

Author Jance finds unlikely heroes in her fiction

'There are little pieces of me in all my books'

By Nancy McCarthy
For Cannon Beach Gazette

When author J.A. Jance discusses the key characters in her mystery books, they seem more like old friends than personalities from her imagination.

She "met" retired Seattle police chief J.P. Beaumont 30 years ago on a train to Portland; they have the same birthday. Arizona Sheriff Joanna Brady is short because the 6-foot, 1-inch Jance wanted to know what it was like to be short.

During a talk and book-signing sponsored by the Cannon Beach Library Aug. 24, Jance sat in an overstuffed chair on the Coaster Theatre stage. She said her stories often come from personal experience.

"There are little pieces of me in all of my books," she said.

Jance, 72, demonstrated her humor, which could easily turn into a



NANCY MCCARTHY/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Author J.A. Jance.

sharp retort when fielding audience questions. She laughed at her mistakes and became emotional when she talked about her parents.

"Eighty-one years ago today, my parents were married," Jance said. They were together 68 years and had seven children. Her mother cooked three meals a day for nine people, washed dishes, volunteered with community organizations and kept an organized house.

"She could have been a general," said Jance, who was the first member of the family to earn a four-year college degree. After her graduation,

Jance admitted, she became an "unbearable snob" toward her mother, who had only a seventh-grade education. She read a poem from her 1984 book of poetry, "After the Fire," in which she wrote, "It is impossible for me and my mother to be sisters."

That attitude remained until, Jance admitted, she had children of her own.

When her mother died a few years following her father's death, Jance said she shed no tears because she knew her parents finally were reunited. But in her novel, "Damage Control," she wrote a scene where an elderly couple drive off a cliff similar to the death scene in the movie, "Thelma and Louise," and the tears broke free.

"I cried like hell when I wrote that scene," Jance recalled.

She also included a scene in the book involving a memorial for a fallen officer. Jance said she wrote it in memory of her brother, Jim, an Arizona firefighter, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack several years before her parents' deaths.

Another personal experience, which ended up in a J.P. Beaumont story, revolves around guilt. She didn't attend the funeral of Doug Da-

vis, a high school friend from Bisbee, Arizona, because she didn't know, until after the funeral, of his death at age 22 while serving in Vietnam. Years later, after meeting the woman who had been engaged to Davis, Jance decided to write a Beaumont "prequel" — "Second Watch" — in which Beaumont searches for his friend's missing fiancée.

"People who have read my book have sought out the cemetery and left tokens of appreciation on his grave," Jance said. "Being a writer is a very good job sometimes."

The popular writer is closely followed by her fans, who remind her of mistakes or ask about the well-being of her characters. "When I had Beau do a lot of drinking so he would have something to do with his hands, readers would ask, 'Does J.P. Beaumont have a drinking problem?'"

"The author was the last person to realize it," Jance said. In the next Beaumont book, "Minor in Possession," Beaumont goes into treatment.

To those who point out mistakes in her 50-plus books, (she publishes at least one a year the newest Beaumont book is out this month), she recalls

the lesson she learned from basket weavers on the Tohono O'Odham Indian Reservation, where she was a librarian. Mistakes, Jance said, "are my contribution to making sure my art is not perfect. Only the Great Spirit is perfect."

While fielding questions from the audience at the Coaster, Jance displayed her humor and a bit of impatience.

When a man asked her if she worked from an outline, Jance told him that, in her 30 years of doing book-signings, it's usually a male who asks that question, and it's usually a retired engineer. The questioner admitted that he was a retired chemical engineer.

Jance said she hated outlines. Instead, she added, she starts with someone who is dead, then she spends "a lot of time figuring out who did it and how. Occasionally, I paint myself into a corner."

The first 20 percent of the book is difficult to write, the middle 60 percent is somewhat easier, and the last 20 percent is a "banana peel," and that's what I know what the ending will be," Jance said.

Coast Happenings Calendar YOUR GUIDE TO MUSIC, ART, COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL EVENTS ON THE NORTH COAST

Friday, Sept. 8

Wheels & Waves

7 a.m., downtown corridor, Seaside, 503-717-1914, www.seasidedowntown.com. A gathering of show quality hot rods, street cars and customs will be displayed at the annual Wheels & Waves car show and parade.

Canoeing

Noon, Broadway Park boat dock, 1300 Broadway, Seaside, 503-738-3311, www.sunsetempire.com, \$20 to \$30. SE-PRD-led canoe trips travel along the river and upper estuary near the Necanicum confluence, registration required.

Kelsey Mousley

6 p.m., Cannon Beach History Center, 1387 Spruce St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-9301, www.cbhistory.org, \$15. A concert and reception kicks off the multi-day annual Cottage & Garden tour with live music by Kelsey Mousley & the Next Right Thing.

