

Boxing Day

Wednesday, December 26, 2007

Today is December 26th, Boxing Day in Merry Olde England. And Boxing Day here in soggy Seattle, too. It's rainy but not snowy.

Our "Boxing Day" tradition is to wrest a little order from yesterday's chaos. The house was full of people and presents and discarded gift-wrapping and food. Today most of the people are gone along with most of the left-over food. The gifts and the gift-wrapping have moved on as well.

What's next on the horizon? Figuring out how to spend more than a month on the road on a book tour while keeping enough of our office along that the business part of our business doesn't crash and burn in the meantime. We're like a turtle except we have to bring the world headquarters of J.A. Jance with us wherever we go.

In the last few days I've had several e-mails about the website. If you want a printable copy of the book titles in order, all you have to do is look for the caption that says click here for a printable pdf version and you'll have one. And for those of you who are looking for the essays that give a brief overview of the books, click in the book cover for that particular series on the About My Books page of the website, and the essay pages will download. There's a pdf file available on the Schedule page too.

We've limited what shows up on the pages for ease of loading. Some of my readers still have dial-up connections, and websites with lots of bells and whistles can take a long time to load. If you have some other issue with the website, however, please let me know and we'll try to address your concerns.

So now I'm stopping writing the blog update. I need to go pack.

The Early Bird Gets the Worm

Thursday, December 20, 2007

We're finally linked to Amazon as well as jajance.com and some of you may be seeing my blog for the first time. I've been blogging for almost two years, so there is quite an archive on my website. I hope you enjoy keeping up with my thoughts and travel schedule. We will be blogging from the road during the ongoing Hand of Evil tour...lets all hope for little snow, and unseasonably warm temps for the next 6 weeks while we are out and about. Hope to see you at a signing!

Writing is a complicated process. At any given time, I'm writing one book, editing another, and promoting a third. Sometimes the lines tend to blur. I am, after all, a one-woman business.

A few weeks ago, just after my new Ale Reynolds book, Hand of Evil, had been printed but before it shipped, someone in New York discovered an egregious error. On page 147, someone named Joanna showed up and for NO GOOD REASON. It wasn't a Joanna Brady book. She had no business being there!!! But the deed was done, and there was no fixing it until the next printing.

So I did a blog update on this and announced that the first fan to spot the error would receive a prize. This morning we have a winner! Already!! And Virginia, from Palmdale, will be receiving a prize.

When I wrote back to her, I was still embarrassed about the error as are my editors. She kindly sent me a note saying that I shouldn't be: After all they are ALL members of your family, it is okay to get them mixed up.....I raised five kids, have eight grandchildren, two great grandchildren, sons in laws, daughter in laws, and believe me, I OFTEN call them by the wrong name. That means that even though you are visiting one of them (ALI in this case) you also have Joanna on your mind.

Her note made me feel better, and it also reminded me of my mother. There were seven children in our family. Five of us had names that started with J's-- Janice, Jeannie, Judy, Jim and Janie. (With a maiden name of Busk, you can see how all those J.B. names in my books always seem so right to me.)

But back to my mother. On countless occasions, I remember her standing in the kitchen sputtering: Ja,Jee,Ju, Ji, Jan!!! Finally, she'd just give up and say, "Whoever you are you know who you are." And she was right. The particular J word in question knew exactly what he or she had done wrong and why our mother was calling him or her to account.

Virginia told me that she had just turned 74 and had never won anything. That's not true. She's won our prize--which will be shipped to her directly--and she's also won my heart. She made me feel better--and brought me another enduring memory of my mother, someone who is gone now and someone I miss every day.

And so this morning, with a new book on the stands, it's time to hit the showers and then the signing trail. I hope to see some of my blog readers somewhere along the way. But please don't write to tell me about the error on page 147 of Hand of Evil. Believe me, I already know!!

Lila Jul Aften 2007

Thursday, December 13, 2007

As the holidays approach, we often find ourselves remembering good old times and some not so good times as well. It's only natural, then, that I often think about my mother at this time of year. She's gone now, but her wit and wisdom linger on.

When I started dating my first husband, he told me straight out that he had to be home with his mother for Christmas every year, NO EXCEPTIONS!! In other words, if I was going to be with him, we were going to be with her. In actual fact, I believe this was his rule more than it was Mary Grandma's, but that's another story.

The point is, I believed him and, when, I told my mother, so did she. Did she pout? Did she fuss? No. My mother, a hardheaded Swede, was a lot smarter than that. Instead, facing the prospect of having me absent from family Christmases for the foreseeable future, she fell back on her roots.

She recalled Lila Jul Aften, an "old Swedish custom," that happened the Sunday before Christmas. Lila Jul Aften, Little Christmas Eve, has had many spellings over the years, but the way she explained it is this: The Sunday before Christmas, the family got together for a smorgasbord and everyone got to open one present. She went on to suggest that maybe we could do this before I left to spend Christmas with my then boyfriend's family.

And that's exactly what we did--starting in 1964. Lila Jul Aften became my Christmas with MY family. It was a handy holiday to have around when I was dating my first husband and when I was married to him. After I divorced him, it became a real life-saver. I could handle sending my kids off for Christmas with their father and with Mary Grandma because I had celebrated Lila Jul Aften with them before they left.

Over the years, Lila Jul Aften has become a precious holiday for my first family and also for my second one. As long as we have the Sunday before Christmas together,

everyone is free to do their own thing (or not) when Christmas Day comes around. It puts a stop to some of the in-law/out-law bickering.

Lila Jul Aften is early this year. Doing the party only two days before Christmas is playing it too close, so this year's celebration will be on December 16th. (It's our holiday, after all, and if we want to move it around a little, so be it). We'll have the smorgasbord, and my son Tom is doing the cooking. (He did that last year, too, but it was a lot more complicated since our house didn't have any power and neither did his!) We'll all open one gift, and the people who will be elsewhere on Christmas will open all their gifts. For me, once I get through Lila Jul Aften, it's all downhill. (This year that next week will be complicated by the fact that a book tour is starting, but that's another story, too.)

Earlier this year, I heard from a friend who was in the throes of a divorce and dreading the inevitable holiday push and pull between her and her soon-to-be-former husband. So I gave her the gift of my mother's wisdom.

It could be that there's no such thing as Lila Jul Aften in real life. My mother was long on smarts and it could be she simply made it up on the spot. But it's a gift she gave me and a gift I gladly share with others.

If you need it, use it. On the Sunday before Christmas, Sweden can become everyone's "old country" because there are times when we can all use a little bit of old country cheer.

Enjoy.

NYT #6 Thank You !

Thursday, December 6, 2007

When I wrote Edge of Evil and came up with the idea of cutlooseblog.com, my husband, webmaster, and IT guy extraordinaire made it his business to corner the market on that domain name so that if anyone tried looking for cutloose, they'd end up coming here to www.jajance.com.

Over the years I've heard from lots of people who tried it and came here more or less by accident. (Isn't that the old definition of a small town? You call a wrong number but talk anyway?)

In the past few weeks, now that Web of Evil is on sale in mass market paperback form, that's been happening again. So welcome all you cutlooseblog.com explorers. I hope you come back, but I also want to say a big thank you. Due to people like you--new paperback readers and long term paperback readers alike--Web of Evil, Ali Reynolds #2, will be # 6 on the NYTimes best seller list. Thank you for making that possible. Number 6 is the highest I've ever been.

That's the good news. And now for the bad.

Thirty-plus years ago I spent two years living in the small western Washington town of Pe Ell. Our house there was only a hundred yards or so from the river. It was two stories tall. Even so, I'm sure it was severely damaged by Monday's fierce flooding. I've tried looking at the photos they show on TV, but in all that water, it's tough to get your bearings.

I know I have lots of fans in the affected areas from Centralia and Rochester to Aberdeen. Many of the people living there have lost everything and now they're cut off from life's most basic necessities--food, water, and electricity. I doubt any of them are logging on to their computers right now. They have too many other life and death issues to deal with--like keeping warm and dry.

But even if they don't know about it, I'm keeping the flood victims in my thoughts and prayers. I hope you do the same.

Annual Storm Event

Tuesday, December 4, 2007

This morning after Seattle's weather woes hit the national news shows, I heard from several people wondering if we were all right. We're fine.

Some of you are probably wondering wait a minute. What's the big deal? Doesn't it rain in Seattle all the time? Well, yes, it does--except in July, August and September--usually. The problem is, it hardly ever rains this much ALL AT THE SAME TIME!!!!

Some parts of Western Washington got eleven inches. That's way too much rain!

One of the reasons we're fine is that we live at the top of a hill rather than at the bottom of it. Our near neighbors should probably be grateful that our pool caught and held a good portion of the three and a half inches of rain that fell in our back yard. Better it should be in our pool than streaming down the hillside. They should also be glad that we redesigned and rebuilt a retaining wall which wasn't properly constructed in the first place and might not have held up to this kind of rainfall onslaught.

Our kids are all fine, too. The ones who live in West Seattle had the closest call. A backed-up storm drain there caused a landslide on the hillside behind their neighbors' house which is now condemned. Tom and Kathy's house is fine.

Over on the Kistsap Peninsula the freeway intersection closest to our daughter's house turned into a raging river. Luckily for Cindy and her family, they're able to access their house from the opposite direction.

Yes, the rains came. Fortunately for us, there wasn't that much wind. If there had been, we'd have been in big trouble since the ground was so sodden.

I happen to know why the winds stayed away. Last year's storm, the Hanukkah Day Windstorm, as locals like to call it, put us out of business for days. We spent five very chilly days with no power and much longer than that with no phone or Internet connection. Over the summer we took corrective measures. We now have a gas powered generator and computer air-cards.

So we're taking full credit. Now that we have a generator, we probably won't ever lose power again--and neither will our neighbors.

Life Imitates Art

Tuesday, November 27, 2007

I'm always surprised when I make something up and then it appears to happen in real life.

The first time I remember dealing with this situation was a number of years ago when *Payment In Kind* was published. That book, Beaumont number nine, starts with Seattle shut down due to a severe snow storm. I wrote the book one year and it came out the next--in February or March as I recall. During the tour, I was doing a signing at a Target in Lynnwood when a fan came up to me and said, "You're really fast aren't you." I must have looked puzzled by her comment because she added, "That snow storm happened just a couple of weeks ago."

She was right. There had been a similar storm but not THAT storm. I'm fast, but I'm not that fast, but it's something I've been able to chuckle about ever since.

Other times, when those occurrences have been far more chilling. For example, when I wrote *Day of the Dead*, the third Walker Family thriller, I made up the bad guys. I didn't base them on any real case I knew about from the news or even from watching back-to-back episodes of *Forensics Files* on Court TV, but after the book came out, I heard from a woman who thought I had patterned my story after some people who had done similarly awful things. The people who had abused her and others had hidden their appalling deeds behind a facade of being do-gooders. Knowing that there were real people who so much resembled by pretend ones rocked me.

In *Shoot/Don't Shoot* Joanna Brady is shocked to learn that she has an older brother who was given up for adoption long before she was born. I was surprised to learn later than Joanna's experience mirrored that of another fan who thought maybe she had told me about her family history and I'd used it in a book, but the spooky thing is, she hadn't. I made the whole thing up.

I've also heard from people who are sure they know some of the real Seattle P.D. detectives who must have served as models for my various characters--Big Al Lindstrom especially. The truth is, I don't know ANY real Seattle P.D. homicide detectives. Never have.

Last week, I had a similar encounter, only this one made me laugh. A number of years ago I wrote a novella for a book called Bark M. for Murder. It was called "The Case of the London Cabbie" and featured a crime-fighting retired kindergarten teacher and her two red-dog golden retrievers. Set in the Pacific Northwest, the story included a company called the London Cab Company that utilized vehicles similar to iconic ones that exist in London to this day. They're more or less rectangular with no real trunk. Passengers sit in a back seat while luggage is stacked in an open area next to the driver.

This week, driving on Madison toward Seattle's downtown area I was astonished to see one of those very cabs with the word London in the taxi sign on the top. Up close you could see it's the limo for the Sorrento Hotel, but it did give me a start. Seeing it I expected to see Maddy and her dogs step out onto the curb.

Thanksgiving

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

Today we went shopping. We bought the turkey. We bought the cranberries. We bought the potatoes and the marshmallows. The lefse was shipped from Grandrud's Lefse Factory in Montana on Monday and should arrive tomorrow. And we have a Halloween pumpkin sitting on the front porch that will be turned into several (estimate 6) pumpkin pies in the course of the day tomorrow.

For Seattle in November, it was the perfect day. Sunny. Clear. A few lingering red leaves on the gum trees around town. So, after coming from Tucson and ninety degrees, we're suddenly plunged into fall. And from there we go straight to December. Yikes.

We came home from Tucson with some critical holiday supplies--flour tortillas and tamales (green and red) from the Anita Street Market in Tucson's Barrio Anita. So last week was the traditional Mexican food feast before the traditional American one before the traditional Scandinavian one. Who says America isn't a melting pot?

This week there was a lot on the news about the school district in Seattle declaring that Thanksgiving should really be a national day of mourning out of respect for Native American peoples. But an interesting thing happened while the talking heads were talking. I received an e-mail from someone who used to be one of my students when I was a librarian on the Tohono O'odham Reservation in Arizona.

Admittedly, it was several decades ago when I was there. The thought police were not yet in the driver's seat and the PC craze had yet to get a stranglehold on our institutions. There weren't any Native Americans back then. There were only Indians and Anglos. Max has lived all his life on the reservation. I have a sneaking suspicion that if I actually asked him how he regards himself even now that the Indian answer would still hold sway.

And why did he write to me this week? To say hello? Yes. And to send me his new cell phone number. Even in the wilds of the Tohono O'odham Nation smoke signals have

pretty much gone out of style. The People use cell phones these days and e-mail on the Internet.

But the real reason Max wrote was to wish me was to say hello and to wish my family and me a Happy Thanksgiving. His good wishes came from one melting-pot American to another.

Right back at you, Max. Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours. And to all you other melting pot folks as well.

As you sit down with your families do, please, be truly thankful. I am.

Mea Culpa...Hand of Evil got me!

Thursday, November 15, 2007

I write more than one series. People often ask me, how do you keep them straight? And do you write more than one book at a time?

I usually say that I keep them straight by writing only one book at a time. I think anyone who tries to do more than that would most likely drive themselves nuts in short order. I don't start work on the next book until I'm done writing the one before. Even so, that doesn't mean I only deal with one book at a time. In the real world, I'm out promoting and talking about one book, doing editorial work on the next, and doing the creative writing part on a the one after that--all at the same time.

This week the very first copy of the new Ali Reynolds book, Hand of Evil, arrived in the mail. Don't go to your local bookstore and demand they sell you a copy right now, today. They can't. The on-sale date for Hand of Evil is still December 18, and stores can't sell it to you before that. But the books have to be printed in time so they can actually arrive at stores all over the country before that on-sale date. So my copy was and is, as they say, hot off the presses.

Before it had a chance to cool off, however, trouble arrived. It would seem that in doing work on more than one book at a time, (editing one and writing another) I had a mental meltdown. I'm not going to say what the gaffe is right this minute. I'm simply going to say that it exists. That it's my fault and no one else's.

And once Hand of Evil is out there, I'll give blog recognition to the first sharp eyed reader who catches me red-handed. To say nothing of red-faced.

An Exciting Day!

Saturday, November 10, 2007

In the last several weeks, I've done as many speaking engagements--several. After the last one, a member of the audience came up and said to me, "I'd love to live your life for just one day. It must be terribly exciting."

That set me to wondering exactly what part of my life she thinks is exciting. Being out speaking to and with people is interesting. Last week, for example, I met a woman who, fourteen years ago, was the victim of a workplace shooting that left her blind, four other people dead, and six children fatherless. Yes, the woman is still alive and lucky to be so, but she also has on-going medical problems from bullet fragments that remain in her body to this day. As I spoke to her, I was incredibly grateful that she was alive for me to meet. Had the bullet entered her body another inch in any direction, she wouldn't have been. Was that exciting? No, but it was a study in gratitude--hers and mine.

A week ago I spoke to an organization that is addressing the problem of adult literacy in Kern, County, California. These are people who can read themselves but who are devoting their time, talent, and effort to make reading available to others so they can read road signs and directions on prescription bottles. So they can help their children with homework. So they can fill out tax forms or job applications. The Kern County Adult Literacy Council knows that reading opens doors that would otherwise be permanently closed. Was this an exciting event? Not really. It was a hot day. The gym where I spoke wasn't air-conditioned. But was I glad to be there and have a chance to participate? Yes.

