of all time, and I feel like I'm right back at the Whistle Stop Cafe.)

My Blog

Respect Must Be Paid

Saturday, August 19, 2006

Yesterday I attended my first "with honors" military funeral. We drove over the mountains from Bellevue to Cle Elum, Washington, to the Douglas C. Munro National Servicemen's Gravesite. Douglas Munro was a Coastie and the grave site was the place Jon chose for his own. He did his first U.S. Coast Guard Honor Guard duties there, and that's also where he reenlisted for the last time.

The cemetery is a beautiful, tree lined spot just off the freeway. I was struck by the group of butt-sprung old veterans from the local VFW chapter who surrounded the gathering and who stood respectfully at attention, rifles on shoulders and who spoke, with creaking voices, of fallen comrades who have defended their country. I was equally struck by the contingent of very young Coasties who gently carried Jon's flag-draped coffin from the hearse to the service.

I was not prepared for the 21-gun salute. (Neither was Colt. He burst into tears and refused to be comforted.) I was not prepared for my reaction to the playing of Taps. (Colt loved it. I cried like a baby.) I was not prepared for my reaction to the bag-piper playing Amazing Grace. (Colt loved it.) I was not prepared for my reaction to the two young women Coasties carefully folding the flag. That one got to me so much I have no idea how Colt reacted.

At the grave site, we all tossed flowers--roses. (Colt tried to eat his.) Jon and Jeanne T's dogs, Kensie and Angel, were there to say their good-byes as well. They stood by the coffin with their tails wagging. Did they know? I'm sure.

I was busy thanking the VFW guys. I didn't see Jon's uniformed friend and fellow Coastie, Steve Lincoln's, final salute as the coffin was lowered. I think I'm glad I missed it.

And then we drove back here to the house and had a barbeque/swimming party. (Colt loved it, and I think Jon would have, too.) I think the young people could have gone on swimming for hours and hours, but the older generation, me included, was running out of steam. The party shut down about nine PM or so.

The memorial service was one thing, with its mixture of laughter and tears--which is how memorial services are supposed to be--full of memories. The funeral was something else. Jon's service to his country was so much a part of his life, that it was only fitting that respect should be paid.

It was.

My Blog

We Got It Done

Thursday, August 17, 2006

Yesterday the obituary for Jon Jance appeared in the local papers. (Go to seattletimes.com. Find Obituaries. And then enter Jance in the search line. If I were more computer literate, I could come up with a real link, but there you are.) Several people have written to ask why, if he was our son-in-law, was Jon's last name Jance. That would be because he took our daughter's name when they married. He was one of a kind!

Last night was the memorial service. It played to a packed house at the Coast Guard Station on Pier 36. When Jeanne T. and Jon got married, the rehearsal dinner was delayed three hours by a bank robbery followed by a high-speed chase that ended blocks from where the wedding was to be held. Last night's memorial service was delayed due to police activity surrounding a bomb scare on Pier 18. Hollis Williams, the Episcopal priest who presided over their wedding and spoke at the memorial service said that, with Jon and Jeanne T., there was always a kicker.

Also speaking at the service was my good friend, Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, who presided over Jon and Jeanne T's renewal of vows three years ago on the occasion of their fifth anniversary. (Mary Ann and her husband, Jeff, were the real life models for my fictional Marianne Maculyea in the Joanna Brady books, and she said it was strange meeting so many strangers who were convinced they knew her.) She spoke lovingly of Jon's humor and love of life.

Jon's old Executive Officer spoke about coming to the Seattle Station and being told, "Jon Jance has been dealing with cancer for several years. He probably won't be around much longer. But that time and again, often still bandaged from his latest round of surgery or whatever, Jon would be back at his desk--time and again. And I have to say, the fact that the Coast Guard wanted Jon back was an integral part of Jon's battle. He wanted to be back at work because he knew he was needed.

Then Jeanne T. stood up and asked the doctors and nurses in attendance to please stand and come forward. There were a good dozen or so of the good people from floor 7-SE (the cancer floor, or the University of Washington Medical Center.) Jeanne T. called them forward--two doctors and ten nurses--and introduced them by name and told a story about each one. When she finished, they all received a standing ovation. (One of the nurses told me later that had never happened to her before.) But the point is, all of those folks have been involved in Jon and Jeanne T's live and battle for a long, long time. JTJ was always Jon's ambassador to the medical community. Yes, he fought a long, hard, tenacious battle, but it was Jeanne T's skill and kindness which helped bring the skills of those very talented medical practitioners to bear on Jon's situation.

My Blog

Jon was a thirty-something, and it was a thirty-something memorial service, complete with humorous eulogies and a touching music-accompanied slide show. It was a celebration of Jon's life and of Jon and Jeanne T's life together, with Colt crowing and gurgling in the background.

Jon's service to his country, in both the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard, was a vital part of his life. The photos of him in his various uniforms were wonderful. He loved being in the honor guard, and I loved the fact that an honor guard and a bag-piper were there for him.

