



**The 'Girl Who Wasn't
Supposed to Be a Writer'
Makes a Name for Herself
Novel After Novel**

On the Best- Seller List

**Author J.A. Jance Is Coming to
Scenic Regional Library in Union
Sunday, February 26, at 7 p.m.**

***New York Times* Best-Selling author J.A. Jance has written over 40 novels of mystery and suspense. For the last 10 years she has averaged writing two novels a year, which means making two national book tours a year as well.**

Photo by Mary Ann Halpin Studios.

Prolific author J.A. Jance is the perfect example of how sometimes you have to believe in yourself and ignore the negative voices of others if you want to make your dreams come true.

A *New York Times* best-selling author with more than 40 titles to her name, Jance might never have been a published author at all if she had let the naysayers in her life hold her down.

First there was the college professor who refused to admit her to the University of Arizona's creative writing program because he thought girls should be teachers or nurses. Next there was her first husband, also a writer, who discouraged her from writing too, even more so in 1968 after she received a letter from a New York editor interested in publishing a children's story she had written.

Jance acquiesced, but she didn't let either of them silence her completely. She kept writing, mainly poetry, in secret.

She was divorced when she began writing fiction, a crime thriller based on murders that had occurred in Tucson in 1970. That book was never published, but her next work was, and ever since Jance's books have rolled off the press year after year.

"Not bad for a girl who wasn't supposed to be a writer," Jance said with a chuckle.

She's currently touring the country promoting her newest title, "Left for Dead," and will make a stop at Scenic Regional Library Sunday, Feb. 26, at 7 p.m. for a presentation and book signing.

Her visit is part of Scenic's focus to offer more creative programming for patrons. That includes bringing in national authors like Jance and Ridley Pearson, who held a book signing at Scenic last year.

Library Director Vivienne Beckett said the timing for booking Jance was perfect with "Left for Dead" having been released earlier this month.

"She's a very popular writer of mysteries and thrillers with several different series," said Beckett, noting last month Scenic's book club read one of Jance's titles, "Dead Wrong," from her Joanna Brady series.

The book club members were "excited and impressed" that the library was bringing in a national author, said Beckett, adding that many patrons are fans of her work.

"Her writing is captivating and entertaining," Beckett remarked.

"She's a fun and talented writer . . . adept at creating stories."

Beckett said the library is expecting a good crowd for the event. There will be refreshments and Barnes & Noble will be selling copies of "Left for Dead," along with several other Jance titles.

Anyone who purchases copies of her book or brings their own along for her to sign will not leave disappointed, said Jance.

"My policy is not to leave any book unsigned," said Jance. "If people show up

with all of my books, I'll sign them all."

'We've Come a Long Way'

Jance, who splits her time between homes in Tucson, Ariz., and Seattle, Wash., doesn't shy away from sharing her background and, in fact, sees it as an important cultural benchmark of how times have changed.

"We need to know we've come a long way," she told *The Missourian*.

From the time she was a child in the second grade, Jance had wanted to be

"It was on-the-job training program," Jance commented. "In the process, I taught myself how to write."

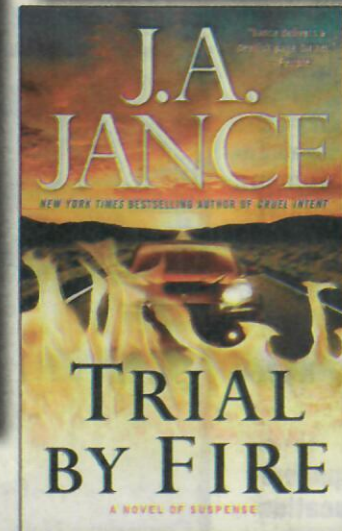
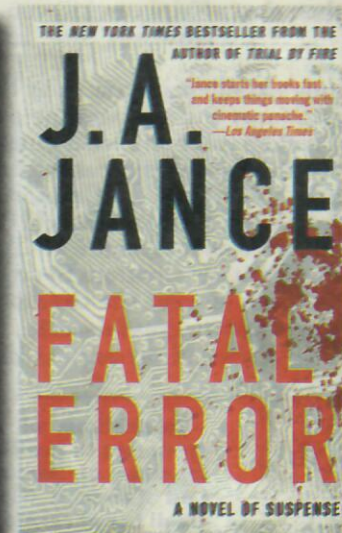
The book had its flaws, she admits. For starters, it was 1,200 pages.

"Since I was never allowed in the creative writing classes, no one ever told me there were some things I needed to leave out," Jance notes on her website, www.jajance.com.