I've had the opportunity to speak to book clubs and literary societies. Since I write murder mysteries, anything that smacks of "literary" tends to make me skittish. It's very clear to me that I'm a storyteller as opposed to a literary light, but I'm grateful for the opportunity to stand in a room with a hundred or so potential readers--many of whom have never before read one of my books--to make my case about the importance of storytelling. Is that exciting? I'm not sure. Hearing an audience laugh at something

you've said or knowing you've managed to touch even a few of them is very rewarding but not necessarily exciting.

And then there's the writing part. The part that says: If it is to be it is up to me. The part that says, this book needs 100,000 words in it by such and such a date, and I'm the only one who can fill in those blanks. At the beginning of the book writing process, that makes for a lot of blanks. There are times when the arc of a story comes to a complete halt--as it did in the last week or two. When the story would not move forward no matter what I did. I lay awake at night--even the nights before those speeches--worrying about what was wrong with my storyline and why it wasn't working. And after wrestling with the problem for days, I finally realized that I had to give up a path I was planning on following in the book--a path that was the wrong one. I had to change my mind about something I had hoped to write. Was that easy? No. Was it exciting? Absolutely not.

A book tour is coming. If you check the schedule page on this site, you'll see it's not a tour so much as it is a crusade. We'll be on the road for the better part of two months. In this case, much of the "road" will be done on board our corporate jet. Is this exciting and exotic? Yes, but it's also useful. We can get on and off aircraft with all our clothing intact. And we can carry along as much mouthwash and toothpaste as we like. But being charming day after day at interviews and signings is hard work. It's fun but hard. And draining. And by the time we get home from the tour, we'll be ready to burn whatever clothing we took along.

So today I'm in Tucson. It's November, but I'm sitting out on the patio in my bare feet with the computer on my lap and the fountain splashing in the background. Is this the kind of "exciting" day that woman had in mind? I don't know, but it's a perfect day for me.

November already!@!!

Friday, November 2, 2007

Yesterday I worked on this year's Christmas Card Letter. It was hard to get my head around the idea that the holidays are fast approaching because we're currently dealing with a heat-wave in Tucson--temperatures in the mid to high eighties--a good five degrees above normal. How can Thanksgiving possibly be right around the corner?

I worked on the letter and on copy-editing the next Joanna Brady book, *Damage Control*, while sitting outside on the patio barefoot. In other words, there's a lot of good to be found in being a snowbird.

Tomorrow, Saturday, I'll be going to Bakersfield, California where I'll be speaking at an adult literacy foundation event. Adult literacy is a hidden problem. At the times it was impacting my life, I had no idea that the people whose actions were so puzzling were behaving as they did because they couldn't read and didn't want anyone to know their terrible secret. So yes, going to Bakersfield isn't the best thing for my own particular writing process this week, but it's important work and I'm glad to be involved.

Now here are some bits and pieces:

A year or so ago, I heard from a young man--a thirteen year-old--in New Hampshire who was determined to start a library in his hometown. He was asking for recipes for a celebrity cookbook that he hoped to sell in order to raise funds. This week I heard from him again. The e-mail included a photo of him at the lease signing ceremony.

Congratulations, RJ. I guess a box of J.A.Jance books will be on its way to you and your new library sometime soon.

This week I received a copy of the cover for this year's Ali Reynolds book, *Hand of Evil*, which is due to go on sale December 18. The author picture features me with our two red-dog goldens, Aggie and Daphne. Unfortunately, we lost Aggie to a fungal disorder only a few weeks after the photo was taken, so seeing the cover put a lump in my throat. Aggie's sister, Daph, came down with the same symptoms, but timely veterinary intervention managed to save her. So in case you're wondering, Daphne is still doing fine and is enjoying being back in Arizona as well. We're snowbirds? She's a snowbird dog.

All for now. Copyediting is calling.

Blogging or Writing

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

In case you've noticed it's been quiet recently, there are two reasons. Number one, the webmaster has been working at redesigning the website in hopes of making it a little more user friendly to all--including the folks who still live in the world of dial-up. Too many bells and whistles may be slick, but they also make the website very slow to open.

People often want to print some pages--like the lists of books in order or the schedule. He has changed those so printable PDFs of those pages should be available with a click of the mouse.

So that's one part of the silence equation. The other part is mine--blogging versus writing.

On the surface, it would seem that writing and blogging would be much the same thing. Words leak into the computer through tips of my fingers and come out the other end in the form of a chapter or a blog update.

Blogs are written when something catches my interest and I want to talk about it--the two fans in Duluth, Minnesota, for instance, who have started drinking Seattle's Best Coffee because it's now available in Duluth and it's J. P. Beaumont's coffee of choice. That's fun.

Books are also written because something catches my attention. The difference is, the subject of a book has to be good enough to keep my attention for six months or so while I'm doing the writing and editing. And it has to be something that is still interesting enough to me for me to talk about it when it's time to go out on the book signing trail to discuss the story with fans.

Blogging can happen when I'm living with a limited attention span. When I'm writing a book, I have to think about it ALL THE TIME. When I go to bed at night I'm thinking about what the next scene will be. And when I wake up in the morning, I'm doing the same

thing. If the story somehow grinds to an unexpected halt, those nighttime "thinking" sessions turn into what I call "wrestling with the devil" as I lay awake hour after hour, trying to figure out what has stopped the progress of the book and deciding how to change it. This usually calls for one of the most difficult things an author is ever called upon to do--I have to change my mind.

Blogging is something I can pick up and put down--sort of like reading my monthly issue of Reader's Digest. I can go away from it for a while, come back, find my place, and start over with the next article. When I'm writing a book, I have to do it every day. I have to keep my mind INSIDE THE STORY! I need to know where the characters are, what they're seeing and doing, how long they've been there, and when and how they'll move on to somewhere else. If I walk away from writing a book, even for a day or two, I lose track of some of the threads of the story. I end up dropping a stitch here and there and don't remember to pick it back up again until it's much too late.

When I'm blogging, if I change my mind about something at the beginning of the piece, it's not that difficult to make sure that change is consistent throughout. It's a lot more difficult to keep track of those pesky changes when something happens at the beginning of a 100,000 word book and then needs to be kept track of and layered into the story from beginning to end.

So right now, I'm doing a lot more writing than I am blogging. I'm 32,400 words into the next Ali Reynolds book. Not the next one due out in December of 2007. Hand of Evil is finished, edited, and copy-edited. No this is NEXT YEAR'S Ali book. And, yes, I count the words EVERY DAY. (That comes from my days in the insurance business when my agency manager, Gilbert F. Lawson, told us in weekly agency meetings: "Know the score, keep the score, report the score. The score will improve.")

My head is full of what Ali and her friends and family are doing at the moment. In my fictional world, they're getting ready for Thanksgiving. For a few days next month, fictional time and real life time will intersect in a strange way. I'm expecting Thanksgiving in the book to be at the end of the story. Thanksgiving in real life should

be the beginning of a busy holiday season. In the meantime, I'll keep moving on--at a rate of a thousand words a day--maybe more if I'm lucky.

So this is a plea for patience. Yes, I'm a woman, and that means I'm supposed to be able to do more than one thing at a time. But sometimes I run out of energy and concentration. Blogging is a labor of love. Writing is my job. Right now the job takes precedence.

Came, Saw, and Conquered

Friday, October 19, 2007

The grandchildren came, they saw, they conquered. They were here for a week--three grandchildren under the age of five. A four year old, a three year old, and an almost two year old.

It was fun. It was exhausting. One child whose mother has to be at work at 6 AM in real life is on one schedule--early to bed and VERY early to rise. The other two operate on a later shift--arising at seven or so and going to bed later. Do you see a potential sleep-deprivation problem here?

Audrey Lynn, the oldest, was immediately able to decode Grandpa's accumulated clickers, clickers--a daunting collection that baffled her parents. Audrey was distressed, however, to discover that the TV in their bedroom, one that's on basic cable only, didn't come with a Tivo style pause button. Welcome to the Old Days, Audrey Lynn.

Celeste and Colt are much closer in age. It was fun to see Celeste teaching Colt to play Ring-Around-the Rosy. It was fun to listen to this little girl sing ABCDEFG all the way to the end and to remember how, a little over a year ago, she was just coming here from an orphanage in China.

Daphne, our aging golden retriever, made out like a bandit during the visit. Lots of stuff fell on the floor, and Daph was there to Hoover it up. And Colt, missing his own dogs, loved giving her treats. More than she's used to. She's a dog, after all. When it comes to treats, she's not counting them, she's eating them.

There were a few casualties while they were here. Within five minutes of being in the yard, Colt was able to find six things he shouldn't have. In other words, we flunked child-proofing in a big way. One lamp came to grief and a five gallon jug of liquid Tide somehow managed to commit suicide by throwing itself off the shelf in the laundry room, smashing the lid and spreading liquid detergent far and wide. It turns out that

liquid detergent is no fun to clean up. It's both slick and sticky and very, very thick. Fortunately we had a whole raft of swimming pool towels that we were able to use to soak up the mess. We had to wash them one at a time, though, to keep from over-soaping our low-suds front loading washer.

So the kids and grandkids are all gone now. They took all their legally mandated equipment and went home. (When you add three car-seats to the rest of the luggage for six people, it turns into a MOUNTAIN of luggage.) We were left wondering how it was that our own kids managed to survive childhood without ANY car-seats at all. But there you are. Tivo isn't the only way the world has changed.

It was a fun week. A tiring week, but in the end, we were able to play the grandparents trump card: Our children packed up their gear, took THEIR children, and flew home. We got to stay here--glad they came but also glad that they were on their way home--to their own houses, their own food preferences, and their own schedules.

All of which brings me to a woman, a fan, who wrote to me last week. She said that she enjoys my books but that she can't afford to buy them new because she's raising her FIVE grandchildren on Social Security. I know she's not alone. There are plenty of grandparents, people my age, who have taken over raising their grandchildren because the parents are in prison or messed up on drugs or alcohol. They've willingly taken on this important task, and I want to take this opportunity to say this: I salute you. Thank you for spending your golden years doing this incredibly important work.

As for our visiting children? Jim, Cindy, and Jeanne T, I salute you, too. You're doing a great job.

Blog Silence!

Friday, October 12, 2007

The blog is quiet for one very good reason--well, three, actually. Three of the six grandchildren are here visiting. For a week. Three grandchildren between the ages of not quite 2 and not quite 5.

Colt Stephen walked into Grandma's house and was able to find six things he shouldn't get into in as many minutes. So we are doing eternal vigilance here. We aren't doing much blogging. Or writing. Audrey Lynn and Celeste are handfuls in their own particular ways.

But having this batch of kids around, watching them interact--the way they duke it out over toys or else find ways to share--is giving me insights into how the adult world ought to operate as well, ought to but seldom does.

Several people have mentioned having difficulties with the website of late. If it happens again, you may need to type the website address www.jajance.com into your search engine. In the meantime, once the grandchildren go back home, we'll be reworking the website. (That must be the "royal we" since Bill will most likely be doing all the work!) It's time to put up an announcement of coming attractions, and Hand of Evil is only a couple of months away.

Happy Fall. Leaves were turning when we left Seattle earlier this week. It was cold, drizzly, and overcast. It's sunny here in Tucson. The AC is on and appreciated. Isn't that why we became snowbirds to begin with?

Thanks For Your Service

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Yesterday we visited Walter Reed Hospital in Washington DC.

The cab driver who took us there, a legal but ungrateful immigrant, was offended when he learned where we were going. According to him he was sorry we got in his cab because it "takes too long" to get through security. He was rude and surly throughout the trip. In actual fact, it took less than five minutes to get through security. Bill is usually a generous tipper. Not for that cabbie.

Then we went into the hospital and had an opportunity to thank some of America's newest "greatest generation." These wounded warriors, young men and women with missing limbs and shattered bones, couldn't have been more gracious. To a man (and woman) when we told them how much we appreciated their service, they all said, "I was just doing my job." And the parents we met there, people waiting outside in hallways and pushing their sons and daughters in wheelchairs seemed to be glad that someone appreciated their sacrifice as well. It was a small thing to do. It was a good thing to do.

As for the people at Walter Reed? They were terrific. As master sergeant had been delegated to meet us at the curb with a cart to carry our hundred pounds of books into the hospital. He briefed us on each person we would be meeting, seemed to know them all individually, and made one hundred percent certain that we used the hand sanitizer before we entered a room.

As we waited for another cab to take us back to our hotel, we sat outside the valet parking garage watching patients and their families come and go. Many of them were older folks, long retired and in wheelchairs and on walkers, who have also paid a huge price in service of their country.

As we waited there, a big tour bus pulled into the very crowded driveway and parked. One person got out and went inside the building leaving both Bill and me to

wonder what kind of "tour" would come to a hospital. Eventually we found out. Another master sergeant guide with a pair of carts emerged from the hospital. A few minutes later two carts worth of colorful handmade neck pillows went by, followed by the group of obviously retired men and women who had made them,. They, too, were on their way to show their gratitude.

Then we came home. It's been an amazing week. Lots of good news and some bad as well.

For years we joked that putting a restaurant in a J. A. Jance book was the kiss of death. It started with Tom and Darlene Girvan's Waterfront 55, included the Doghouse and Bellevue's Fountain Court. The most recent victim was a small French bistro in the 2600 block of Seattle's Second Avenue. (So far some of our other favorites--Phoenix's La Pinata, as well as Bellevue's Bis on Main and Mediterranean Kitchen have avoided suffering similar fates.)

Now we may be dealing with the curse of the blog. In my Sunday morning post I mentioned two of my favorite spas--Tucson's Hush and Ashland's Blue Giraffe. Sunday night--that VERY Sunday night--Hush burned down. I'm currently holding my breath about the Blue Giraffe.

Back to work now. Time to write another book.

We're Not in Bisbee, Toto!!!

Sunday, September 30, 200

I'm a writer. It isn't often that I'm at a loss for words, but this has been one of those times.

It's Sunday morning. The National Book Festival ended yesterday, but we're still in DC. I was too tired to write about this on Friday night. Yesterday I was too busy and last night I was once again much too tired. Now it's time to take a crack at it.

This spring, when we were trying to decide about whether or not to go to Bouchercon, the National Book Festival was the other choice. Between the two, I decided to opt for Washington, DC over Anchorage. A few weeks ago, I learned that, out of 70 participating authors, I had been selected as one of the four who would be speaking at the gala prior to the Friday night dinner which is held on the mezzanine of the Library of Congress. Author guests—spouses and significant others—are traditionally not invited to the Library of Congress dinner for space and security reasons, but that isn't true for speakers. When I told Bill he was now invited and needed to dust off his tux, he said and I quote, "Oh crap!" But then he set about doing it with complete good cheer.

Just a week ago, I learned that at the gala, the first author is introduced by Laura Bush and then, after the completion of his or her remarks, each following author introduces the next. I was thrilled to learn I was the first speaker.

So I actually worked on what I was going to say. Usually I don't write down speeches, but the person running the show wanted to know details so I did something else I seldom do. I sent her an outline. She said that looked fine. Last week, just before we left home, she said she needed to see the talk itself. So I wrote it down, and since I generally don't read at book signing events, I planned my talk around my NOT reading.

She sent back a note that, in the rush of getting ready, I took as an okay. Bill read it and got a different message. He asked me if I had thought of something to read, but we were in our DC hotel room at the time and I didn't even have a copy of the book with me. I had my computer, though, so I looked through my Justice Denied files to see if I could find a short passage that would give the general flavor of the book.

I thought about reading a few paragraphs at the beginning of the book where Beau is first introduced. The problem with that is that he talks a lot about his job with the

Attorney General's Special Homicide Investigation Team. (S.H.I.T.) I wasn't about to say that with the President of the United States sitting in the front row. My mother would have had a fit.

Then I thought about reading the part where Beau proposes to Mel, but he asks her in the middle of a stake-out and four pages later she still hasn't given him an answer. In a seven minute speech, a passage that long wasn't going to work either, so I finally decided to proceed with my talk as is.

Friday was a very busy day that started with a flurry of e-mails letting me know that Laura Bush had been on Fox News early in the morning, holding up my book, and recommending it to a nationwide audience.

Knowing that manicures and dragging luggage around do not mix, I had already made an appointment for an early morning manicure. I left my computer to pick up the crush of incoming messages and rushed off to a nail salon near my hotel. Unfortunately this manicurist wasn't at all like Nicole from Hush in Tucson or the ladies from the Blue Giraffe in Ashland, Oregon. He slathered the polish on so thick that it was still sticky two hours later.

In the middle of the afternoon there was a live TV interview at a station in DC . We had to leave the hotel at 2:30 in the afternoon. We went to the studio dressed to the nines—Bill in his tux and me in a long black skirt and a brand new St. Johns jacket—red with a trim of black embroidery and occasional sequins. At the station, we waited for an hour in the green room, sharing a conference table with the mother of one of the hosts whose tiny dog, Tango, spent the whole time sauntering up and down the table.