What struck me about the slide show and the memorial service was the fact that so many of the faces in all of them were the very same faces--the faces of people who came and stuck. The same people who were there for the wedding and the parties and the renewal of vows were also the people who were there at the Relay for Life walks and in the hospital and hospice waiting rooms as well. Good people. They say you have to be a friend to have a friend. Clearly Jon Jance was a good FRIEND.

The graveside ceremony will be tomorrow at the Munro Serviceman's Memorial in Cle Elum--where Jon did his final re-enlistment with the Coast Guard. And after that? Well come back to the house, with all those same good friends, and have a party. What could be more appropriate?

Jon was always concerned about others. He knew I was struggling to finish writing a book during these last few difficult months. Every time I saw him, he wanted to know how many words I had written and how many I still needed to write. I didn't manage to finish the book before Jon left us, but the last three chapters went to New York yesterday morning.

Yes, Jon. We both got 'er done.

JAJ

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My Blog

Jon's At Rest

Monday, August 14, 2006

Yes, this morning Dead Wrong is on the NYTimes list. And I'm back home from the tour. But it's not a time of rejoicing.

Our son-in-law, Jon Jance, lost his battle with malignant melanoma this year. Those of you who have fought your own war with the Big C know what a mixture of both sorrow and relief that we're feeling at the moment. One very real blessing in our lives is the existence of Jon and Jeanne T's little last minute miracle, Colt Stephen Jance who is now eight months old.

With services scheduled for this week, the appearance at Title Wave in Anchorage has been canceled and will be rescheduled for as soon as possible.

For all of you who made contributions to the Cancer Fighting Flamingo team of the Relay for Life, please know that we are now within spitting distance of making Jeanne T's goal of Seventy Five (thousand) in Five (years). Thank you.

My Blog

Another Quick Update

Wednesday, August 9, 2006

I'm on the road again. Last night was a great success in Ft. Worth and they treated me like a queen. There were hundreds hanging on every word I spoke and I've had a lot of very nice email from the audience members.

It's been gratifying to be out here visiting with people and hearing their reactions to my work in general and Dead Wrong in particular.

In September, I'll be participating in an on line discussion group for Dead Wrong. If you're interested in participating, please go to this website to sign up. As I understand it, it's free. Signups are open now and will remain open through September. The website is:

<http://educate.barnesandnoble.com/educate/bn/home/catalog/overview.jsp?productId=65502>

Sorry for the slowness of the website at times. The traffic on the site was overwhelming and it got the best of the server. We're on the verge of resolving the difficulties.

A very sincere thanks to everyone who went straight out and purchased their copies of Dead Wrong. It will be Number 8 on the NY-Times list on August 13.

Also, for those of you who are keeping track of Pink Floyd and the Cancer Fighting Flamingos. We're now at \$73,500 of the \$75,000 in Five Years Goal for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. If you want to send a donation, checks should be written to The Relay for Life and sent to me at P.O. Box 766, Bellevue, WA. 98009.

JAJ

My Blog

Finally an update!

Monday, August 7, 2006



Today, I'm in Amarillo, TX deep into the tour. The crowds have been heartwarming and the sales of the book have put it on the NY Times list again, Wall Street Journal list, USA today, and Independent Booksellers lists. Thank you all.

I know I haven't been holding up my end of the blogging routine, but I've been overwhelmed by finishing a book, preparing for the tour, and other real life issues. Our son-in-law has been in and out of the hospital several times in the

past couple of weeks. Our daughter, her 8 month old, and two dogs stayed with us for several days while the last of the repairs to her house were completed. Having an 8 month old in the household does create its own kind of chaos...especially if you have been out of the baby business for several years!

The opening day signings for Dead Wrong were challenging due to the fact that my husband was gimping around with a bad back caused by moving furniture in an unapproved way, we had company for a night, the record heat in Seattle and an uncooperative AC system all at one time. When it rains it pours, my mother said.

I hope you are all enjoying Dead Wrong.

JAJ

My Blog

What is happening to my son in law???

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

Welcome to the new J.A.Jance website. My webmaster/husband has been hard at work updating the entire site.



The last couple of months have been tough. As many of you know, events in California and the Baltic cruise with both canceled due to my son-in-law's precarious health situation here in Seattle. After three months spent mostly at the University of Washington Medical Center, plans are now being made to transfer Jon to Evergreen Hospice. He and our daughter have battled his malignant melanoma for the past eight and a half years, but that fight appears to be coming to an end.

I've heard from many fans/friends from all over, people whose lives have also been touched by cancer, who know that this is a situation in which the entire family is affected. We've all greatly appreciated your kind thoughts, words, and prayers.

The next Joanna Brady book comes out in July and the next Beaumont--one for next year--is already completed. I'm also working on a new Ali Reynolds book. So believe me, I am working.