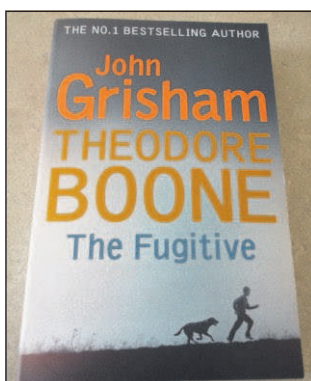


# A positive verdict on Grisham's kid lawyer character

Legal adventures where lead character is a child

By **PATRICK WEBB**  
Special to *The Daily Astorian*



"The Fugitive"

Mention bestselling author John Grisham and what comes to mind?

Tangled legal dramas that capture the essence of the American South.

But there's a side to Grisham's writing that is even more compelling. And unlikely, too: Enjoyable legal adventures where the lead character is a child.

"Theodore Boone: The Fugitive" is the fifth in a series of books written for young readers.

And they have me hooked.

I liked the work of former attorney Grisham when he first exchanged the courtroom for the writer's pen. "A Time to Kill," about a father who shoots his daughter's rapists, was an attention-grabber clear back in 1989 with definite echoes of "To Kill a Mockingbird." (In interviews, Grisham refers to it as his best book; it reportedly was rejected by several publishers and only reprinted when his

## Theodore Boone is a role model for anyone his age, without appearing to try.

three next works gained noteworthy success.)

"The Firm" involved tedious photocopying, but had a plot twist involving the mob that was unexpected and explosive. "The Client," his fourth work, is his best adult story. The movie is faithful to the plot, with Susan Sarandon and Tommy Lee Jones capturing Grisham's cleverly drawn, imperfect characters amid the sweat of New Orleans.

### Enter Boone

However, Grisham's other output has been a series of somewhat weighty tomes that are often far-fetched. "The Pelican Brief" and "The Runaway Jury" seemed implausible, and took too many pages to excite. Last year's "Rogue Lawyer" was episodic, almost as if it

were notes of novel fragments strung together.

Enter Theodore Boone. Theodore is a middle schooler growing up in a small American town. He's an inquisitive, intelligent boy who rides his bike and has a dog called "Judge." His parents are both lawyers, and their son hangs around the courthouse where he is well liked by judges and janitors. His dad, Woods, is dull, predictable and somewhat lethargic. His mom, Martha, who definitely wears the trousers, is protective but encouraging. Her compromises allow Theodore to be himself.

And his Uncle Ike, a struck-off lawyer, is eager to guide his nephew's "cases" with an unorthodox approach that proves to be key.

Grisham captures the thoughts of a likable eighth-grader. It may seem unbelievable to middle-school teachers, but Theodore admits he doesn't know all the answers, he isn't obsessed with raging hormones, and he always pays attention in class. He is a role model for anyone his age, without appearing to try.

The fifth book in the series, "The Fugitive," takes Theodore out from the confines of his heartland hometown to Washington, D.C., where a chance glimpse at a wanted suspect leads him to adventures and danger involving the FBI.

It's the most far-fetched plot to date. But it works, in part because Grisham blends the familiar characters with the unknown with-

out stretching the boundaries of credibility.

### Quick, yet satisfying, reads

I'd recommend the series to any Grisham fan, especially someone who liked the author's early works but finds his later, adult novels too dense and slow-paced. The Boone novels are a quick read, but satisfying.

The series began with "Theodore Boone: Kid Lawyer" and was followed by "The Abduction," "The Accused" and "The Activist." I have read them in publication order, though I don't recall the later books contain spoilers for the earlier ones.

The sixth, "Theodore Boone: The Scandal," is being released this month. I cannot wait.

Patrick Webb is a North Coast writer and the former managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

# Surveillance: Mayor LaMear took a measured view

Continued from Page 1C

In addition, an FBI Inspector General report from last year revealed that the bureau's collection of phone records between 2004 and 2009, as authorized by the USA Patriot Act, did not itself foil any terrorist attacks.

But, even if government agencies' collection of personal data had helped to thwart attacks, would that be worth living in a panopticon state?

At least one person at Williams' talk said "no." Another said he would be more willing to support a period of heightened national surveillance, provided it was a stopgap and would be reined in when the threat had passed.

Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear took a measured view of surveillance.

"I think there are times when surveillance is important. We've talked about all the negatives, but I'm happy when they take a look at who's coming on board airplanes and so forth when I'm flying," she said. "It's hard to know how to balance the whole thing."

### Why privacy?

Williams raised a question so basic that even the most emphatic opponents of surveillance forget to ask it:

Why do we value privacy in the first place? Why do we care if our privacy is invaded?

"What is it about this idea of having unobserved space, or unobserved time, that we find valuable?" he asked.

One possible answer: To maintain our sanity, and to feel like ourselves, we need room to drop our guards, to unselfconsciously behave as flawed beings — to tell off-color jokes and sing out of tune, write careless texts and emails, behave vulnerably and emotionally, use the bathroom and be sexual.

"It's not like we don't do those things in public because we're ashamed of them," Williams said. "It's just that we don't do those things in public because we don't want to."

The "unobserved space" is where we store the blooper reels of our lives, the outtakes that prove we're human. When that space is monitored and the details



Erick Bengel/The Daily Astorian

Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear, right, and her husband, Cliff, engage in a group discussion at the Astoria Public Library about balancing matters of privacy and security in an age of government surveillance and concerns about terrorism.

shared without our consent, it feels like a fundamental violation — a trespass against our dignity.

What's more, when we know that such monitoring may be taking place, we cannot help checking our own behavior, acting as our own prison guards, even in private.

In a sense, when we submit to surveillance measures, we give up the freedom to fully relax. Several people at Williams' talk reckoned that is a rather steep price for safety and security.

And make no mistake: At the heart of every pro-surveillance sales pitch is the promise that it will make society safer and more secure.

"Personally, I think that the burden of proof that it does do that needs to be on the people who are exercising authority," Williams said. "I think this should remain a question, but it's a question that people who are exercising the control should be able to answer."



Erick Bengel/The Daily Astorian

During the Oregon Humanities Conversation Project's event "Keeping Tabs on America," Astoria City Councillor Drew Herzig shared his thoughts on the transparency of citizen's lives to a less-than-transparent government surveillance infrastructure.

While other newspapers give you less, The Daily Astorian

**GIVES YOU MORE**

From left: Hillary Borrud, Mateusz Perkowski, Paris Achen

**CAPITAL BUREAU**

Our new

covers the state for you