After the interview we went by limo from the Reuters studio to the Library of Congress, arriving there an hour earlier than we were supposed to—not quite enough time to go from the studio back to the hotel in rush hour traffic to change into our gala duds. We stepped out of the limo just as an army of caterers rushed up the stairs and entered the building.

We had been directed by our printed itinerary to go to the library's "carriage entrance," where a sign says clearly: "restricted to members of Congress and other authorized personnel." We thought we were authorized and were surprised when we were surrounded by six shotgun carrying Capitol Police and Secret Service agents who told

us N-O in no uncertain terms, but we had already called for someone from the library to come get us there and she was supposedly on her way.

After a flurry of whispered radio communications up their sleeves, the guards finally reluctantly let us inside where we cooled our heels in a downstairs hallway and wondered why it was taking so long for our escort to arrive. (Think about waiting outside the principal's office!) When our flustered escort finally showed up she was astonished to find us there. She is a Library of Congress employee with a proper badge and identification, but the Secret Service wouldn't let her in through the carriage entrance. She told us yesterday that we were the ONLY people who had made it in through the carriage entrance.

After that we had about an hour to wait before the gala "walk through and sound check." By then I was starting to get nervous. Because we were so early, we killed time by taking a quick glance through the upstairs glass into the magnificent reading room in the rotunda and by studying the statuary in the reception hall. We also wandered through the Bob Hope Archive which would have been a lot more interesting to me if I hadn't been trucking around on marble floors in high heels. Bill's shoes were a lot more comfortable, and we had trouble dragging him out of there.

By the time we got to the Coolidge Auditorium for the rehearsal, I was really nervous and my feet were killing me. When I went up on the stage for the sound check, my knees were knocking and I almost froze up at the lectern. Fortunately I made it through. After that we went upstairs to the reception. More hard marble floors. And then I caught sight of Mrs. James Billington, the wife of the Librarian of Congress. As soon as I saw her, I knew I was in trouble. She and I were wearing the exact same red St. Johns jacket. We came together in the middle of the room and exchanged a heartfelt "Oops." The problem was, at that point, neither one of us could very well go home to change, so we decided to make the best of it. When I first saw the jacket in Nordys in Bellevue back in July, I told Bill, "That's perfect for the gala." Which of course turned out to be much too true.

Then we stood in the reception (more marble floors) for another interminable twenty minutes before the speakers and spouses were led to another room for a photo op moment with the President and Mrs. Bush. There were eight of us in the room. Bill and I were nervous and twitchy, with Bill tugging at his bow tie and with me trying to take the

weight off my aching feet. Finally the First Couple came in. The two of them were greeted by Dr. and Mrs. Billington. Then they came over to greet us. It was an amazing moment.

I had come with a mission. Last year, while our son-in-law, Jon, was in University Hospital in Seattle dying of melanoma, an envelope arrived from the White House with a greeting and best wishes for Jon from his Commander-In-Chief. It's been framed since then and will be saved for Jon's son, Colt Stephen, but I wanted to personally thank President Bush for his kind gesture. Prior to the photo I managed to do just that without wrecking my mascara. Barely.

Then there was a photo—each of the four couples with the President and First Lady. After that we returned to the auditorium which was now full of people. We were led to the far side of the room where speakers and their guests were seated in the front two rows. Across the aisle the next four places were reserved for the Billingtons and for the President and First Lady.

After a few more minutes of pomp and circumstance, J. A. Jance, aka Judy Busk from Bisbee, Arizona, was sitting there listening while Laura Bush lavished kind words on each of the four speakers' works and announced as she went along that we would be reading from our various books. The more she spoke, the more I wanted to fall through the floor, because I knew I wouldn't be reading anything. But then it was time to walk up on the stage and start.

I'm hoping that we'll be able to get a copy of the clip and post it. Or at least provide links to it. It was an incredibly exciting moment, and I greeted them with Minnie Pearl's traditional opening. "Howdy, I'm just so proud to be here." Because I was. When Bill reminded me of that yesterday, he said he was astonished that I opened my speech that way,. It turns out, I was, too, and had completely blanked it out. "Did I really?" I said. All he could do was nod. Yes, I did, but then what can you expect from someone from Bisbee?

I went on to apologize to Mrs. Bush for making a liar out of her. I said wouldn't be reading from Justice Denied and explained exactly why—that my mother would have killed me if I used the Special Homicide Investigation Team's unfortunate acronym in front of the President of the United States. (City officials from Seattle take note: In the

future you're going to have a similar problem with the South Lake Union Trolley–
S.L.U.T.)

Then I went on to explain how two years ago, after years of accumulating literally tons of author copies in the attic of our home in Bellevue, we had put some of those to good use by working with a program at FedEx, one that shipped books off to our troops serving in Afghanistan and Iraq and to wounded soldiers being treated at Walter Reed Hospital.

I spoke about how some of those books fell into the hands of a wounded soldier at a hospital in Iraq, a guy named Cesar Flores. He had been injured when his HUMMVEE was blown apart by an IED. Cesar has since recovered from his injuries. Still deployed, he's now back at work in Iraq. I told the audience how Cesar and I have corresponded over the past several months. When I mentioned to him that I'd had a bad pathology report and would be having surgery for possible uterine cancer, he generously sent me his St. Michael's medal to give me strength and protection. (St Michael is the patron saint of paratroopers.) The medal he sent me which I wore to the gala, wasn't the one he had been given originally because that one was destroyed by the explosion that literally melted his HUMMVEE. The one I wore that night and the one I'm wearing now is the medal Cesar was awarded after he got out of the hospital and went back to work. The medal seems to be working well for me, too. My cancer was caught early and I've been told that no further treatment will be necessary other than the surgery I've already had.

I finished my talk by explaining how, on Monday of this week, Bill and I have a ten AM appointment to take books to Walter Reed Hospital where we'll have a chance to visit with some of our nation's heroes while autographing books and CDs for them and thanking them in person for their service.

By the time I sat down, my feet still hurt, but my knees were no longer knocking. After all four speakers finished their presentations, off we went to dinner—up the many stairs through the auditorium and up many more marble stairs to the mezzanine. As I made my way to the table, people stopped me and told me how much they had appreciated my remarks.

The dinner was wonderful although, through a fluke, Mrs. Billington and I, in our matching outfits, were seated at the same table. Fortunately, the man between us wore a red bow tie, so it looked like maybe we had done it on purpose.

The President and First Lady were seated at the next table over. After occasions like that, etiquette requires that the two of them leave first. On their way past, President Bush stopped at my table, took my hand and said, "Great speech."

It took my breath away. As we made our way out of the building to find a cab, my feet still hurt, but not that much. And when we got back to the hotel, I was so wound up that I couldn't sleep. It reminded me of Eliza in *My Fair Lady* when she's so excited that she could have "danced all night." Me, too.

Bill was in the same shape I was, and that wasn't a good thing since we had to be up and out for the White House breakfast the next morning. That was followed by a day on the mall, listening to fellow mystery writers in the "Thrillers and Mysteries Pavilion," speaking at my own session, and then signing books. By last night, when we came back to the hotel, I was too tired to put fingers to keyboard.

So there you have it. Pretty much the whole story. Today we're going to take the day off and go sight-seeing in Washington DC. I think we've earned it.

The National Book Festival

Monday, September 24, 2007

I'm honored to once again be appearing at the National Book Festival on the Mall in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, September 29 where I'm scheduled to do a presentation in the Mysteries and Thrillers Pavilion from 3:20 to 3:50 PM. That will be followed by a book signing session from 4 to 5 PM.

I'm always dazzled by the number of people who come to events like this dragging with them stacks of books to be signed. (Roll-aboard luggage often saves the day.) My readers have heard time and again that my corporate policy is to leave no book unsigned. That remains true. If I wrote it, I sign it.

However, in this instance, the Festival itself may have rules about the number of books that can be signed at any one time. If you have a whole wad of books to be signed (and I've written that many) please come prepared to wait until the end of the line if necessary. I won't be due to catch a plane afterwards, so we should be able to get them done.

T-Shirt Bonanza

Wednesday, September 19, 2007

A number of years ago, my fictional creation, J. P. Beaumont, left Seattle PD and went to work for a fictional Washington State Attorney General in a new unit called the Special Homicide Investigation Team. Only after the unit had been established and stationery had been properly ordered, printed, and put in place, did someone realize that those letters formed a very unfortunate acronym. And poor J.P. has been ducking S.H.I.T. jokes ever since.

Now to real life. For the last year or so the streets between Seattle's downtown area and South Lake Union have been torn up while they diverted traffic and installed tracks to create a new trolley line. Now they've named their baby--the South Lake Union Trolley.

Somehow the people in City Hall didn't notice the unfortunate acronym--S.L.U.T. Once city hall did notice, they tried valiantly to change their minds. But you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. A local T-shirt company had already noticed and now they're making a fortune in S.L.U.T. T-shirts.

I guess I should consider making and selling S.H.I.T. shirts, too.

Patriotism

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

I've been thinking about 9-11 this week. How could I not?

Six years ago, September 10 found me in Montreal doing a book signing for a convention of airport managers from around the world. My signing was from noon to two PM. When it was over, someone took me to the airport and dropped me off. Lots of flights were either delayed or canceled that day. There had been "weather" on the East Coast and a fire at LaGuardia Airport. I was relieved when my flight took off reasonably on time, headed for a connecting flight in Chicago that would take me home to Seattle.

When we reached Chicago, however, time to make that tight connection had pretty much disappeared. One other couple and I were hot-footing it through O'Hare Airport in hopes of making the Seattle flight. A man driving one of the passenger carts asked us where we were going. When we told him, he looked at his watch and said, "You'll never make it this way. Get on." So we did and he zipped us through the airport in short order. When we made it to the gate, all of the other passengers had already boarded the plane and the gate attendant was preparing to shut the doors.

That's how I made it home from Seattle on the last plane from Chicago on 9/10/2001-- through the kindness of a stranger. I told him thank you at the time. We all did, but we had no idea what a huge favor he had done for us.

The next morning my husband and I were due to leave for our annual vacation in Ashland, Oregon. Early September is when we usually come here to see plays, play golf, and have fun. That Tuesday, as we were packing to leave, someone called to say a plane had crashed into the Twin Towers. Mentally, I imagined the tail of some tiny airplane sticking out through one of the windows, but when I turned on the television set, it was immediately apparent that this wasn't a small plane. It was a big plane, and just then the second plane crashed into the other tower.

We watched what was going on in slack-jawed amazement. Six years ago was long before the vivid images of high definition TV reached our home. I remember sitting there and saying to my husband, "What are those things falling out of the building?" But of course, they weren't "things" at all. They were people, people leaping to their deaths to escape the conflagration above and below them.

Finally, at noon on that awful Tuesday, we decided that if we stayed home, glued to our TV sets, the terrorists had won. So we loaded our luggage into the car and drove here. We missed the play that first night. The second night the cast declared a moment of silence before the curtain went up. I think we probably skipped half our usual six play schedule that year. The comedies weren't funny, and the tragedies weren't nearly tragic enough. But we came here to Ashland anyway. We were part of not giving in. The world had changed, but we were holding close to those hard-won freedoms that make America America.

A lot has changed since then. Like it or not, we're a country at war. It turns out we were at war long before the towers collapsed--we just didn't know it. We weren't paying attention.

This week, lots of people have been reminding us that we must not forget what happened that day. The political divisiveness that seems to permeate everything around us makes us want to pull the covers over our head and wish the problems away.

One person who doesn't want 9-11 forgotten sent me a slide show--a series of 53 photos of what went on that day, from beginning to end. It starts with that clear blue sky and a single plume of smoke, the growing flames, the mushrooming cloud of smoke and debris and ends with the appalling wreckage. And carnage.

One photo in particular made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. It's the photo of a man--a man dressed in a suit--falling, falling, falling, in front of an expanse of white building. He got up that morning, put on his white shirt, his suit and tie and tasseled loafers, and went to work. And when the unthinkable happened he made a choice. He

didn't wait for the building to collapse around him. He didn't wait to be consumed by the smoke and fire. He chose to cast his fate to the winds--and onto the wings of the angels.

The people who fought back that day and drove their plane into the field in Pennsylvania are heroes. But so is that unknown man, the one plunging to his death in front of that wall of building.

I'm not posting those photos here. They would use up too much bandwidth. But I have a feeling there are lots of people out there who, like me, don't want to forget what happened that awful day. If you'd like to see the slide show for yourself, please send me a note. I'll be happy to forward it to you.

Damage Control

Thursday, September 6, 2007

I've just finished writing and doing the initial editing on the next Joanna Brady book.

The new baby FINALLY has a name: Damage Control. And now, I'm in the part of the writing process that most closely resembles postpartum depression. It's the time when I think I'll never be able to write another book, and that I'll never have another workable idea. In that regard, I apparently have a lot in common with my mystery-writing foremother, Agatha Christie. There's a passage in her autobiography that deals with the same malady.

So what am I doing? Having fun. This afternoon we're actually going to go see Harry Potter at IMAX in Seattle. After that I'm going actually go on VACATION. We're going to Ashland, Oregon, play golf, read books (other people's books), watch plays, visit a spa, and just generally have fun, so don't be too surprised if I'm short on posting the next little while. I've earned it.

While on vacation I will be doing one bit of work--participating in a B & N Book Club discussing *Justice Denied*. If you're interested in joining that process go to bn.com and check out the book club tab.

One housekeeping chore. When people click on Name, City, and State, they often don't include that information, and I need it so I can let you know if I'm coming to your area. Also, people often send me work-related e-mails. When it comes time to send out book notices, company spam detectors often kick out the notices and then you don't know when a book is going on sale. So, wherever possible, include an e-mail address where that won't happen. And as for your Earthlinkers. If there's any way you can pre-approve me to get through your spamblocker when you send me your information, it would be greatly appreciated so I could avoid having to type in all those pesky letters in order to respond.

Because I do respond.

Have fun while I'm gone. I intend to. All for now. Over and out

Dirty Laundry!

Saturday, September 1, 2007

Last December, just before Christmas, a storm blew through the Pacific Northwest, knocking down loads of very tall trees that took plenty of power lines with them. We were without power for four days and without telephone, cable, or Internet for thirteen. Our daughter was without power for nine days.

We managed to get by. Our house has three gas log fireplaces, and those were enough to take the edge off. And we have a gas range, so cooking was possible, too. When we had a big party, we celebrated by candlelight, but our son who was in charge of cooking prepared the food at our downtown Seattle condo and then brought it across the lake for us to eat.

As I said, we made it through, but the whole ordeal--too much togetherness and not enough light--left me with a permanent bee in my bonnet: WE WILL HAVE A GENERATOR.

So I've whined about this for months on end. It was my Top Pick on "Things to Do This Summer." Bill, in his "I am an engineer let me check all the details" mode. Did so. ATL--which, in our house, means at tedious length. Finally the decision was made. An acceptable generator was chosen and an installation team was hired to come install same. Which they did. This week. And when all was said and done, they field tested it, which is to say, they turned off the lights. In the time it took me to walk from the family room to the garage, the generator snapped to attention, switched itself on, and the lights came back like magic.

I was elated. I was thrilled. I was a happy camper. Then yesterday the bad news hit. When I tried to start the washer in the laundry room, NOTHING HAPPENED. Bill came in and did the engineering thing. Is the door closed properly? Yes. Is the cord plugged in? Yes. Those two questions pretty well cover my technical skill level. Then he got

something out of his tool chest and tested the line. Power was coming to the line. Something was wrong with the washer.

Today the repairman showed up from Sears. The mother board is toast which means that the surge protector must not have been working properly when the power came back on. It'll take ten days to get a new part. (Excuse me. How is that possible? FedEx works in 1 day from almost anywhere in the world!! Where is this mother board coming from?. Don't they have brains enough to have some of those in stock? etc., etc. etc. Oh, wait a minute. I haven't been taking my hormones. This is sounding suspiciously like a mood swing.)

But ten days? We weren't trying to wash clothes because we had ten days of spare underwear hanging around in our dresser drawers. So I called our daughter, whining, to see if we could come over and wash clothes.

"You know," she said, "you could always take your laundry down to the condo in Seattle to do it."

"Oh," I said. "I never even thought of that."

Her response? "I think you have too many houses."

Bill's response? "I think we're pathetic."

So here we sit in the condo with our undies splish-splashing in the washer. Tomorrow we'll bring over a load of colored clothing and do that, too. The ten days will go by in a flash.

A Side Dish???!!!!!

Tuesday, August 28, 2007

A number of weeks ago, a friend of ours was introduced to someone he had never met. When my name came up in the course of the conversation, she told him disdainfully, "Oh, I don't read her books. I don't like her."

