

The Story Behind Second Watch

Every story has a beginning.

For me, this one started in Mr. Guerra's Latin 2 class at Bisbee High School, in Bisbee, Arizona, in 1959. I was a sophomore as were most of the other kids in the class. The one exception to that was an upperclassman named Doug Davis.

I was the scrawny awkward girl, the one with glasses and a fair amount of brains, sitting in the third seat in the row of desks next to the window. Doug sat in the third seat in the middle



Leonard Douglas Davis
1943-1966

row. If I was the wallflower, he was the star, literally the big man on campus.

Doug was an outstanding student. He was smart, tall, good looking, and an excellent all-around athlete. He wore a Letterman's sweater loaded with all the accompanying paraphernalia--the pins and stripes--that showed which years he had played on varsity teams and in which of several sports. He had a ready smile and an easygoing way about him that was endearing to fellow students and teachers alike.

Doug was a junior then, and why he was in class with a bunch of sophomores remains a mystery to this day. But I remember him arriving in the classroom early every day and

then standing beside his desk waiting for the teacher to show up. He moved from foot to foot with certain impatient grace, like a restless, spirited racehorse ready to charge out of the starting gate. As soon as the teacher called the class to order, Doug was on task. His homework was always done and done right. He always knew the answers. He put the entire class on notice that he was there to learn. He wasn't mean or arrogant about it; he was simply focused.

It turns out that Latin 2 was the only class I shared with Doug. My talents didn't carry over to the kinds of advanced math and science classes in which he excelled. But in that one class we had in common, Doug was the yardstick by which I measured my own efforts. When Mr. Guerra allowed some of us to do an extra credit paper to help improve our grades, mine came back with a life-changing notice on it written in bright red pencil: "A+/Research worthy of a college student." I was a high school sophomore, but that was the first time anyone had ever hinted to me that I might be college material. That was a milestone for me. In case you're wondering what kind of a grade Doug got on *his* paper, don't bother. He already had straight As in the class. He didn't need any extra credit.

I was a bookish young woman, and I know that Doug and I were often the only two students prowling the stacks looking for books after Mrs. Phillippi threw open the school's library doors before class in the morning. Doug was a voracious reader, and so was I. I mostly read novels. I believe he was one of the only kids in the school who checked out and read all the volumes from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

The guy was a hunk. It's beyond doubt that I had a crush on him at the time. Since he was clearly out of my league, I simply admired him from afar and let it go at that. When Doug's class graduated from Bisbee High in 1961, he was the valedictorian. I know I attended the graduation ceremony because I was in the school band, playing endless repetitions of *Pomp and*

Circumstance while members of the class marched to their places under the bright field lights shining over the infield in Bisbee's Warren Ballpark. I'm sure I heard Doug's valedictory address; unfortunately I don't recall any of it.

Once Doug graduated, he disappeared from my frame of reference. I had no idea that he had gone on to West Point and that from there, after attending Ranger school in 1965, he had shipped out for Vietnam.

My life went on. I, too, graduated from Bisbee High School. With the help of a scholarship, I became the first person in my family to attend and graduate from a four-year college. I had always wanted to be a writer. In 1964, when I sought admission to the Creative Writing program at the University of Arizona, the professor in charge wouldn't let me enroll due to my being a girl. "Girls become teachers or nurses," he told me. "Boys become writers."

That's why, when I graduated from the U of A in May of 1966, it was with a degree in Secondary Education with a major in English and a minor in History. By the end of that summer, I was hired as a beginning English teacher at Pueblo High School in Tucson. Sometime early that fall, I received a letter from my mother telling me that Doug Davis had been killed in Vietnam.

This was long before the advent of the Internet or Facebook or Twitter or any of the other many devices that allow us to stay in touch with one another. By the time my mother's letter arrived, the funeral had already taken place. I was not a close friend of Doug's. No one thought to notify me in a more timely fashion, and my mother sent the information along as an interesting scrap of news from home the way she always did--in her own sweet time.

Tucson is only a hundred miles from Bisbee. If I had known about the funeral before it happened, I would have made an effort to be there for it. The upshot was, of course, that since I

didn't know, I wasn't there. I suspect that a shard of guilt over my unwitting absence stayed with me through the years--a splinter in my heart that periodically festered and came to the surface.