But that first book showed Jance had a knack for writing mystery-thriller-sus-



"Left for Dead" is the newest book in Jance's Ali Reynolds' series. Submitted Photos.



a writer. It was reading Frank Baum's "Wizard of Oz" series that hooked her.

When she was denied entrance to the writing program at the University of Arizona, Jance opted to earn a degree in English and secondary education. She went on to finish a master's in education in library science.

Jance taught high school English at Tucson's Pueblo High School and then was a librarian at Indian Oasis School District in Sells, Ariz.

Writing was something she did on her own time, in private.

"Not being allowed in the writing program (at the University of Arizona) didn't stop me from writing," she stressed.

She wrote poetry as a way to work through some tough issues in her life, namely being married to an alcoholic. After the divorce she began writing a book on those 1970 murders.

pense stories, and her editors encouraged her to write more crime fiction.

"Until Proven Guilty" was published in 1985, introducing the character of Detective J.P. Beaumont. Jance has since written 20 more "Beau" books, along with three other series — two following detectives Ali Reynolds and Joanna Brady and one more following the Walker family.

Jance, who is happily married to her second husband, no longer writes poetry, not because she doesn't like it, but mainly because she just isn't inspired to.

"It's difficult to write poetry when you're happy," she said. "Who writes poems about being happy?"

Her fiction keeps her busy, too. Jance has been averaging about two books a year for the last 10 years.

Ideas, Writing Process

Jance said she only ever works on writing one book at a time, but she is of-

ten promoting or doing editorial work on another book at the same time.

She “has no idea” where her story lines come from, except that she looks for some interesting detail and expand on it.

“In one of my Joanna Brady books, I read in my alumni magazine that the material used to inflate airbags was dangerous and unregulated . . . so I ended up writing about that.

“It has to be something that will hold my interest for six months,” Jance said, noting that’s about how long it will take her to complete a book.

On her website, Jance said she also draws on her own experience to add details to her stories.

“One of the wonderful things about being a writer is that everything — even the bad stuff — is usable,” Jance writes on her website. “The 18 years I spent while married to an alcoholic have helped shape the experience and character of Detective J.P. Beaumont. My experiences as a single parent have gone into the background for Joanna Brady — including her first tentative steps toward a new life after the devastation of losing her husband in ‘Desert Heat.’

“And then there’s the evil creative writing professor in ‘Hour of the Hunter’ and ‘Kiss of the Bees,’ but that’s another story.”

Jance writes her stories on a laptop computer, preferring to work where the mood strikes her rather than at a desk in a traditional office. One of her favorite places is the easy chair in her family room.

She has used a computer for writing her stories since 1983 when she purchased her first — an Eagle with a dual floppy-disk drive and 128 K of memory.

When it comes time to write, Jance said she starts with the fact that someone is dead and begins writing to figure out who did it and why.

“I never outline,” she stressed. “I hated it in sixth grade, and I never do it now.”

Even with more than 40 books to her name, Jance isn’t planning to wind down her writing career any time soon.

“My idol is P.D. James,” said Jance, who also pointed out, “We’re neighbors on the book shelves.”

Best-Seller Status

Jance can still remember when she found out that her books had earned the status of “*New York Times* Best Seller.”

It was with her fifth Joanna Brady book, and she and her husband were on a Rick Steves’ tour of France. At their hotel, she was given a message to call home.

“I assumed something was wrong with the kids,” she said. “But instead it was my editor saying we had made the best-seller list.

“I had the hotel people buy champagne for everyone on the tour.”

Jance said that kind of achievement brings with it both a sense of confidence and pressure to maintain that level of work. Still, it’s wonderful, she exclaimed.

“It’s a measurement of how you’re do-

J.A. Jance

• Continued From 1C

ing at your job," she said. "It's a label everybody understands . . . it means you're getting the job done."

Jance said she takes pride in the support she receives from fans, "going out to vote with their hard-earned money" to put her on the best-seller list.

And when they write to her, she writes back — not an assistant or her publisher.

"I don't take my fans for granted," said Jance. "When they write to me, they hear from me. They deserve an answer from me, not some faceless entity."

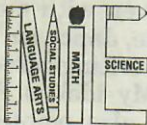
Giving Back

One thing Jance likes to incorporate into her book

signings, if possible, is having a percentage of the proceeds donated to a charity.

She has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars this way for charities like the AAUW (American Association of University Women), Behind the Badge (a foundation to help police officers in Tucson, Ariz.), the Humane Society, American Cancer Society and Girl Scouts, to name a few.

"It's part of being a good citizen," Jance said.



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