Since she clearly didn't know me, our puzzled friend asked why. "Oh," she replied. "Years ago when her new husband's first wife was dying of cancer, I worked in the bank he used. J. A. Jance was just waiting in the wings to pick him off as soon as the first wife was out of the way."

Our friend, who knew this to be false, almost went ballistic. Anyone who has lived through the awful limbo of losing a spouse to cancer will understand that the idea is ludicrous. At the time Bill's wife was dying, he had two full-time jobs and three high-school and college aged children. He had neither the time nor the inclination to maintain a side-dish.

The real truth of the matter is that he and I met for the first time six months after his first wife's death and two and a half years after my first husband died. After realizing how much we had in common, we fell in love and married six months after that initial meeting. Was it a whirlwind romance? Absolutely. We met at a time when both of our lives and all of our dreams were in ashes. We were determined to go for the gold--and not waste any time in the process.

It's shocking to realize that for the entire twenty-three years we've been married, someone I don't even know has been spreading this kind of vicious gossip about us to anyone who would stand still long enough to listen. In a way, I suppose that's one of the prices of celebrity. Your life and your actions become the subject of public scrutiny.

Years ago, after hosting a series of charity dinners at our home in Bellevue, we discovered that a tiny horsehair basket, one of my Tohono O'odham treasures, was missing from its place of honor on our living room mantel. Any number of people had

been through our home in the weeks preceding our noticing that the basket had disappeared. To this day we have no idea who was responsible for the theft, but I know enough about the mystical qualities of those Native American treasures to know that no good came to the person who walked off with it.

And I think--no, I BELIEVE--that the same thing is true here. No good will come to that unidentified woman so intent on ruining my husband's and my reputations. Eventually she will reap what she has sown--and deservedly so.

August Celebrations

Friday, August 24, 2007

This morning I'm thinking about my parents. This would have been their 71st wedding anniversary. They grew up in small Midwest farming towns that were ten miles apart. My father was two years younger than my mother. According to family legend, he first came courting my mother's younger sister, Toots, but was told by their father, "Norman, in this house we eat the old bread first." And so he ended up with the older sister, Evie, instead.

When they went about setting their wedding date, my mother was determined not to "rob the cradle." My father turned 20 on the 21st of August, they married on the 24th, and my mother turned 22 on the 30th. Growing up I remember the end of August always came with a flurry of celebrations.

In choosing her wedding bouquet, my mother asked my dad what his favorite flower was. His immediate answer? "Snapdragons." So that's what she carried down the aisle--a bouquet of snapdragons. After the wedding he made the mistake of asking what kind of flowers those were. It turns out snapdragons were the only flower he could think of when she asked the question.

They were married for almost 68 years before my father succumbed to a stroke. My mother, annoyed at being left behind, lasted a few short years after he was gone, but her fervent wish was to join him.

Together they raised seven hardworking kids who all have kids and mostly grand kids, too. They worked together through good times and bad, the worst of the bad coming seven years ago when my younger brother, Jim, apparently in good health, died from an undiagnosed heart ailment. Losing him took the wind out of the folks' sails, and they never quite bounced back from that tragedy.

Growing up, we kids knew the two of them presented an absolutely united front. We were never able to play one of them against the other. What one of them said, went. If one said NO, the other backed that NO to the hilt.

With both of those old birds gone now, I can't wish them a Happy Anniversary today and send them a sappy card, but what I can say is this: I salute you Norman and Evie. You set a wonderful example.

Universal Health Care?

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

For those who think universal government sponsored health care is the answer to all our nation's medical ills, let us consider the state of . . . toilets.

Toilets in this country used to work. You pressed the handle and it, well . . . flushed. I don't know the exact gallon count per flush, and I don't doubt that there was some overkill involved. I do know that, in order to preserve water when I was living on a ranch in the Arizona desert in the sixties, we added a brick to the flushing tank to reduce the amount of water needed to fill the tank without really affecting the way the mechanism actually worked. Because it still did--work, that is.

But then the government involved itself and things went, if you'll pardon the expression, down the toilet. Or rather, they didn't. Once government-mandated low-flow toilets became the law of the land, we were no longer flushed with success, as it were. What once would have taken one MIGHTY flush, now requires three or four and as often as not, at least one of those has to be plunger-assisted.

So when you're thinking that government is the answer to everything that ails us, you might want to consider the state of your lowly water closet and, as my mother would have said, think again.

Tour Done Tomorrow, Book Done Today!

Thursday, August 16, 2007

By now people are probably thinking I've fallen off the edge of the earth. Not quite. I've been finishing a book, and when I get on the downhill side of a book--the part I call the 'banana peel'--it's hard to think of anything else. Make that impossible. The book and the characters tend to go with me wherever I go, waking and sleeping. As a consequence, the blog has taken a back seat.

So last night I finished. And sent the manuscript to New York. In the old days, finishing a book required having my husband create a "master document." That process alone was usually good for several temper tantrums on both our parts. Then we had to print it. On a "Daisy Wheel printer, this amounted to a three hour ordeal complete with paper jams too numerous to mention. And even more temper tantrums. When it was time for what our kids called "the computer wars," they all went into hiding. Even the dogs were smart enough to make themselves scarce. After that it was time for the obligatory visit to FedEx.

But that was then. This is now. It's wonderful that the world of technology has evolved to a point to where I can type my editor's name into the "send to" section of my e-mail form, attach the file--an expanded document containing the entire book--and hit press send. It was sitting there waiting when my editor came into her office this morning.

I will not tell you the name of this book. The name it was given originally isn't grabbing me right this minute, and it doesn't really apply to the book as written. So a name change may be coming. Whatever the book ends up being called, it is the next Joanna Brady book and it's due out next summer.

It's also in the can. So hip, hip, hooray, and where oh where is my Harry Potter now that I'm good to go?

Justice Denied Tour Episode 6

Wednesday, August 8, 2007

We're getting on toward the end of the tour. It's been great, but I'm getting tired. Last night, when I was checking my spam file, there was a note from a fan. Unfortunately, instead of punching the "This is not spam" button, I deleted it. And I can't get it back.

Someone else sent me an e-mail to which I responded, but my e-mail was kicked out by her spam detection and the link she gave me to by-pass the spam-blocker didn't work.

So if you've sent me a note and didn't receive a reply in the last few days, you should maybe try again. The Internet does have a few challenges. Why are book tours tiring? Let's see. Last night there was a full house signing. This morning I had to be at a live TV interview at 6:30 dressed, make up on, and with my hair washed and ironed. There'll be a taped radio interview this afternoon followed by another hopefully packed house tonight. There's a rhythm to doing this stuff day after day, but it does tend to take it out of you.

Our time in Arizona has been interesting. In Tucson the rain was amazing--about two inches in a little over two hours. And the waterfalls near Bisbee on Sunday were downright spectacular. Phoenix is hot, but it's August. What were we expecting? Tomorrow we'll be back home in Seattle. With the tour winding down, it'll be time to go back to work at the other part of my job--actual writing.

Again, thanks for your very kind support which put *Beaumont* on the NYTimes list at number 8. It's been gratifying to meet people out on tour and to hear what they think of my books in general and of *Justice Denied* in particular. I'm lucky to have fans who are willing to read about more than one character.

Oops. I'd better sign off. Time to go to that next taping.

Justice Denied Tour Episode 5

Monday, August 6, 2007

One of the things that makes being a writer rewarding is hearing from readers who share how their lives connect with my stories. This morning brought me an e-mail from a woman who has found the Beaumont books to be a springboard to memories of growing up in Seattle and eating at the Doghouse.

And last week a man shared with me that reading about Beau's struggle with alcohol had helped him make it through ten years of sobriety.

And yesterday, in Bisbee, a female soldier just back from Iraq told me how much reading the Joanna Brady books had meant to her when she was far from home. Two years ago, an organization, working in conjunction with FedEx, offered to ship books to the troops. For years boxes of "author copy" books had been accumulating in our attic, and Bill was worried that the slightest tweak of an earthquake might send them crashing through the ceiling. So we brought them down from storage, unpacked them long enough to autograph them, and shipped them off. For the men and women who are keeping us safe to live and work here at home, it seemed like the least we could do.

Which brings me to my new friend, Cesar Flores, who is serving in Iraq. He wrote to me several weeks ago and told me how he first met my books while he was in a hospital in Iraq recovering from injuries received after his HUMMVEE blown up by an IED.

Thankfully, he's fully recovered now, but he's having to work at headquarters while he waits for a replacement rifle to arrive. (His original one was melted in the blast.) He's stuck doing paperwork for the time being and missing being out on patrol with his guys.

I've corresponded with him several times now. The other day he sent me a photo of the vehicle in which he was riding. If you examine the accompanying hunk of melted metal, you'll be as astonished as I was that no one died in the incident. Clearly, there was a guardian angel doing a ride-along in that vehicle.

Cesar sent me a picture of him, too, a handsome young man wearing battle fatigues. I think of him daily. And of James, my nephew's son, an eighteen year old Marine also serving in Iraq.

We have much to be grateful for in this country, but these fine young men and women are right at the top of my list. Stay safe Cesar and James. See you when you get home.

Justice Denied Tour Episode 4

Saturday, August 4, 2007

It's Saturday. We're flying between Michigan and Tucson. Bouncing from one time zone to another is hazardous to my mental condition. By the time the tour is over, I'm on no known time zone.

Yesterday we were in Petoskey, Michigan where people came from as far as four hours away to attend the event. One of them, a lady from my mailing list, brought all 36 backlist books to be signed. And they were.

The day before yesterday, in Milwaukee, an 84 year-old fan came by bus from Madison--two hours each way--and from the bus station to the book store by taxi to see me. She said it was the first time she had ever bought one of my books. Always before she's read library copies.

In Silverdale, a lady told me that she'd been given my book of poetry, *After the Fire*, by her Al-Anon sponsor and that, when she left her marriage with only what would fit in her car, that book and her other J.A. Jance books went along.

In Spokane a man handed me his AA ten-year token and asked me to hold it for a moment while he told me that J.P. and I had helped him get sober.

Yes, going on tour is hard work. And occasionally I'm a little grouchy. (After that fall in Minneapolis where carrying my purse sent my back into spasms and Bill had to carry my purse, we were BOTH grouchy!)

But meeting my fans and hearing their stories is a wonderful blessing. It's part of what Bill calls the psychological income that goes with my job. I thrive on it, and eventually it gets me back in front of the computer finishing the next book so there can be more of same.

Justice Denied Tour Episode 3

Thursday, August 2, 2007

Even in the wilds of Bisbee, Arizona, a place that had no bookstores when I was growing up, the New York Times Bestseller list still resonated. It may not have been printed in the Bisbee Daily Review, but it showed up in the Tucson and Phoenix papers that were delivered in town.

For a girl who wanted to be a writer when she grew up, that list was a holy grail-- something to be sought after.

And so, it's particularly gratifying to have Justice Denied debut at #8 on the list. In the top ten. It's a dream come true. But it's also a long-term dream. It didn't happen overnight. Justice Denied is Beaumont number EIGHTEEN!!!! It's book number THIRTY-SIX!!!

Beau is the "old guy." He's not new. He's not flashy. But people like him. I like him. And it looks like lots of other people like him, too.

Something like this doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens because the publisher pushes the book and so do the stores. It also happens because people go to stores and vote with their wallets.

Thank you. Number eight with number eighteen is feeling might nice this morning.

Justice Denied Tour Episode 2

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

So we arrive in Minneapolis. Having ridden on the Jet in splendid comfort, we are comfortable and cool. We take The Babe's directions, except the exit the GPS directs us to is closed due to construction. We take another exit and, eventually, arrive in the near vicinity of the hotel. Except you can't get here from there. The GPS sent us down 6th, but directly in front of the hotel there's no way to turn in. There's a double yellow line (which we finally crossed) only to find ourselves in a bus only zone. So they directed us around the corner to the valet stand and doorman/bellman half a block away.

By then, having listened to Bill GRUMBLE, GRUMBLE, GRUMBLE, I am fit to be tied. So I snarl at the valet parkers. I snarl at the doorman. I snarl at the bellman.

So we have lunch. And then it's time to go to Uncle Hugo's for the stock signing. I take my computer along because we're apparently going to have an hour or so between signings. As we leave the hotel lobby, we have to go down a flight of about ten granite stairs. On the edge of each stair is a little metal ridge to keep people's roll-aboard luggage from chipping the granite.

So, I'm guessing you already have guessed what's coming.

Bill starts down the stairs ahead of me, pushing his computer case with The Babe, our GPS, inside it. I start down the stairs with my computer (the one that, after this morning's flight now contains 90% of the next Joanna Brady book in it) in one hand and grabbing the stair rail in the other. (I may be a former blonde, but I'm not so dumb that I don't hold on to stairway banisters for dear life.)

I take one step. The smooth sole of my sandal, slides across the metal rail on the edge of the step and I can feel myself start to tumble. I give a little shout. "I'm falling." Bill turns leaves his computer long enough to reach for me. I'm falling. I'm grabbing for the

rail, not strong enough to stop the fall, but slowing it, and--at the same time--hanging onto the computer for dear life. Bill manages to slow me down, but I'm a tumbling tumbleweed. He can't stop me, but he puts me in slow enough motion that the doorman leaves his post at the door, leaps up several steps in a single bound, and catches me three steps into what would otherwise have been a VERY BAD FALL!!!! He is a black man named Boudwin, the same man I had growled at earlier. When we both come to rest, his eyes are HUGE! He must feel as though he has kept a giant sequoia from falling.

I am very grateful. I'm glad he didn't say, "There goes that bitch; let's see how far she'll fall." I give him a big tip. I shake his hand and say thank you. Bill shakes his hand and says thank you.

I have two gigantic bruises, one on each leg. The one that is big doesn't hurt. The one that is smaller is on the bone of my shin. It hurts like hell. My left shoulder hurts. Bill had to carry my purse down to dinner because when I put it on my other shoulder, my back went into a spasm.

But the truth is, it could have been much worse. Especially if I had dropped the computer. Thank God for doormen.

Justice Denied Tour Episode 1

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Blogging and being on a book tour are mostly counter-indicated, but this one pushed my hot button.

For the last several weeks, the Pacific Northwest has been horrified by the case of Zina Linnik, a twelve-year old girl who was kidnapped from the street outside her home, raped, and murdered. The man arrested in this case is a convicted sex offender who had been through a counseling program and was thought to be unlikely to reoffend. He has been linked to the previously unsolved rape of another Tacoma girl, an eleven year old who did survive, and once he was arrested, another young girl came forward. During a family crisis, her mother, with no knowledge that the guy was a convicted sex offender, had sent her to live with the same man. While she was in his "care," she was raped countless times. Not only that, this lowlife is under investigation in several other unsolved cases as well.

So what does all this have to do with the book tour?

Last night my husband and I were in Silverdale for the Barnes and Noble signing. Our daughter and son-in-law and our two granddaughters live there, and they came to the store as well. While I was signing books prior to the event, Grandpa was charged with purchasing books for the granddaughters.

When the signing was over (and it was a great signing) and we got in the car to leave, Bill said, "Cindy ended up buying the girls the books."

"How come?" I asked.

"Because I had to come leave the kids section."

And then he went on and told me the story. There were two other children in the children's section of the store--an eight year old boy and a five year old girl whose parents had left them there with strict orders not to leave that section. The little girl was blond and cute and she kept telling Bill he "looked like grandpa" (this is true) and would he "please read" to her.

But then she needed to go to the bathroom. Desperately. And her brother said he wasn't allowed to leave the section. He finally begged Cindy to take her and eventually, reluctantly, she did.

But this idea that those kids were left alone and vulnerable in such a public place left Bill feeling sick. Once he told me about it, I felt the same way--sick.

In view of what's on the news, how can the parents be so irresponsible and completely OBLIVIOUS? The two kids, both of them, were smart, cute, polite, well-behaved and compliant. And compliant kids are the most at risk in situations like that. They're the ones who will what any passing grownup tells them to do. As the Big Bad Wolf would say, "All the better to get you to do what I want!"

Last night did not turn into a tragedy. It could have. Had those children encountered any number of other people, one or the other of them could have been long gone before the parents woke up and came looking for them.

Please. I love bookstores. And I love the idea that children can come there and browse, but bookstores are not licensed daycare facilities. Sales clerks are there to handle sales not to serve as free babysitters while their parents sip lattes in Starbucks or read in another section.

Parents, pay attention. If the street outside Zina Linnik's home wasn't safe, neither is the children's section of your local bookstore.



Hasselbeck Photo

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Several of you have written about the Matt Hasselbeck piece that was posted earlier. My daughter brought over one of the photos from that day, and here it is.