The first instance of that occurred in the early eighties, shortly after I moved to Seattle. A cardboard replica of the Vietnam War Memorial came to town and was put on display at Seattle Center. My children and I were living downtown then. One afternoon, I took my two grade-school aged kids to Seattle Center to see it. Doug's name was the only one I looked up, shedding tears as I did so, explaining to my puzzled children that Doug was someone I knew from Bisbee, a soldier, who had died in a war. It was only then, in looking up his name, that I learned Douglas was his middle name. His first name was Leonard, but no one in Bisbee ever called him that. Back home he was simply Doug--Doug Davis.

Time passed. Despite the opinion of that Creative Writing professor about girls' inability to write, I nonetheless managed to do so. I wrote nine Beaumont books as original paperbacks. When my first hardback, *Hour of the Hunter*, was published, my first publisher-sponsored book tour took me to Washington, DC. One afternoon, between events, I asked my media escort to take me to the Vietnam Memorial. It's the only "tourist" thing I've ever done on a book tour before or since. While I was there, walking past that long expanse of black granite with all those thousands of names carved into it, again there was only one name that I searched out and touched--Doug's.

More time passed. I wrote more Beaumonts and the first Joanna Brady book, *Desert Heat*. For years the grand opening signings for my books were held at the Doghouse Restaurant in downtown Seattle. By the time Joanna # 2, *Tombstone Courage*, went on sale in 1995, the Doghouse had closed, so we had the grand opening at a Doghouse wannabe, a short-lived place

called the Puppy Club. I was seated at the signing table when a woman came up to me, introduced herself as, Merrilee MacLean, and asked, “Have you ever been to Bisbee, Arizona?”

“I was raised in Bisbee, Arizona,” I told her.

Merrilee followed up with another question. “Did you ever know someone named Doug Davis?”

“Of course I knew Doug Davis!”

For the next several minutes, Merrilee told me about her sister, Bonnie Abney, who at the time was living in Florida. Bonnie had been engaged to marry Doug when he died. According to the sister, Bonnie had been a flight attendant back then. She’d had a bag packed to go to Japan for Doug’s R & R at which time they planned to be married. Instead, at age 22, he came home to Bisbee in a flag-draped casket. Bonnie was in her mid-twenties when she waited alone, standing by a lonely railroad siding in the middle of the Arizona desert. Nearby, two Davis family friends sat in a parked car. Eventually a speeding freight train hove into view. First it slowed; finally it stopped. The door on one of the cars was rolled open, allowing attendants from Dugan’s Funeral Chapel to unload Doug’s casket from the train and into a waiting hearse.

According to Merrilee, some months before the *Tombstone Courage* signing, Bonnie had read the first Joanna Brady book, *Desert Heat*. In it, a drug cartel’s hit man guns down Joanna’s husband, Andy. In the aftermath of Andy’s death, there’s a moving funeral scene that takes place in Bisbee’s Evergreen Cemetery, the same cemetery in which Doug is buried.

As soon as Bonnie read that scene, she was convinced there had to be some connection between whoever wrote the book and her beloved Douglas. For months afterwards she carried that eventually very tattered paperback volume around in her purse because she couldn’t let go of the idea of that connection, and of course, she was absolutely right. There was a very real tie

between Doug Davis and the woman who wrote the book--that gangly girl from Mr. Guerra's Latin 2 class.

Bonnie's family hailed from Alaska originally, but many of her relatives had settled in the Seattle area. The next time she came to town to visit, she and I got together for lunch. I went armed with my collection of Bisbee High School yearbooks, my *Cuprites*.

Our meeting was supposed to be lunch only, but we huddled over those books for a good three hours. Bonnie knew some of Doug's classmates from West Point, but she knew almost nothing about his high school years. The photos from the yearbooks filled in some of those blanks. We saw Doug in his various sports uniforms; Doug as Valedictorian of his class; Doug in a toga for the Latin Club's annual toga party; Doug in the National Honor Society. And as we examined those photos, a lasting friendship was formed. Bonnie Abney and I have been friends ever since.

During lunch she told me a little about how she met Doug on a blind date in Florida in the fall of 1965 after he graduated from West Point and before he went to Ranger school. She told how their short time together was inadvertently extended by the arrival of Hurricane Betsy. She told how lost and alone she felt after he died. She told me of her marriage to someone else some six years later--a relationship that was not as successful as it had promised to be.

Bonnie's days with Doug have remained a treasured time in her life. I understand that. As a writer I saw that happen with Beau in the aftermath of his torrid romance with Anne Corley. She shot through his life like a shooting star and then was gone as suddenly as she came. While after lots of years and many books Beau eventually found happiness with Mel Soames, Anne will always remain an indelible and important part of his life.

After our lunch together, Bonnie and I stayed in touch with Christmas cards and periodic short visits. After a career with the airlines, first as a flight attendant and later as director of training, she went on to write a book on management. Later she opened and ran her own management-consulting agency, one that trained executives for major companies all over the globe. A few years ago she left Florida behind and retired to a place in the Pacific Northwest on Whidbey Island.

In the meantime, I was writing books, one after another. It was invisible to me, but between one Beaumont book and the next, a certain period of time would have elapsed both in fiction and in real life. Not only was I getting older, so was J.P. Last summer, as I prepared to write Beaumont # 21, my son suggested that since Beau was getting a bit long of tooth, perhaps it was time for me to consider writing a Beaumont prequel.

People often ask me where I get my ideas. They come from things people say to me and from things I read. According to my husband, ideas go into my head where they undergo a kind of “Waring Blender” transformation. When they come back out, leaking through my fingertips into the keyboard on the computer, the stories are different from how they went in.

The other thing about writing books is that they take more thinking than they do typing--approximately six hundred hours of the former and three hundred hours of the latter.

About six months ago now, I sat in this very chair in front of a burning gas log, wondering what on earth I was going to put into the next Beau book. In 20 previous books, written over a period of 30 years, Beau had evolved into a somewhat curmudgeonly old cuss, a guy with a pair of chronically bad knees, a somewhat younger wife, and a full panoply of co-workers, friends, and relations. The idea of seeing Beau at a younger age had some appeal, so I went back to *Until Proven Guilty*, Beaumont # 1, and started reviewing his history.

I was halfway through that book, reading about his experiences with his dying mother, when I came upon the word Vietnam. It was almost as if someone had flipped a switch in my head. Had Doug Davis lived and had Beaumont been real, the two of them would have been about the same age. They would have served in the same war. What was there to keep me from blending fact and fiction and having the two of them meet in Vietnam?

That very evening I wrote an e-mail to Bonnie Abney, telling her about my idea and asking for her help. She wrote back the next day, signing on for the project. The result of our collaboration is woven into the fabric of Beaumont # 21, *Second Watch*.

Over the course of the next several weeks and months, Bonnie was kind enough to share with me the details of her life back then and of her life now. She allowed me access to some of the letters she received after Doug's death. The sympathy notes came from fellow officers, some of whom had been classmates of Doug's at West Point, as well as from guys with whom he served in Vietnam. In the process, I began to gain some insight into the young man Doug Davis became after I lost sight of him.

As I first learned in Seattle Center, in the army, his given name, Leonard, held sway. The men he served with knew him not as Doug but as Lennie D. They told stories of his days in the 35th Infantry; about how he spent his spare time playing poker, writing letters and reading. Several of them mentioned that one of his favorite books, one he read over and over from beginning to end, was William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Their notes revealed instances of his innate kindness and of his natural ability to lead his men. He was known for taking raw recruits and molding them into capable soldiers in a platoon that was considered one of the best. He was a smart and dedicated leader who was able to spout off plenty of colorful

language when a dressing down was required. Soldiers who found themselves taking heat from Lennie D. for some infraction or other, never made the same mistake twice.

Through that correspondence, I learned about how Doug and three other officers from Company C, while sitting around a card table in their quarters and playing poker one day, heard a news report about how the Vietcong were a supposedly a very superstitious lot, especially when it came to seeing the playing card, the Ace of Spades.

The four second lieutenants embarked on a psychological warfare program in which they made a practice of leaving an Ace of Spades calling card with the body of every dead VC soldier. The problem with that, of course, was that each deck of cards contained only one Ace of Spades, and when it came to playing poker, 51-card decks didn't really measure up. Eventually one of the four wrote to the card manufacturing company. His letter was forwarded to a company executive who had lost a son in World War II. The man was only too happy to comply.

Within days, Company C had an ever-ready supply of decks of cards containing nothing *but* Aces of Spades. At first those special decks were shipped postage paid, only to Company C. As word spread, however, so did the program, as the card company continued to ship all-Ace of Spades decks of cards to other soldiers serving anywhere in the war zone. Remnants of that Ace of Spades tradition continue in the U.S. military to this day.

Doing research is the easy part of creating a book. Writing it means work.

Eventually, with all the Doug Davis material pulled into a master file, it was time for me to start the actual writing. In *Second Watch* we first meet Beau and his wife, Mel, as they head for Swedish Hospital in Seattle where Beau is scheduled to have dual knee-replacement surgery. While in the hospital and under the influence of powerful narcotics, he encounters a whole series

of dreams that offer glimpses of his past. Through the dreams, Beau encounters former and reviews long-ago cases.