Tomorrow is opening day for Justice Denied. I must confess I have my usual case of opening night jitters. Thirty-six books into the process, having a book come out still makes me worry. Of course, showing up three days after the Harry Potter blockbuster (8.3 million books in 24 hours!!) also makes me feel a bit like one of Cinderella's ugly stepsisters, but there you are.

As for J.K. Rowling? She's done more for reading for pleasure on this planet than any other one person ever has. Every author who writes for a living should be grateful. I know I am.

Not Hanging Out A Shingle

Sunday, July 22, 2007

In the past two months, two different friends in the "over sixty" set have been stricken with shingles, a debilitating rerun of childhood cases of chickenpox. Unlike the childhood version, however, this one comes with searing pain and long term nerve involvement. Treatment is available, but only if the problem is properly diagnosed so corrective anti-viral meds can be administered within three days of onset. And since shingles can masquerade as any number of other ailments, prompt diagnosis and treatment seldom happens.

With our friends' dire situations fresh in our minds, we went in for our annual physicals. By the end of the appointments, our doctor had given us a prescription for shingles vaccine. I have to admit, I was a little put off by a number of things. One is price. \$220 per person, and not covered by insurance. Lack of availability. You can't get this stuff everywhere. It's not necessarily available at your neighborhood pharmacy. I thought the drug company was just being difficult, but the reality is, the vaccine is a live virus and can only be out of the freezer for thirty minutes prior to being administered--by injection.

In order to get the shot, you have to be over sixty. And you can't have some allergies.

So this week we did it. We went to a doctor who keeps the vaccine on hand, an internist near our primary physician. You don't have to have an appointment in advance, but it's a good idea to make sure they have it available. With that particular office, you needed to bring either cash or check because they don't take credit cards.

The nurse warned us that there could be muscle pain afterward, but we had none at all.

My friend, Mary, was told about the vaccine before she came down with shingles, but because it was hard to get, she didn't go to the trouble of tracking it down. Now she's sorry she didn't.

So here I am urging you to not make that same mistake. Ask your doctor. Find out about the vaccine, whether or not its appropriate for you, and then make it your business to do what needs to be done.

We have Mary and Wally to thank for getting us off the dime. I hope they do the same for you.

Thanks to Matt Hasselbeck

Saturday, July 21, 2007

At this time last year, things were pretty tough around here. Our son-in-law, Jon, was in the University of Washington Hospital fighting through the last few months of his nine year battle with melanoma. Jon was in the Coast Guard at the time he was first diagnosed and continued to work in and for the Coast Guard until he was no longer able to do so.

Sometime during that long difficult time, a person whose name I don't know--a person with connections to both the Coasties and to the Seattle Seahawks--made arrangements for Seahawk quarterback, Matt Hasselbeck, to come visit Jon in his hospital room. It was supposed to be a half-hour photo op type visit. He stayed for two hours. He brought along an autographed football and a pair of shoes--cleats--for Jon's son Colt to "grow into." There were pictures. Pictures of Matt with Jon, with Colt, with our daughter, Jeanne T., and with hospital nurses and doctors as well. And there was talking--guy to guy talking about sports, about life, and also about faith. Even from the waiting room across the hall, it was a very moving thing to witness. Once Matt left, Jon was on a high that had nothing to do with his pain meds. In a very dark time, that visit was a vivid splash of light.

Jon died August 11, 2006. The intervening year has been tough for Jeanne T and Colt. Maybe not for Colt, so much. He has no concept of what he lost. Jeanne T. has been wandering in the wilderness, trying to make sense of a world without her soulmate.

Last week she went to Fort Lewis to shop at the PX. (Shopping on base is one way to stretch her single-parent budget.) When she got there she saw a sign that in half an hour Matt Hasselbeck would be appearing there--as he and some of the other Seahawks do--to show their support for the troops and to have their photos taken with service members and their families. Seeing that the event was due to start soon, JTJ took Colt and got in line. The people in charge of the line said "One minute photo op only." And JTJ was prepared to abide by that.

When she reached the head of the line and stepped forward, she walked up to Matt and said, "I don't know if you remember me, but. . ."

"Of course, I remember you!" Matt Hasselbeck said. "You've cut your hair. And look how big your baby is!"

She stayed a bit over her one minute. She told Matt that meeting him was the highlight of Jon's last summer. Matt returned, "Meeting Jon was the highlight of mine." The people in line, realizing something special was happening, moved back and let it happen. So did Matt's handlers.

What he said and what he did was something more than just being "on" for a personal appearance. It was being "present." He didn't just phone it in.

It was a wonderful gift from a great guy to someone who is still struggling with her grief, and JTJ's mother has something important to say to Matt Hasselbeck:

"Thank you."

If You Can't Say Something Nice . . .

Monday, July 16, 2007

This spring, on a visit to Cornwall, I had the pleasure of visiting Fowey, the lovely seaside village Daphne du Maurier, one of my favorite writers, called home. As I wandered the steep winding streets and meandered past quaint old buildings,



seemingly unchanged for centuries, it struck me that it was probably not all that different from when Daphne lived and worked there. And visiting the small museum devoted to her work made me glad that she was remembered--and valued.

This week I received an e-mail from a fan who had visited my home town of Bisbee, Arizona, for many of the same reasons I visited Fowey. He was interested in seeing how accurately the surroundings were depicted in my books, and he was hoping to catch a glimpse of where I go when I'm looking for inspiration. (Who wouldn't be inspired by the treacherous curves on "Youngblood Hill?")

In his e-mail to me, my fan said that, in the course of his visit, he thought he'd met the original "Marliss Shackelford." People who have read my Joanna Brady books already know this isn't a compliment. It seems that he had mentioned to one of the museum volunteers that I was his favorite author. "Well," she replied, "J. A. Jance does get published, but it certainly isn't literature." Obviously this is someone who doesn't remember Thumper's father's very cogent advice: If you can't say something nice, etc., etc., etc.

Boy, howdy! Did that ever put me in my place! And here I was walking around with a full blown case of delusions of literary grandeur!

The truth is, I've always said I write the kinds of books you can find "in better bus depots everywhere." No, wait. When I first started saying that, airports weren't the kinds of three hour ordeals they are now. At the moment I believe airports do qualify as "better bus depots everywhere."

But make no mistake. I don't write literature. I simply tell stories. And the fact that some people like the kinds of stories I tell is truly wonderful.

In actual fact, I've heard comments of this ilk for as long as I've been writing what the New York Times once referred to as my "funny little books." I've sat with a smile plastered on my face at book signings and at book clubs where well-meaning people--serious minded people--have felt constrained to tell me, "Oh, I don't read murder mysteries." I always wonder why they don't? Probably because they don't give themselves permission to read for fun.

I believe I've mentioned before in this blog that it's not a good idea to make writers mad because we have our own peculiar ways of getting even. If you're reading *Dead Wrong* about now, you'll know exactly what I mean when you encounter the section that deals with Butch's mother. It turns out Margaret Leona Dixon doesn't have much use for murder mysteries, either.

So here's fair warning. A lady from the museum could very well turn up as a character in my next book, preferably as a victim or even as a perpetrator. No, wait. I don't need to do that. My fan was right. Marliss Shackelford is already there. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Summer Schedule

Saturday, July 14, 2007

With the exception of a late-breaking signing in Port Angeles, Washington, the signing schedule for Justice Denied is now posted on the web site. Thank you for your patience. While I've been trying to finish one book, I've been looking at this tour coming toward me like a freight train, and it's been very difficult to keep it all together.

My webmaster has done his best to get the schedule posted in a way that people should be able to print it. If that proves to be an elusive hope, please contact me at jajance@aol.com. We have a PDF version of the schedule that I can send out. You should be able to open it in Word, WordPerfect, Adobe, and Preview. If you don't have access to those, I give up. I'm an ex-blonde, by the way, and this technical stuff is beyond me.

The tour is coming. I can't be every this time. And I can't be everywhere next time. If I'm not coming to a bookstore near you, please consider contacting one of the stores where I am going. They'll be more than happy to have me sign books to your specifications and then ship it to you. In other words, there's more than one way to get autographed books.

As for Joanna? As of today, I'm now 79.49 % done with Drop Dead, but who's counting? I am, actually. My goal for today was to hit 80%. I missed that, but not by much.

Enjoy your summer.

JAJ

Delayed Gratification

Thursday, July 12, 2007

Now that I've mentioned I'm working on another Joanna Brady book, people are writing to ask when will it be out. Unfortunately, it's not quite as simple as going down to Kinkos and running off a few copies. Writing books is a study in deferred gratification. So here's how it works.

I write the book. From beginning to end. I do not outline. I do not skip around writing scenes hither and yon and then stringing them together at a later time. I start with someone dead and write until I know who did it--a distance of 95,000 to 100,000 words. All written one at a time on my Toshiba Satellite laptop. In Wordperfect. Yes, I know it's a dinosaur word processing program, but it's a dinosaur that works.

As I work, I count the words so I know how many words I've used and how many I have left. And when I finish each chapter, I print it so it can be read by someone else--usually my husband--and proofed. There are typos that are invisible on screen that jump out at you when it's in hard copy.

Sometimes, somewhere along the way, I'll run into a spot where the book refuses to move forward. Usually that means I have a motivation problem of some kind. Those writing blockades usually result in a number of sleepless nights as I do what I call "wrestling with the devil" and preparing to make the most difficult change any writer is required to make--changing my mind.

When the book is finished, I create a master document and print the whole thing. Double spaced. It's read again, from beginning to end and proofed again. Once whatever resulting changes are made, I e-mail the document to my editor in New York. Time passes. Sometimes days. Sometimes minutes. Then the manuscript returns with an editorial letter, outlining the changes the editor believes are necessary to improve the book. I make the changes, usually in electronic form, and send it back. When the

editor says it's okay, I get paid a portion of the contractual advance, the D & A--Delivery and Acceptance.

The next time I see the manuscript, it's a paper file filled with Post-it notes and red pencil notations. Think of your worst English teacher ever. That is called copy-editing. I go over the manuscript again, from beginning to end. It returns to New York.

Time passes. Then come the galley proofs. This is after the manuscript has been typeset but before it is printed. Once again, I have to go over the manuscript from beginning to end, word for word, looking for typos, errors in continuity, whatever. By this time I'm usually so tired of the story that I hate it with an abiding passion.

More time passes. A tour is set up. In terms of writing, by the time the current book is being published, I'm one or more books beyond that in terms of actual writing. So before the book goes on sale, I have to have someone else (usually one of my daughters) read the book and discuss it with me to get me back in touch with the story I'm supposed to be able to go out and discuss in public. When the book is published, another little piece of the advance shows up. The same thing happens a year later when the paperback is published.

This whole process takes a year to eighteen months. Minimum. The Joanna Brady book I'm working on right now isn't due to be published until July of next year.

Please remember, patience is a virtue.

Working, Working, Working

Saturday, July 7, 2007

"When are you going to update your blog?" That question has turned up several times in e-mails and most recently in a conversation with my daughter.

The truth is, with deadlines coming from all directions--a book to finish, galleys to proof, and announcements to send--all before the tour starts on July 24, I'm having a bit of an anxiety attack here. How will it all get done?

On the other hand, it's summer here. Seattle summer. Which means the weather is in the eighties to low nineties, the pool is lovely, and there are serious temptations out there--golf and grandchildren. Wait a minute. Speaking of temptations, Harry Potter is coming this week, too. A movie one week and a book the next. Yes, I'm an unapologetic J. K. Rowling fan.

And what am I going to blog about? I spend much of each day--and a good part of each night--agonizing about people who don't exist. I have to worry about Joanna Brady and Butch Dixon along with their pretend kids, dogs, relatives, and assorted acquaintances. What will they say, think, and do? And in a little over two weeks, I'll be out in public talking about J. P. Beaumont and Mel Soames and their set of non-existent people. Oh, and wait. That set of galley proofs? Those are for the next Ali Reynolds book.

So please be patient. The next two weeks are going to be brutal--enough so that I'm looking forward to going on tour. That sounds like light duty.

Dreams and Formula One

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Twenty two years ago today, the world of automobile racing walked into my life in the guise of a man, a recent widower, who was attending the same widowed retreat I was. Over time (not enough, according to some of our friends) we fell in love and got married.

Gradually I learned that, although Bill wasn't wild about sports in general, he did have an abiding interest in automobile racing. For years his only required sports viewing activity was watching the Indy 500 once a year on Memorial Day. For years he spoke longingly about maybe one day having a chance to see a race in person. And so, in 1996, we did just that. We kicked over the traces and drove to Indianapolis to see the race.

It turns out, that particular race was a bit of a disappointment. The local weather reports were predicting rain. When I saw that our seats were high in the grandstand and under a cover, I figured there wouldn't be a problem. Wrong! When the weather reports proved to be correct and the rain poured down, the roof protected us to begin with. Unfortunately, there was a broken gutter overhead as well, and when the water collected on the roof in sufficient quantities, it flooded down on us in a cascade worthy of Snoqualmie Falls.

We didn't stay around long enough for them to cancel that day's race which they subsequently did. Making our soggy way back to the bus, we found it locked, so we caught a cab and made our way back to the hotel to dry out.

The next day there were far fewer people in attendance and we found seats that weren't under the broken gutter, but that day, too, the race was canceled on account of more rain. On the third day, when they finally ran the twice postponed race, there were so few people at the racetrack that they threw open the gates to any and all. We watched the race that year and enjoyed it, but I'm afraid, as far as I was concerned, the blush was off the rose.

Over the next several years, Bill's interest, too, seemed to wane, as the world of racing was rent apart by a civil war between the IRL (Indy Racing League) and the CART people. Don't even ask me what CART stands for. I don't know. What I do know a fierce battle was enjoined between the two sides. From my point of view, I couldn't see what all the fuss was about. After all, this was a race where the drivers went endlessly around and around a tight little oval, stopping whenever they seemed to feel like it, and pulling up stakes completely if a cloud showed up on the horizon.

So then Bill started talking equally longingly about Formula 1 and Monaco. He was apparently speaking some kind of foreign language, but I was game. So two years ago, for his 65th birthday, I took him to Monte Carlo for the Grand Prix. We stood on the deck of the Fairmont Hotel and watch the cars come racing through the narrow streets of Monaco, roaring around the 90 degree turn, down a hill, around a U-shaped curve, and up another hill before they turned again to disappear into the tunnel. It was exciting. It was loud. It was a mystery to me, but somehow I had caught the bug.

So since then, I've become a Formula 1 fan, too, watching TIVOed races from Speed Vision. I've been fascinated by the complicated layout of the courses. No plain Jane oval courses for Formula 1. I've learned about the points system for the drivers and for the constructors both. I've come to have a nodding acquaintance with the teams and the various drivers. And, based on my Indy 500 experience, I have a lot of respect for races that move forward rain or shine. Racing in the blinding rain at 200 plus miles an hour is something those guys do.

This year, I along with countless other Formula 1 fans, have been enthralled by the emergence a young black driver from the UK, twenty-two year old Lewis Hamilton. He emerged from being a back-up driver to being hired by Mercedes McClaren to be the teammate--and assumed second banana to-- two-time world champion Fernando Alonzo. Except that isn't how Lewis plays the game. In the first seven races of his career, he's been on the winner's podium each and every time. In the last two races, he's won the pole and the race as well, going toe-to-toe with Fernando.

What I like about Lewis is his gentlemanly demeanor--an auto racing version of Tiger Woods. He's smart but he's also careful--in his words and in his driving. And I suspect that all over the world there are little black kids who are looking at what he's done and thinking, "Hey, maybe I could do that, too."

Because that's what Lewis did. He decided when he was six years old that he was going to be a Formula 1 driver, and I've heard him, in tearful podium comments, speaking about the miracle of living his dream.

I'm getting to live my dream, too. I was seven when I made up my mind that someday I was going to be a writer.

There are plenty of people in the world who will be more than happy to tell you that dreams don't come true. Lewis Hamilton and, on a much smaller scale, J. A. Jance, are here to tell you those people are wrong. Dreams do come true.

The Sounds of Silence

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

Some of you may have noticed the sounds of silence in the blog end of the world. Joanna Brady readers will be happy to know that I'm up to my eyeballs in the next book about her. When the characters are doing interesting stuff in the book, it's hard to turn away long enough to write something else. Anything else.

In the next few days I'm doing several speaking engagements. The first one, tonight, will be for an organization called Seattle Freelances. This is a long-established group for writers that has been around since Betty MacDonald first published "The Egg and I." When I sold my first two Beaumont books in 1984, I was invited to come speak at a Freelances meeting by the man who was then president, Dick Sawyer. We remained friends with Dick and his wife, Cynthia (who shared our wedding day and our reception) for the next many years. So, in a way, going back to Seattle Freelances tonight will be a lot like going home.

On Thursday I'll be doing an event in Olympia for the American Cancer Society. People who have read this blog before know that our family's involvement with cancer goes wide and deep. I know of at least one fan who is coming to that event with all her books to be signed. I warned her that she'll probably need to wait until the end of the line, but my corporate policy is to leave no book unsigned. If I wrote it; I sign it. Period.

Then, on Friday morning, I'll be the commencement speaker for University of Washington-Tacoma. I'm hoping I can offer those folks something inspirational that will be a welcome addition to their already very special day. I'm honored to have been asked.

So that's where I am. We're back home in Seattle. The backyard swimming pool had an issue the day after we got home. And since it's summer, we're having a hard time getting someone to come in and fix it. But it will be done, hopefully sometime soon. Summer doesn't last all that long in Seattle, and we don't want to waste any of it.

This morning, Jennifer McKinney of Channel 12, the Tucson government access channel, sent us a copy of the latest edition of a video magazine, Sonoran Style. We're posting the whole program. The first segment deals with a reenactment of a Civil War battle that occurred at Picacho Peak. (Cloud Stopper Mountain in the Walker Family books.) The next segment features the Arizona Inn in Tucson. The Inn has several connections to my life. For one, I attended Greenway School in Bisbee, Arizona. The school was named for Jack Greenway whose widow, Isabella, started the Arizona Inn. And Isabella Greenway's granddaughter, Isabella Breasted, is a good friend of mine from my days at the University of Arizona.

The third segment is mine. It was filmed before, during, and after the Web of Evil book signing at Atalanta, Bisbee Arizona's sole bookstore. If you're someone who has always wanted to attend a book signing and haven't been able to, this is as close as you'll get without being there in person. And without having to stand in line.

The fourth segment features cowboy poet, Baxter Black. Until I saw the program, I didn't know he lived near Benson (inside Joanna Brady's Cochise County.)

So watch it all. Enjoy it all. I'll get back to blogging when I finish paying attention to Joanna.

Judgement Day?

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

A year ago, on the way home from a family dinner outing, we witnessed a domestic violence incident. A red van stopped in the roadway ahead of us, blocking our lane. A man stepped out of the passenger side of the vehicle. He was carrying a young child of some kind. For a moment or two, he walked along in the ditch with the van driving along beside him. Then, the van stopped. The man climbed back into the vehicle. While still holding the baby in one arm, he proceeded to land several head-jarring punches on the woman who was driving.

Concerned about the woman's safety to say nothing of the child's, we drove to the nearest available parking spot, called 9-1-1, and summoned the cops. Uniformed officers turned up at our house an hour or so later. They told us that the perpetrator had been apprehended, and they took statements from both Bill and me about what we had witnessed.

In the intervening months we've been served with papers several times, requiring us to come testify. Each time the proceedings have been delayed for one reason or another. Tomorrow we are once again required to appear. We've been told to expect a jury trial.

In the intervening months, the details have gone a bit fuzzy around the edges. I'm sure this isn't the first incident of domestic violence that occurred in that particular family, and I doubt it will be the last. We will appear tomorrow as required and we will do our bit to see that justice is served.

Unfortunately, there's a part of me that knows that the poor innocent babe in arms who witnessed that vicious attack is still living in a very dangerous environment.

It made my heart hurt at the time it happened. It makes my heart hurt still.

Bay Vista...or Belletown Terrace???

Friday, May 18, 2007



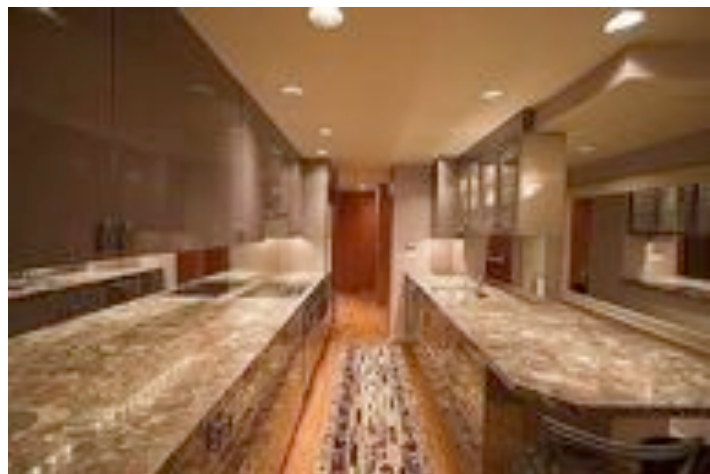
Several years ago, right in middle of one of the final episodes of that year's version of "24", a real estate agent called with the news that someone wanted to buy our home in Bellevue--even though it wasn't listed at the time. And they made us a very good offer, so we did the only reasonable thing. We sold.

Because we were leaving the country for several weeks during the deal-closing process, we needed to a

place to live pronto. So we went looking for a condo. And we found one in downtown Seattle--in Bay Vista.

Bay Vista wasn't exactly an unknown quantity in my life. It was where I was living at the time my first book was published in 1985. And discerning readers will have sorted out that Bay Vista doubles as Belltown Terraces, the location of J. P. Beaumont's penthouse condo at Second and Broad. Legal restraints at the time Beau was moving into the building made it necessary for me to change the name of the building when I put it into my books.

For a time we really enjoyed living the high-rise condo lifestyle. Then Jon, our son-in-law, got sick. Getting back and forth from Jeanne T. and Jon's place in good traffic could take as little as twenty minutes. In bad traffic, however, that trip could turn into a two hour ordeal. And as Jon got sicker and as we realized that Jeanne T. would probably end up being a single parent, that two hour commute



seemed more and more onerous.

So we bought a place that's much closer--five minutes regardless of traffic. But we still liked the condo, so we've sort of just kept it. Actually, it came in very handy last Christmas when the only kitchen with power was the one in the condo. Our major holiday dinner was prepared in West Seattle, cooked



offer, feel free.



in Bay Vista, and eaten in Bellevue. Talk about a moveable feast!!!

But now we've decided to sell. Our condo is listed with Ben Carr of Windermere Real Estate. The multiple listing number is: MLS#: 27065990. A link to the listing directly is http://idx.windermere-seattle.com/srch_mls/detail.php?mode=&LN=27065990&t=&l=. If you're interested in taking a look and/or making an

OC, LA and Corona

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Okay, okay. So I'm over it. As expected, no thank you note appeared from the young woman who had me participate in her school assignment, but I've received several nice notes from other people. So I'll put a smile on my face and move on.

I've just returned from a tiring but very rewarding weekend in California where the ladies of the Orange County Literary Guild put on a top-drawer literary conference on Saturday. And on Monday evening, I spoke at the Corona Public Library to a roomful of die-hard fans.

All in all, it was a very good weekend even though, as a result of doing those rescheduled events from last year, I missed the Relay for Life in Redmond this year. The Cancer Fighting Flamingos did well, however. I understand that, although it didn't actually pour down rain, it was windy and cold. But the Flamingos still flew through the night. Thank you to all who flew with us in spirit.

Today a dear friend goes in for a lung biopsy. I'm holding my breath

Cranky Day!!!

Friday, May 11, 2007

This is a cranky day. I'm sitting here looking at an e-mail address and wondering what I should do about it.

Periodically teachers feel free to make assignments that cause their students to contact authors for reports of various kinds. My least favorite--and I'm not making this up--was the young woman who asked me what was important about my last book so she could write a report on it. I won't even discuss the person who wanted to know where she could get the Cliff's Notes on my books. Hello!!! I write murder mysteries. People are supposed to read them because they actually ENJOY them.

But the message currently lurking in my new mail list comes pretty high on my baddy list. On the plus side, this particular young woman did write to me and ask if I would be willing to answer some questions for her for a school project. I wrote back saying I would be happy to do so, and she sent them. The problem was, some of those questions were downright intrusive. (No one outside my immediate family needs to know the names and birth dates of my children, for example.) And the answers to some of the questions--what got me interested in writing-- are readily available from other sources if the teacher had actually encouraged her student to do something useful like. . .well . . .independent research, for example. Try checking my website?

But the truth is, I did answer most of her questions--the ones I deemed appropriate. Once I sent those, she immediately sent me another question. I answered that one as well. What I'm waiting for now is that other essential--a thank you note. It should have been forthcoming as soon as the answers were received. It hasn't been.

It would be nice to think the teacher would have included that as part of the assignment, but I doubt it. It is called "Common Courtesy" Folks. And I'm not going to send the young woman a note telling her about this. But the next time a student writes to me asking for help with a school project, I have a feeling the answer will be no.

As I said. Cranky today, but there it is. Definitely feet of clay.

Melanoma Monday

Monday, May 7, 2007

I've just read my first newspaper of the day. It's appropriate that this is being posted on what the American Academy of Dermatologists call "Melanoma Monday."



Some of you who have been reading along with this blog from the beginning are aware that the first entries were in August of last year when our son-in-law, Jon Jance, was in the last stages of his almost decade long battle with malignant melanoma. He held it off far longer than anyone expected due to his singular determination and also due to any number of cutting edge treatment protocols offered through the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, the University of Washington Hospital, and the

American Cancer Society. And because Jon hung in there for so long, he left his wife, Jeanne T., and us with an incredible treasure, his son Colt Stephen, pictured above with his daddy.

Six years ago, while visiting Madigan Hospital with Jon, Jeanne T. first learned about the Relay for Life, a series of 24 hour walks held in communities all over the country to raise funds for the American Cancer Society. The Relay, it turns out, is the American Cancer Society's primary fund-raising arm. Jeanne T. formed a team in Jon's honor, named it the Cancer Fighting Flamingos, and set a goal to raise "seventy-five in five"—\$75,000 in five years. Last year was year five and, with her husband in the hospital dying and with her baby on her hip—in the driving rain—Jeanne T. and Jon's loyal friends, visiting from all over the country, helped her meet that very ambitious goal.

Yes, the patients who battle cancer are courageous, but so are their loved ones—the people who fight the battles with them, one at a time. As you'll see from the letter posted below, Jeanne T. has very little memory of last year's Relay. I remember it well. It was, as John F. Kennedy would have said, "a profile in courage." And determination.

This coming Sunday is Mother's Day. It's also time for the Relay. (Question: Why don't they schedule the Kirkland/Redmond Relay for a little later in the summer so maybe it ISN'T raining?) Jeanne T. And Colt Stephen will be there. I can't be.

Because of Jon's situation last spring, I ended up having to cancel several of last spring's speaking engagements, and I'm doing make-up work this year. But our hearts will be there.

Once you are drafted into the cancer fight (No one ever volunteers!) you're in it. And if you life has been touched by cancer, either your own case of it or that of a loved one, you know how tough it is. You also know the importance of research for that ever elusive cure, and research means money.

You may already be involved with the Susan Koman Foundation or with Safe in the Shade or with any number of other organizations that raise money to fight the fight against cancer in all its many awful guises. If you're doing your bit in that regard, you have my heart-felt thank you. But if you aren't—and if you're looking to find a way to become involved—read the letter below. If you can see your way clear to donate, thank you. (Address information is posted at the bottom of the letter. If you want to become in the actual walk, please use Jeanne T.'s contact information to find out about getting on the schedule.)

Yes, the Cancer Fighting Flamingos have been hurt pretty badly, but we're catching our second wind now. With your help we will soar again, and if we all do a little bit, we can make a huge difference.

Land's End, Recliners, and Trains

Friday, May 4, 2007

Land's End

I'm writing this blog update at the Land's End Hotel in Cornwall, but I won't be able to send it from here. When I came into the lobby and asked the lady at the desk if they had Wi-Fi, she said, "I beg your pardon?" I think it's likely that the hotel



actually has a broadband connection, but it's not something she's on a first-name basis with.

It turns out my Cingular connection doesn't work in our self-catering cottage in Penzance. Neither does the water at the moment. The owner came by yesterday in a bit of a panic and announced that the city would be working on the water connection this week and that we'll have no water from 8:30 AM to 6:30 PM every day. This means we have to be up and out early, and we are.

I've been on vacation for

a week. Well, a day or two less than a week if you count the 14 hours of editorial work I had to do on the new Ali Reynolds book after we arrived at Tintagel. (Cingular worked just fine there, thank you very much.)

I've read several books. (My idea of vacation.) We're enjoying seeing the countryside with our friends Michael and Sheri Coleman.

Life is very good.

Recliners, and Trains

As a writer, I bring to the task of creation my own peculiar bits of baggage, and I'm always surprised by the way readers react to some of those bit and pieces.

My first husband came to our marriage with an old, leather-covered recliner that had the unfortunate habit of tipping over backward on occasion. My husband eventually mastered the art of being able to tip over in it without spilling so much as a smidgeon of his beer.

Does J.P. Beaumont's fictional recliner owe its origin to that other recliner? Possibly. I can't answer that question definitively, but I suspect it's true. Several books into the series, Beau's much loved but very disreputable leather recliner goes in to an upholsterer for a complete makeover. Obviously Beau could have afforded to buy himself a new one, but he preferred the old one--the one he was comfortable with, the one he knew well.

Please don't ask me which is the applicable Beaumont book, but shortly after the recovered-recliner episode was published, I heard from a fan who had done the same thing. "If Beau can have his recliner recovered, so can I." And she did.

In our family there were seven kids--four girls and three boys. When I was six or seven, the BOYS!!! received an electric train set, a Lionel, for Christmas. If you were unfortunate enough to be one of the girls in the family, time running the train controller was strictly limited. Is that why Butch Dixon ended up with a train in his restaurant in Peoria, Arizona? Probably. And because the train was so important to him, he and Joanna end up building a shelf for it in their fictional family room.

Is Butch's fictional train an outgrowth of what I regarded as a form of childhood deprivation? Probably. And over the years, I've heard from train hobbyists who've written to me asking for more details about Butch's train set, but an e-mail that came in

last week takes the cake. With the writer's permission, I'm including some of that e-mail correspondence:

I just wanted to tell you how your Joanna and Butch "train shelf" dilemma has impacted my family. My husband (age 52) and I bought a home about seven months ago and his prized childhood Lionel Trains (approximately 40 years old) have been packed away in the dark recesses of the bedroom closet. We looked at the bedroom as a possible train area, but with a queen sized bed and other furniture it is just too small. So after reading about Joanna and Butch's dilemma over blueprints of the train shelf, I agreed--what is the use of having the trains if he cannot "play" with them? So, I took a deep breath and said do it. He and my youngest son (also a train enthusiast) are in the living room at this very moment setting up a full sized train table. They haven't been this happy in quite awhile. Sometimes we just have to step outside the box to make others happy.

We moved into this house (after looking at what seemed like a kazillion houses) and I remember thinking YES! we finally have a full size living room! And then we measured the corner of the bedroom designated for the trains and found that there was no way the table was ever going to fit. I saw the flicker of hope quickly fade from my husband's eyes. Plan B...I played around with the idea of Butch's train shelf but the living room has ductwork the length of one side and we could not figure out how to get around that without hanging or suspending track to some degree. That's when the train table got the green light. I am even going to hang skirting around the frame once the entire thing is complete...that may be awhile....haha...

So my parents' long-ago gift to my brothers has now resulted in a gift to someone else--the ability to bring his beloved trains (probably the very same model) out of hibernation. What goes around really does come around--in every sense of the word.

Which reminds me of one more thing. Occasionally we all get hung up on keeping our living rooms perfect--for company. I'm thrilled that this one living room is going to be used for living.

Wear Your Sunblock

Sunday, April 8, 2007

My mother, Evelyn, was known to involve herself in other people's affairs on occasion. This wasn't necessarily a bad thing because she was a very wise woman and the advice she had to offer was usually on the money. As her daughter and a chip off the old block, I tend to do the same thing. Sometimes Bill will give me a hint that I may have gone too far. "You're Evieing it," he'll say.

So here goes. I'm Evieing it again.

Those of you who have followed the blog from the beginning know that we lost our son-in-law, Jon Jance, to malignant melanoma last summer. When I went out on the book tour, my daughter asked me to remind people to wear sun block. And I do.

This past week, sitting in an office, I overheard one receptionist, late twenties or so, tell another about something she "needed to have removed sometime." I went over and asked her point blank, what that was. She raised her pant leg and showed me a black mole toward the bottom of her calf and said she had another one on her toe, both of which have appeared in recent weeks.

I went straight up and turned left. I told her to go to a dermatologist at once and have it checked. Three days later I called to see if she had done so, and she had not. I told her I was worrying about her and to please e-mail me once she's been to the doctor.

Jon's melanoma was already third stage when it was diagnosed. He'd had the mole for a number of months but thought he had nicked himself shaving. Yes, melanoma is "just skin cancer." It's also deadly. Third stage melanoma patients have a life expectancy of five years. For fourth stage it's eighteen months.