One of those, the first case he handled after his promotion to the homicide squad at Seattle P.D., deals with the still-unsolved murder of a young girl, a University of Washington co-ed, who was murdered in 1973. While Beau is under the influence of post-surgical medications, Monica Wellington, the long dead victim, wanders through a series of vivid dreams intent on giving him a piece of her mind. Monica may be dead, but she's disappointed with the fact that J. P. Beaumont failed to keep the promise he made to Monica's mother long ago when he said he would bring the killer to justice. Jarred by his dream-prompted recollections and while still laid up in the hospital, Beau determines to revisit Monica's case in hopes that new forensic technology may provide new answers.

By the end of August, the writing process for me was well underway. Eighty or so pages into the story, in another drug-fueled dream sequence, a guy in Vietnam War vintage fatigues, walks into Beau's hospital room, pulls out a deck of cards, and lays four Aces of Spades out on the bedside table.

The dreamscape Lennie D. is Doug Davis as Beau remembers him from their initial encounters in the latter part of July of 1966 when Beau first arrived in Vietnam and only days before the August 2nd firefight that took Doug's life and earned him a Silver Star. I could remember Doug's engaging grin and his slouching stance from Mr. Guerra's classroom, but the other details that I wrote into the scene were drawn from my correspondence with Bonnie and with Lennie D.'s friends and fellow officers. I knew from Bonnie that he had chipped a front tooth in an automobile accident in Texas three weeks before his deployment, and that he had planned on having the tooth fixed once he was back home in the States.

The hospital scene finds Beau and Doug chatting together as though only days rather than nearly half a century had passed. As I wrote the dialogue, I found myself shedding real tears for the Doug Davis I had known and lost so very long ago. When the apparition Doug charges Beau with finding the unnamed woman to whom Doug was engaged at the time of his death, someone Beau knew nothing about, it struck me as an unlikely mission to be assigned to an ailing homicide cop so many years after the fact.

One of the things that puzzled me as the story continued was Beau's reticence to discuss the situation with anyone else, including his wife, Mel, his boss, Ross Connors, his son, Scott, or his best friend, Ron Peters. I couldn't understand why he was so close-mouthed about it.

Sometimes, when I don't understand something that's going on with one of my characters, the only way for me to find answers to those questions is to keep writing, and that's what I did. During Beau's second encounter with his commanding officer in Vietnam, Lennie D. lends Beau a book to read, a 1600 page copy of the *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Not only does he lend Beau the book, he also urges him to read it, with a grinning warning him that there will be pop quiz once he finishes.

Days later, during the lethal fire-fight in which Lennie D. is killed, J.P. Beaumont's life is spared because the pages of that book, carried inside his shirt, were between him and the three pieces of shrapnel that would otherwise have taken his life. Beau credits the fact that he is still alive to Lennie D.'s kindness in lending him that book.

So why wasn't he talking about it? I still didn't understand.

By then it was early September and time for Bill and me to make our annual pilgrimage down to Ashland, Oregon, to see the plays at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. On the way back, I had agreed to do a book-signing event at the library in Lincoln City.

During the presentation, in a discussion of Joanna # 15, *Judgment Call*, I told about the people who were mentioned on the dedication page for that book, some of whom happened to be in the audience that very evening. Randy Tucker, was a Marine who served in Vietnam and who later spent years serving on Presidential security details. After leaving the military, he worked as a motorcycle cop in Portland, Oregon. In the eighties, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor his doctors warned would kill him within a matter of months.

Randy was a Marine, however. (By the way, there's no such thing as an ex-Marine.) He and his wife, Loretta, fought that tumor tooth and nail for the next thirty years. He had finally lost the battle only a year earlier. The dedication page of *Judgment Call* says, "For Loretta, in memory of Randy. *Semper fi.*"

After my presentation ended and as I made my way to the signing table, a young man, probably somewhere in his early twenties, approached me and asked if I'd mind introducing him to the Marine's widow. Loretta was standing right there. When I introduced them, he held out his hand, looked Loretta directly in the eye, and said, "*Semper fi.*" To which she responded, "And to you."

It was a magic moment. In that noisy, crowded space, it seemed as though those two people were alone on the planet, exchanging a heartfelt, traditional greeting.

After the crowd died down, the young Marine made his way over to my table and sat down in front of me. He told me his name was Rhys and explained that he had just come back from a three-mile run on the sandy beach as part of his rehab while he recovered from dual knee replacement surgery. Having just written about Beau's dual knee replacement, that seemed like quite a coincidence, but when I looked at Rhys, he struck me as far too young to need two new knees. That was before he told me about them.

I'm not sure if the incident occurred in Afghanistan or Iraq, but when Rhys was caught in a firefight, a copy of my book *Devil's Claw*, the first book of mine he ever read, happened to be between his knees and the bullets. The pages of the book took enough of the impact that doctors were able to replace his knees rather than having to amputate both legs.

The story was so much like the scenario with Beau in my fictional work that it was jaw-dropping!!! I have yet to see the actual bullet-ridden book, but Rhys tells me he still has it and that when he locates it, he intends to show it to me.

Fueled with that story, I came home from Lincoln City determined to finish the book. As I continued writing and as Beau embarked on his mission for Lennie D, that of finding Doug's missing fiancée, what was going on became increasingly clear to me. Beau was walking around carrying a burden of guilt due to the fact that after he came home from the war, he had made no effort to reach out to Bonnie--to find her and comfort her in her loss.

Obviously that's not the whole story of *Second Watch*, but it's an integral part of it. As first Doug and then Bonnie came to life on the pages of the manuscript, I realized that I was living their love story with them, not as part of it, but as a caring observer., as someone who understood about what they had shared and what they had lost. It was inspiring to see that all these years later, Bonnie is as true to her Douglas--she's the only one who calls him that--as she was on the day they met in the fall of 1965.

It's a heartbreaking story. It's a loving story. It's a story I'm honored to tell.

I wanted the world to know about Doug, the guy his army pals called Lennie D. I wanted people to know that he was one of the many unsung heroes of that terrible war, a guy who earned his Silver Star trying to save others. He was only one of the 58,000 who died. After Doug died, his younger brother, Blaine, who was my age, signed up and served in Vietnam as well. Blaine

came home from the war as one of the Walking Wounded. The price their mother, Bena Cook, paid for her two brave sons is incalculable. The tragedy, of course, is that there are so many other families out there who paid similar prices with their own terrible losses, ones that often went ignored and have been swept under a our country's carpet of forgetfulness.

In the process of honoring Doug and Bonnie, I ended up honoring the other six boys from Bisbee as well. All seven of their names are on a gold plaque affixed to a slab of granite in front of Bisbee High School. They're the ones from our small town who went away to war and didn't make it home alive.

Bonnie and I worked together to get every snippet of Lennie D.'s subplot story straight. Last week we finished the manuscript, and I sent it to my editor in New York. This past weekend, one of the guys who was deployed to Vietnam with Doug, but who served in a different unit, sent an e-mail to Bonnie having heard of her and of our efforts through another vet. He shared his memories of Doug and his sense of guilt for not reaching out to the family or to Bonnie in all these years.

This colleague's way of dealing with the tragedy of Doug's loss is almost a mirror image of J. P. Beaumont's. I was struck by the validation of Beau's feelings and actions, feelings actions that puzzled me when writing them weeks earlier. Along with his e-mail, he sent a photo of Doug, one taken on July 31, 1966, only two days before he died. That photo is the one you saw at the top of this story. The guy in the photo was the one I knew all right, the antsy student standing in the center row of the Latin 2 class waiting for the bell to ring. I knew about the chipped tooth, but it was only in the photo that I saw it for the first time.

I hope *Second Watch* does justice to Doug's memory and honors Bonnie for her enduring love as well as for her terrible loss. My readers are the ones who will make that final

determination, and I'm sure they'll let me know. I hope that my personal gratitude for all those men and women who served, the ones who came back as well as the one who didn't, shines through this story. That goes for the guys from the Vietnam War, and for the ones from more recent wars as well, Rhys Emery included.

It is my fondest hope that some time in the next few months, some veteran reading this book, somebody around Beau's age maybe or perhaps someone much younger, will realize that he, too, failed to reach out in a timely fashion to the people who lost someone. I hope Beau's story will resonate with him enough that he will pick up his courage and find his way to their doorsteps or to their telephones or to their e-mail accounts and let them know that he is sorry for their loss. Even though it may seem like a long time ago to the rest of the world, I know that those fathers and mothers; sweethearts and wives and children are still grieving. They are still mourning their losses, and it helps to know that they are not alone and not forgotten.

Because it turns out, it's never too late to say you're sorry.

Take another look at the photo. That grinning young man you see there is the guy from Bisbee, the one from my Latin 2 Class--Doug Davis, aka Lennie D., aka Douglas. He was and is all of those people. This is the photo that was taken in the Pleiku Highlands more than forty years ago. It came to Bonnie out of the blue all this time later, just this past weekend, as a direct result of our collaboration on this book. I can tell you for certain that she regards being given that photo as a real blessing.

And so do I.