Melanoma in men is usually found on the head or jaw line. For women it's often found on the legs or feet.

That young woman never met my mother, but she's going to have the advantage of my mother's determination and stubbornness, because I'm going to keep "Evieing" her until I know she's done something about it.

Melanoma scares me to death, and seeing that small black mole on her leg made the hair stand up on my neck. And if you have one or notice one on someone you love, have it checked. NOW!!!

Vacation Reading List

Saturday, April 7, 2007

Several people have asked what books are on the vacation reading list.

I had hoped to have Alexander McCall Smith's new book, The Good Husband of Zebra Drive, on tap. Unfortunately that one doesn't go on sale until April 17, so maybe toward the end of the trip. The new Ann B. Ross book, Miss Julia Strikes Back, arrived today, so that's going into the suitcase. Today Chris Acevedo of Clues Unlimited strong-armed us into Rattled a novel set in New Jersey exurbia where, she swears, the rattlesnake turns into a hero.

In addition we have a number of bargain basement books that we intend to drop off along the way. I know how much I've appreciated finding stray books in hotel rooms and seaside cottages when I've been traveling and have run out of reading material.

Oh, one last thing. I'll be rereading Dead Wrong by J.A. Jance. Time to get back into Joanna Brady's head before writing the next one of those.

So many books; so little time.

Teddy Bear Patrol Update

Friday, April 6, 2007

Since I've written thirty plus books in the past twenty-five years, some of the earlier ones tend to slip to the back of my mind, but because they're all still in print, sometimes an old book is the one a new reader has read most recently.

This morning I heard from a fan who just finished reading *Beaumont # 10, Without Due Process*. That's the one that starts with a home invasion. When J.P. discovers the attack's sole survivor, a young child hiding in a closet, he finds himself in need of his first Teddy Bear Patrol Teddy Bear.

My daughter, then in high school, gave me my first Teddy Bear Patrol lesson. I learned from her that it's a Seattle area charity devoted to making sure first responders in the Pacific Northwest region have a ready supply of teddy bears available to help comfort traumatized children. I put the details into the book, and that part of the story is one that continues to resonate with readers.

This morning's reader wanted to know if the Teddy Bear Patrol still exists. It does, but it's moved from one radio station to another. So here, for the benefit of any of my readers who may be interested, is the current contact information for the Teddy Bear Patrol:

Catherine Hall
KRWM-106.9
3650 131st Ave SE Ste. 550
Bellevue, WA 98006
catherineh@warm1069.com

A JAJance, personal Teddy Bear Patrol aside: One day, a couple of years after *Without Due Process* came out, I went to our post office box and found a notice of a parcel that needed to be picked up. The package came from an unknown address somewhere in Colorado. When I opened it, I found a purple and yellow handmade teddy bear inside along with a note that explained that the maker, a fan, had been so inspired by that part of the story that she was now making Teddy Bear Patrol bears as a hobby. She had made particular bear just for me. It turned out, that the bear arrived at a difficult time in my life. Shortly before the package arrived I had lost a younger brother to an undiagnosed heart ailment. Right then I was greatly in need of the kind of comfort that teddy bear had to offer. I appreciated it then. I appreciate it still.

It was a random act of kindness that I treasure to this day.

Spring Break!

Thursday, April 5, 2007

I haven't had a real Spring Break since I stopped teaching school. But this year I'm having one.

Last night I sent my editorial letter manuscript for the next Ali book to my editor in New York. My marriage is intact because I sent it via e-mail. In the old days, every time it was time to print and send a manuscript, Bill and I embarked on a printing war. No manuscript ever printed flawlessly. There were always paper jams. There were always extra pages. There were always missing pages. And by the time we took the resulting stack of dead trees to FedEx, we would barely be speaking.

So the fact that the manuscript went to New York without a hitch is cause for celebration. The fact that it is done is cause for celebration. And the fact that Bill has managed to sort out all the Uncle Sugar details well in advance of the April 15 deadline is also cause for celebration, and we are going to CELEBRATE!!!!

We're both on Spring Break, and we're going to take some time off. I'm not sure how much blogging I'll do in the course of the next few weeks. I'm on my way to the bookstore to buy books to READ!!! (That's what authors do on vacation.) Bill is going to be doing some painting with our friend Michael Coleman. Daphne will be spending some time with her cousin goldens, Tara and Lady and a new eleven week old addition to the family who, as far as I know, remains unnamed. By the way, Daph's latest X-rays showed remarkable improvement in her fungal disorder. (Thank you Dr. Ireland and the caring members of Encanto Pet Clinic.)

For those of you who keep asking me about Joanna, please be patient. Once Spring Break is over, it'll be time to go to work on her next book. It's time to find out how she's faring on maternity leave. Readers want to know, and so do I.

Women of Mystery

Monday, April 2, 2007

Sunday was April Fool's Day. In honor of same, we hosted an afternoon garden party at our home in Tucson for the Friends of the University of Arizona library. Three other authors were in attendance--Sue Henry, from Anchorage, Alaska, as well as Donis Casey and Betty Webb, both from the Phoenix area. We were celebrating the University of Arizona Library's Women of Mystery Collection, devoted to contemporary American women mystery writers.

Why a Women of Mystery Collection? As the founders of the organization Sisters in Crime discovered years ago, female crime writers receive far less critical and academic attention than male crime writers do. As a consequence, two influential folks at the University of Arizona, former president, John Schaefer, and Dean of the Libraries, Carla Stoffle, decided to do something about that. And they have. They're collection books and authors' papers--mine included--so those materials can be available for academic study.

And on Monday evening, after Sunday's party, there was a panel discussion moderated by Clues Unlimited's Chris Acevedo, which was held at the University of Arizona Library's Special Collections.

The weekend events celebrated four very different writers, JAJ included. Because things were scheduled over more than one day, there was ample opportunity for all of us to sit around and talk--and talk we did, mostly about the ins and outs of writing. At conferences, we sometimes catch glimpses of one another, but because there are often several tracks running at the same time, visiting is limited to rushed conversations before or during panels or plucked from quiet moments at book signings, parties, or hospitality rooms.

What struck me about comparing notes is that we've all had to overcome plenty of obstacles to get where we are. And we've taken what we've learned along the way and used that to create our books. Donis's main character, Alafair, is an Oklahoma farm wife in the early twentieth century who solves crimes while at the same time running a farm and raising 10 (TEN!!!) children. Betty's sleuth, Lena, is a Scottsdale police detective who came from a troubled background and was raised in a series of unfortunate foster homes. Some of Sue Henry's books draw on her intimate knowledge of Alaska's sled dog racing traditions. She also writes a series with a woman of a certain age and her dog making tracks around the country in an RV. And mine, as you probably already know, are all over the map.

The four of us are very different writers who come to this job from very



different perspectives. Other than being mysteries, our books are very different as well, but we all had a lot in common. We sat outside on the patio and talked until the wee small hours every night for several nights in a row.

So yes, I'm inspired. I'm willing to go back to work on finishing the next Ali book, but right now, the flesh is weak. I'm too tired. I had too much fun.

And that's a good thing.



What's in a Name???

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Here's an interesting E-mail from a fan named Max Burkett in Missoula Montana. I thought my J.P. Beaumont fans might find it as interesting as I do.

"On page 94 in "Breach of Duty" you have Beaumont think, "I wonder how many of the folks who share my surname were named for a town in Texas." In a strange coincidence, I knew such a man.

In 1935 a man with a minor criminal record needed a job badly, so he applied for a Social Security card in the name Jack Beaumont and took the U. S. Post Office Exam. He had worked in the oil fields around Beaumont and had liked the sound of the name.

I met Jack Beaumont in 1967 while working at the San Francisco Post Office. He achieved minor fame by being one of the first government employees to successfully challenge mandatory retirement. Jack Beaumont's body is buried in Colma, CA., next to Wyatt Earp.

Amici sumus,

Max Burkett"

A Writer Is Someone Who Has Written Today

Monday, March 26, 2007



This weekend we traveled to Silver City, New Mexico, for the Literacy Alive celebration sponsored by the Friends of the Silver City Public Library. Silver City, like Bisbee, Arizona, is a "small mining town in the West." For some kids, growing up in a place like that is seen as being in prison. For others, it's a launching pad.

As part of the Literacy Alive program, the Friend of the Library sponsored a writing contest in the school system. After reading a book by one of the attending authors, students could either tell how that book affected them or changed their opinion, how it reflected some experience in their own lives, or they could write either an epilogue or prologue to one of the books. Cash prizes ranging from \$25 to \$150 were awarded.

Two of the winners focused on my book. Patricia Fisher, pictured on the left, wrote a prologue to *Outlaw Mountain*, showing the murder victim, Alice, coming to dinner with her difficult son-in-law and daughter prior to her dying in the cholla patch off Houghton Road near Tucson. Carol Kay Lindsey, pictured on the right, wrote an epilogue to *Until Proven Guilty* showing Beau and Ron Peters going to the airport to pick up Beau's kids when they come to Seattle for a visit.

As the author, it was amazing to sit in the audience and see how both of these young writers had internalized the story and the characters. Carol

Kay in particular, the grand prize winner, really captured Beau's prickly but caring personality.

When I was a junior in high school, I entered an essay contest sponsored by the Arizona Republic. I won a hundred dollars which was awarded at a banquet at the Westward Ho Hotel in Phoenix. It was my first writing for pay.

These young women, Patricia and Carol Kay, have now written for pay as well, and I'm hoping they'll be encouraged to continue writing. After all, regardless of pay, a writer is someone who has written TODAY.

Some fans (You know who you are!) have been complaining that photos on the site haven't been updated. And so, today, the webmaster intends to fix same. So he came to me a little while ago, when I was still in my robe and said, "Why don't you throw on some clothes and run a brush through your hair so I can take a picture of you out in front of the house.

Bill is a VERY nice man, but he has no understanding of how "running a brush through your hair" really works.

So I've done it. The process of getting ready took far longer than the photo shoot. And Daphne, our very brave guard dog, is in it as well.

And now that I'm dressed and made up to boot, I guess we'll be going somewhere for lunch.

Sleepless in Tucson

Sunday, March 18, 2007

I was reading through the blog posting and discovered the two thoughts that should have been thoughts. And the two "barking-her-head-offs" in very close proximity. I was going to correct them and repost, but I'm realizing now that the lack of attention to detail has a lot to do with a lack of sleep--because no one is sleeping very well at our house, including Daphne. She, by the way, positioned herself last night directly in front of the hall doorway, in case someone should unexpectedly appear there once again. Brave dog. Good dog.

We were all up and down over night. About every hour on the hour. The doors were all locked, but that didn't mean much. And we are seriously exploring the idea of exercising our second amendment rights, although the idea of living in an armed camp isn't something either Bill or I have ever expected to do. It's serious enough that we both had dreams about buying weapons last night. Mine was a two-tone blue plastic/gray metal model. Who says I don't have an overly active imagination?

And, yes, I can feel my writer's brain figuring out how all that's happened around here in the last few days may well play out in an upcoming book--that's my job, after all. Writing is recycling at its best, and everything is usable.

The irony of today is that early this afternoon a group of 75 or so members of various local library book clubs will be showing up for an afternoon "literary salon." It remains to be seen if well applied layers of makeup can turn me into something presentable. Inevitably, one of the attendees will ask my least favorite question: Where do you get you ideas?

I'll probably give her an earful.

Almost Murder She Wrote

Saturday, March 17, 2007 Second Posting!

Those of you who follow this blog know that our dog Daphne has been desperately sick for the past several weeks. With the aid of a good deal of very expensive medications, she's now on the road to recovery, but one of the unfortunate side effects of her treatment has been a tendency to lose her cookies, as it were. As a result, we've taken to sleeping with the bedroom door open out onto the patio where she could go as needed. And being a good dog, she has done so on numerous occasions.

So last night, we went out, celebrated finishing the book at a local restaurant, and then came home and went to bed. Early. At ten thirty, Daphne went nuts, barking her head off. The fact that she could bark without coughing her head off is a sign of her remarkable recovery.

I awakened and saw our house guest, Tinus, walking through our bedroom. I thought it strange that he would come through the house that way, but I thought he must have been as upset about whatever was going on as Daph was. So I followed him outside, and Bill followed me. He was over near the back fence. "What is it, Tinus," I said. "Can you see what's happening?"

At that juncture, thinking Tinus and I had the situation well in hand, Bill went back to bed. Then Tinus came over to me, only it wasn't Tinus. It was a complete stranger. At which point I freaked. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my house?!!!!!"

"I'm Gary," he says. "I'm looking for some smokes."

I did not see Bill get out of bed. I believe the word levitate probably applies. I went down the hall and roused Tinus out of bed. Then, while he and Bill led a very docile Gary out to the front yard, I called the cops who arrived a short time later.

Gary appeared to be both developmentally disabled and medicated. He told the officers that he was from California. He had no money. No ID. No wallet. No last name. He told them he had done this before. He said he had broken a window although no broken window was found on our property. (The dead-bolt evidently hadn't been properly seated but for the past several months, this neighborhood has had several break-ins and attempted break-ins while people were at home. Someone broke into a neighborhood Lexus and what was taken? Some cigarettes.)

I hung around outside while the cops and the fire department dealt with the guy. Before they left, I heard that Gary had been reported missing from a group home on a particular street and that they were taking him back there.

So this morning, with the help of the Internet (thank you, Ali Reynolds) we located the address of a group home on that particular street. And, late this morning, Bill and I went there. While he sat in the car with his cell phone finger poised to dial 9-1-1, I went up to the door and asked the staff member who answered the door if Gary was home. She said, yes, and who was I. "I'm the woman whose bedroom Gary was in at 10:30 last night." She said she was aware that he had been missing for "an hour and a half last night" and that he also had "severe mental problems.) I believe the timing claim is bogus since our home is a 3.25 miles from the group home and Gary is not that good a walker. She also said, "when he gets out he stays in the neighborhood."

Since then we've heard from the on call supervisor for the group home management company who told us that he was indeed medicated, that he's been with them for two months, and that previous to coming to Blake Foundation, she thought he had been in "a lockdown situation" somewhere in Arizona and that his mother is in California.

We are spooked. Who's to say Gary won't get out and come calling again tonight? After all, he got a lot of attention last night--four cop cars, a fire truck, an ambulance, and a ride home.

We are chastened. Dog barf or not, the doors will be locked and the air-conditioning system will be on.

And Daphne, that especially golden golden, is in for some special treats--but not until after she takes her Pepcid AC.

Partners

Saturday, March 17, 2007

When my husband and I are out in public, he's often asked if he writes books, too. It's hard to explain what he does in a few words, and we've developed a soft-shoe response to deflect it which is to say, "I write the books; he writes the checks."

But I'd like to expand on that a bit. People think of writing as a glamorous occupation, as in you only have to work when you feel like it, right? Right!!!! No one ever thinks of writing as a business, but it is.

Every Friday a carton of mail shows up on our doorstep. (In those prodigious amounts, it's better that it arrive one day a week rather than every day of the week.) Bill sorts through it, gives me the stuff I need to attend to, and deals with the rest. He does write the checks--lots of them, because he pays the bills and the taxes, and he does so in a world of free-fall finance when pay-days come maybe four or five-times a year at irregular intervals and amounts and he somehow has to make cash-flow work from one unknown date to another. He expends lots of personal effort in January and February getting things ready for the accountant and for the IRS. When we have purchased or sold properties, he's the one who has done the due diligence before and after the fact. When we've had remodeling projects--and boy have we had our share of those!!!--he's overseen them from beginning to end.

And then there are the book tours. He goes; he drives. With the aid of his handy GPS he can get us to any book store and back to any hotel and/or airport. He arranges the air-travel. He arranges the rental cars. He figures out how long it will take us to get to any given venue and gets us there on time.

When I'm on tour, talking to hundreds of people a day, what I need in the car going and coming is dead silence, and he gets that. He's my pal on the road; he's also my best friend.

And then there's the website, www.jajance.com. Who designed it? Bill. Who maintains it? Bill. Who posts the blog entries? Bill.

We met in 1985 the week before my first book came out. It was years after we married before there was any money coming in from my books, and during that time he supported all of us--me, his kids, my kids. There wouldn't be nearly the number of books there are now if I'd had to have a "real" job during those first lean years.

I have a feeling, he's going to give me lots of grief about posting this particular entry, because he isn't one to toot his own horn, but it's my blog and I'll say so if I want to. Bill Schilb really is the wind beneath my wings. Thank you.

To Sleep...perchance to dream...

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Okay, okay. I know I've been bad. I know blogging has been non-existent, but between dealing with our sick puppy and trying to finish a book, I haven't been up for air in days. Please remember I am a one woman business.

So the next Ali Reynolds book is in the can. I have to wait to hear from my editor--more breath holding--and then it'll be time to go to work on the next Joanna Brady book.

A word about our sick puppy. Daphne was diagnosed with two separate problems--a megasophagus, (Don't ask me how to spell it!) and a fungal disorder of some kind which may or may not be Valley Fever. The very expensive IV treatment, disagreed with her, as did the first oral medication--and the medications for the two disorders aren't necessarily compatible.

We finally put her on a third protocol--Itraconazole--which is also expensive but which now seems to be working. The problem is, the pharmacy, thinking they were being helpful, sold me a generic form of the drug--and Daph promptly got worse. Now on the non-generic prescription, she's getting better. Slowly, but getting better. And we've now been told by three separate specialists that the generic form of this drug does NOT work for canines.

So this is a word to the wise. If your dog is being treated for something and you get sent to the drug store to fill a prescription, please check with your vet first to determine whether or not the generic form is appropriate.

Now I'm going to go kick up my heels a little. It's been a long hard climb.

Most Wanted

Saturday, March 3, 2007

When I'm off on tour, telling stories, I talk to a lot of people. And when I'm signing books, people often share their stories with me. (Since I have a very short name, it's usually possible to sign and listen at the same time.)

During this year's Web of Evil book tour appearance at Third Place Books in Lake Forest Park, Washington, I met and signed books for a woman named Jennifer—Jennifer Nolastname. While I was signing, she told me her story, biting back tears as she did so.

It turned out that she had once owned an almost complete collection of my books, all of them autographed, and all of them stored on her houseboat. One of her neighbors evidently collected stray logs. During a storm, one of his logs got loose and crashed into Jennifer's houseboat, sinking it within minutes. There was enough warning that Jennifer managed to escape, but all her possessions—including all those signed books—were lost. She came to the signing intent on starting over and purchased several books that evening.

When the signing was finished, I went back to the table where my family and friends were gathered. When I arrived, one of my friends, Kathy Williams, pulled out a first edition copy of *Until Proven Guilty* which she had found at a used bookstore and wanted me to sign. When I told her Jennifer's story, she said, "I'll be glad to give her this one. And I have some others, too."

I immediately went in search of Jennifer, but she had already left the store and there was no way to track her. I've had a couple of people looking for her on an informal basis, but they've all come up empty.

One of my favorite television programs is John Walsh's *America's Most Wanted*. Motivated by his son's tragic and still unsolved murder, John Walsh has devoted decades of his life to helping missing and exploited children. He's also the mastermind behind a television show that, on a weekly basis, brings millions of viewers' eyes and ears to bear on unsolved homicides all over the country. To date *America's Most Wanted* viewers have been responsible for the capture of nearly a thousand "bad guys."

So this is my version of the same thing, only I'm not tracking a bad guy. If any of you know of a fan of mine named Jennifer who lost her collection of books in a log-damaged houseboat, please put her in touch with me. There are a few books around here that already have her name in them.

Thank you.

Write, Write, Write and Valley Fever

Sunday, February 25, 2007

Blogging has been light. I'm working. I'm supposed to be finishing a book, and it's important to stay focused. But it turns out that hasn't been easy, either.

Those of you who have followed this blog know that in December, we lost our red dog golden retriever, Aggie, in a matter of days. She went off her food, started coughing, was hospitalized with pneumonia, and was diagnosed with cancer. Agatha's loss just before Christmas was one of the things that put a dark cloud over our holiday season.

So two weeks ago, when her remaining sister, Daphne, developed many of the same symptoms, we were heartsick. First she went off her food—Daph has always LOVED her food. Then the cough started. Dreading the worst, we took her to the vet.

She had lost weight, was running a fever, and needed hydration. The vet put her on antibiotics and on anti-fungal meds. What followed was a series of visits to that first vet who suspected either cancer or Valley Fever. However, a whole barrage of tests—X-rays, ultra-sound, and needle biopsy—revealed no markers for either cancer or Valley Fever which has been particularly prevalent in the Tucson area this winter.

For the next week Daphne got worse. The antibiotics didn't seem to be helping, and she was suffering lots of side effects from the oral anti-fungal med which she was supposed to take with food. (Hard to do when she wasn't eating.) Eventually the diagnosis evolved into some other fungal disease that probably isn't Valley Fever.

So finally the first vet referred us to a second vet—the only one in town that is approved to use a last-ditch anti-fungal medication that is delivered via a three hour IV drip three times a week. Daph had three treatments last week, but we didn't see any improvement. Thinking the treatments weren't helping, we tried to prepare ourselves for letting her go.

But over the weekend, Daphne made a remarkable turn-around. She's eating again and keeping it down. She actually brought her toy frog to us and asked to play. She's coughing less and spent time with us wherever we were rather than being a flat, dog-shaped rug in the hallway.

We've been advised that discontinuing treatment at the first sign of improvement is the wrong thing to do. Treating anti-fungal treatments takes time.

So today Daph is back at the vet for her three hour ordeal by IV. I'm back to writing and my husband is back to updating the website. It's time for all of us to take a collective deep breath and say a heartfelt THANK YOU!

You Can Go Home Again

Sunday, February 11, 2007

I'm writing this post in the J. A. Jance Suite at the Copper Queen Hotel in Bisbee, Arizona. The ribbon cutting ceremony was last night as part of the gala reception honoring the hotel's 105th anniversary. I join two other luminaries, notably Teddy Roosevelt and John Wayne, in having a named room at the Copper Queen.

As we drove here from Tucson yesterday, my thoughts were filled with memories of growing up in Bisbee. My family came here from South Dakota when I was four. We moved to Arizona for my father's health. He had spent much of the previous year bedridden with rheumatoid arthritis, but in Bisbee's high, dry climate, he went to work underground and recovered his health completely.

We came from a Midwest farm with our worldly possessions loaded in a trailer and spent several weeks at the Shady Dell Trailer Park before moving into what would become our family's long-time home in Bisbee's Warren neighborhood. It was there I found my first friend, Donna Angeleri. Donna was one of the regular participants when, four at a time, we rode our family's Radio Flyer wagon down the steep grades of Yuma Trail. (Helmets? No. Knee pads? Never. And the kid in front sat with the tongue of the wagon right next to his or her throat, but missing safety standards notwithstanding, none of us ever got hurt.)

The Angeleris left Bisbee and moved to California around 1954 or so, and I've never heard from them again. That's why my new book, *Web of Evil*, is dedicated to Donna A. Even after all these years, I'm still hoping to find her.

But back to Bisbee. It was a wonderful place to grow up during the fifties and sixties—a community with good schools, quality teachers, and unlocked doors. I came away from there with a good education and lifelong friends.

Yesterday I was welcomed home. Locals as well as people from all over the country spent two to three hours standing in line on Main Street to have their copies of my latest books autographed. LaVerne Williams was one of the locals.

My first memories of LaVerne date from her being my first Sunday School teacher at the Warren Community Church where she also directed the junior choir and countless Christmas Pageants. She, along with Rose Bennett, served as my Girl Scout leader from Brownies right through Senior Scouts. It was wonderful to see LaVerne, but it was also a little disquieting to listen to her version of my childhood. She told a group of enthralled listeners that, as a kid, I always had a ready supply of limericks. (I don't have any memory of that, by the way. In fact, sitting here right now, I can't recall even one. . . No wait, I do remember one, something about "The turtle lives 'twixt plated decks. . ." but limericks being limericks, it can't be repeated here.)

My parents lived in Bisbee from 1949 until about 2000 when they moved to an assisted living facility in Apache Junction. They made this place home for all of us, and it's strange to come back to Bisbee without them here. But it's also wonderful to be welcomed back as a home-town girl makes good.

It was cloudy and cold as we came into town yesterday, but now the sun is shining, and outside the window of the J. A. Jance Suite the limestone "B" on "B Hill" is glowing white against a background of dull red shale. When we head back to Tucson and emerge from the Mule Mountain Tunnel, we'll see my favorite patch of deep blue sky out over the San Pedro Valley.

Yes, I live other places now. I have homes in Tucson and in Seattle, but yesterday, Bisbee showed me that it really is possible to come home again because. Thanks to the folks at the Copper Queen Hotel and Atalanta, I did.

End of the Snowbird...back to "WORK"

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

We're home. We've done the laundry. We've opened mail, pounds and pounds of it. Answering it is on the agenda for today. But we are home.

Book tours take time and energy. They're wonderful; they're tough. And this one in particular, with weather issues throughout, was particularly wearing. (Whatever weather woes are happening across the country at the moment have NOTHING WHATSOEVER to do with my being on tour!! It's not my fault!)

But now it's time to put on my other hat, the reclusive writer hat. And when I'm writing a book—particularly when I'm finishing a book—everything else tends to fall by the wayside.

I take my laptop, find a comfortable chair, and settle in for the duration

So here's my blog fair warning. It will probably be a bit quiet on the blogging front for the next little while, so please be patient. You do want another book sometime soon, don't you?

Oh, wait. I almost forgot. Back to those pounds and pounds of mail. Some of it was nice. In fact, most of it was nice. One item wasn't. It was a small package wrapped in miles of impervious packing tape. When I finally managed to open it (one broken fingernail later) it turned out to contain a single copy of one of my Beaumont paperbacks and a cranky note from a reader saying that the book was defective (missing several pages) and demanding that I replace it. Note to readers: Books are sometimes misprinted. When that happens, please do not send the defective volumes to the author. I write the books; I do not sell them (or print them, for that matter.) Please return the book to the point of purchase where the bookstore will be happy to replace same.

Back to the book now. Bye for now.

The Snowbird Tour Episode 5

Friday, February 2, 2007

This is ridiculous. For those of you who have been following the “snowbird tour” this won’t be news. First came the blizzard that caught us driving from Seattle to Arizona to start the tour in Phoenix. Then there was the record-breaking cold in San Diego, the snow plows in Malibu, and the great California orange freeze. We were there for all of them. Then there was the ice storm in Portland, the snow in DC, and the record-breaking cold in Raleigh-Durham.

By then my husband was referring to me as the Typhoid Mary of the Weather Channel. By the time we hit Florida, the jinx seemed to have broken. The sun came out and the coats came off. And when we headed for South Carolina we were relieved to know that the snow that fell in Aiken that morning would be melted by the time we arrived. We breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Then we woke up this morning and learned about the deadly tornadoes in Florida. In Lake County, Florida. Where we woke up YESTERDAY MORNING!!!

So, Texas, here’s fair warning. We’ll be there on Saturday and Sunday. Then the whole country will be able to breath a sigh of relief. The J.A. Jance snowbird tour will be over

The Snowbird Tour Episode 4

Saturday, January 27, 2007

It's far too easy to become dependent on electronic gadgetry, and you don't know how much you count on it until something disrupts it. Our December windstorm in Seattle is a prime example. When you are suddenly without your coffee maker, your hair-dryer, your computer, your telephone, and your cable TV, it comes as a big shock to the system.

On this tour, we've counted on our portable GPS to get us through the unfamiliar streets of one city after another. We call the computer-generated, raspy woman's voice, "The Babe" and expect her directions to arrive in a timely manner. "In one-point-five miles turn right." And, when we miss the turn anyway, she's responds with, "Off route-recalculating" and then she figures out how to get us out of the self-made tangle. This was especially important the other night in Raleigh-Durham when we made our slow way to the Regulator Book shop by going in ever smaller circles before we finally zeroed in on our target.

But yesterday modern technology let us down. We moved The Babe to our newest rental car and set off from Fort Lauderdale for Stuart, Florida. Five miles before our freeway turn-off, The Babe ran out of power. It seems the rental agency had disconnected the cigarette lighter in order to discourage people from smoking in our non-smoking vehicle. We made it to the hotel eventually, but it wasn't pretty and we arrived with only the smallest margin to prepare for the next event.

Today we'll be taking the car back and exchanging it for one with a working lighter. And then we'll know which way we're going.

The Snowbird Tour Episode 3

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

The Snowbird Tour continues. So here we are in Washington, DC. Will it surprise anyone if I say there was snow on the ground when we landed here last night? The winter coat I thought would be unnecessary for most of the trip is still with me and it came in really handy when we were trudging around in the Reagan National Airport parking garage last night looking for our rented vehicle. Whoever numbered the spaces there didn't get the concept that spaces should actually be numbered consecutively. By the time we finally figured it out and found our car, I was sure we were destined to suffer our very own Planes, Trains, and Automobiles vehicle rental experience.

But the sun is shining now. The snow is mostly melted, but the signing tonight will be up against the State of the Union message. As I said before, January book tours come with their own special set of idiosyncrasies.

Looking toward North Carolina and Florida, I'm once again glued to The Weather Channel where they're talking about the "freak storm" that was supposed to drop more of the white stuff on Tucson and southern New Mexico today. More snow in TUCSON???? What's the world coming to?

At this point, I can only hope that Florida's orange crop is safe from the ravages of the Snowbird Tour, but with the way things have gone so far, I'm not so sure.

Stay warm!!!

NY Times List At Number 15

The Snowbird Tour Episode 2

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

When we knew *Web of Evil* was going to be a “January book” and started planning the tour, we decided to call it the Snow-bird tour. The idea was to get out of the cold and do book tour appearances in sunnier, warmer climes than Seattle which has been particularly wintery this year. As we headed off for Tucson and Phoenix and a series of California drive-by signings, I assumed that my leather jacket would be so much extra baggage. Wrong!!!

Phoenix wasn't all that bad, but by the time we arrived in San Diego, the weatherman there was wearing a fleece-lined jacket and reporting that Governor Schwarzenegger was declaring a “weather emergency” because the thermometer could dip to 35 degrees. Having just lived through December in Seattle with an ice storm followed by several wind storms and days of no electricity, it was hard not to laugh. But we didn't, and it's a good thing.

It turns out the thermometer went far below 35—it actually dipped down into the teens—and the freezing weather has done untold damage to the California citrus industry. As we drove north from Bakersfield to San Francisco, it was appalling to look out at mile after mile of bedraggled fruit trees still laden with their ruined oranges and lemons. Someone needs to figure out a way to build gigantic pop-up tents that will prevent disasters like this from happening the next time.

So now we're on our way to Portland. Where it's snowing. And where the book store may actually have to close early because of weather-related issues. And the ice probably still hasn't thawed on our street in Bellevue, either.

Now the question is, do I take my jacket along to Florida or not?

Fan mail is flooding in about *Web*. Thank you to all who have written to me. I appreciate hearing from you, but there's one question that really makes me smile: Does Sumo Sudoku really exist? Well yes, because we (my husband and I) invented it. We even wrote up a set of Sumo Sudoku rules. If you're interested in seeing same, just let me know and I'll forward them to you.

So now it's time to put on my snow-boots and ear-muffs and see how things are going to be once we get on the ground in Portland.

Did I mention that I'm VERY tired of winter this year

The Snowbird Tour Episode 1

Saturday, January 13, 2007

Yes, I have been maintaining a long blog-silence of late. That's what happens when authors go on tour—it gets tired out. Even though my husband/webmaster/driver/media escort/best friend is with me on tour, it's been tough trying to upload web site entries. Air-cards work, but they're not fast.

I finally managed to finish sending out the Web of Evil announcement e-mails, all 5300 of them. About 400 of the addresses I had bounced. Once that happens, I drop the name from the list. So if you thought you were on my list and didn't receive an announcement, you may not have let me know that your e-mail address changed—and you'll need to re-subscribe.

Being on tour is at once exhausting and exhilarating. Sleeping in a different bed every night is a challenge, especially since pillows in some hotels seem to be made of tree bark. And living in no known time-zone is also tough. Because of the scheduling of signings and interviews, meals are taken at odd hours—sometimes too early and sometimes too late. At a signing the other day, someone asked me where I live. At that point, I felt like so much of a rolling stone that I wasn't sure what to answer.

But I do enjoy being out in the world and having the opportunity to meet and talk to my fans, new fans and old ones alike. And it makes me smile when, at the end of a book signing, I'll find a few thirty-fivers (people with all my books in several bags) waiting patiently to have them signed. And I do sign them all—that's my corporate policy: If I wrote it, I sign it.

So here we are five days into a month-long tour. I have no doubt that as the tour continues, I'll become something less sane. (Being charming one hundred percent of the time, is NOT easy.) And when we get home—wherever that is—we'll probably both be ready to burn the clothes we brought along with us.

But do check the schedule page and see if somewhere along the way, we can see you, too.

Oops, one more thing. People have written in asking where they can lay hands on some Sugarloaf Café Sweet Rolls. And so, compliments of our son Thomas Schilb, a

talented cook, we're happy to provide the "approved" recipe. (We had several tasting sessions over the holidays, and this is the one that gained an all-thumbs up rating.) So check out the new Sugarloaf Café recipe page. It is a work in progress so check back often.