Wes Wahrmund

6 p.m., The Bistro, 263 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2661. Wes Wahrmund's classical guitar skills amaze with light jazz and original tunes.

Maggie & the Kats

6:30 p.m., Sweet Basil's Café, 271 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-1539, www.cafesweetbasils.com, no cover, 21+. Maggie & the Kats play world-class blues music, Creole, jazz, funk, rhythm-n-blues and soul.

Texas Hold'em

7 p.m., American Legion, 1216 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2973, 21+. Cannon Beach American Legion offers a Friday night Texas Hold'em poker tournament, doors open at 3 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 9

Wheels & Waves

7 a.m., downtown corridor, Seaside, 503-717-1914.

Discover Haystack

9 a.m., on the beach at Haystack Rock, Cannon Beach, 503-436-8060. Discover Haystack Rock presents a program on "Marine Debris Art;" meet at the red HRAP truck.

Cottage Luncheon

Noon, Chamber Community Hall, 207 Spruce St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-9301, \$25. Enjoy a luncheon and presentation by Dr. Doug Deur for the Cottage & Garden tour; maps available at end of luncheon.

Cottage Tour

Noon, Cannon Beach History Center, 1387 Spruce St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-9301, \$35. The self-guided Cottage and Garden

walking tour features the unique craftsmanship and architecture of northern Cannon Beach, maps available.

Reception & Concert

6 p.m., Chamber Community Hall, 207 Spruce St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-9301. An evening concert and reception will follow the cottage tour — wine and hors d'oeuvres included, with a raffle and live music by Thistle & Rose.

Wes Wahrmund

6 p.m., The Bistro, 263 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2661.

Patrick Lamb

7:30 p.m., Coaster Theatre, 108 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-1242, \$35 to \$40. Saxophonist Patrick Lamb focuses his music on old-school rhythm-n-blues and soul with a flavor of rock, jazz and blues.

Sunday, Sept. 10

Wheels & Waves

7 a.m., downtown corridor, Seaside, 503-717-1914.

Cottage Tea

11 a.m., Chamber Community Hall, 207 Spruce St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-9301, \$20. The cottage tour concludes with an English-style garden tea reception and presentation by Dawn Hummel.

NAMI Meeting

2 p.m., Seaside Public Library, 1131 Broadway, Seaside, 503-738-6165, www.nami.org. The National Alliance on Mental Illness welcomes individuals and caregivers of anyone who suffers from mental illness.

Monday, Sept. 11

Burgers & Jam

6:30 p.m., American Legion, 1216 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2973. The Legion offers burgers and music on Monday nights.

Tuesday, Sept. 12

Chamber Breakfast

7:45 a.m., Pig 'N' Pancake, 223 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2623, www.cannonbeach.org. The Cannon Beach Chamber shares chamber news, activities and features a local business owner, no host breakfast available.

Farmers Market

1 p.m., Hemlock/Gower streets near City Hall, 163 Gower Ave., Cannon Beach, 503-436-8044, www.cannonbeachmarket.org. This market offers fresh produce, pasture-raised meat, organic cheeses, handcrafted artisan food products and live music.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Patrick Lamb Band.

Patrick Lamb and band in concert

Saxophonist Patrick Lamb returns to the Coaster Theatre Playhouse on Saturday, Sept. 9, for an end of summer celebration. Lamb's last three singles have been top five nationally on the Billboard Charts. He was recently inducted as one of the youngest members into the Ore-

gon Music Hall of Fame and has been given the Independent Spirit Award by the city of Portland.

The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. and tickets can be purchased online at coastertheatre.com, at the Coaster Theatre box office or by calling 503-436-1242.

Art of Aging

3 p.m., Hoffman Center, 594 Laneda Ave., Manzanita, 503-368-3846, \$5. Janet Holboke will speak about memory loss at the next Art of Aging/Art of Dying series.

City Council

5:30 p.m., Cannon Beach City Hall, 163 Gower St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-1581, www.ci.cannon-beach.or.us. This is a work session.

Wednesday, Sept. 13

Thistle & Rose

5 p.m., The Bistro, 263 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2661. Thistle and Rose perform original tunes, folk and Americana from the 70s and 80s.

Thursday, Sept. 14

Floating Glass Balls

8 p.m., Bill's Tavern, 188 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2202, www.billstavernandbrewhouse.com, no cover. The Floating Glass Balls plays beachgrass music: a blend of bluegrass, Caribbean, folk, swing, contemporary and country.

Thistle

8 p.m., The Wayfarer, 1190 Pacific Drive, Cannon Beach, 503-436-1108. Bobby "Bobcat" Rice and Paul Dueber of Thistle play

an American-inspired music mix of blues, folk, ballad, rock and originals.

Friday, Sept. 15

AAUW Discussion

6 p.m., Beach Books, 616 Broadway, Seaside, 503-738-0808. Shannon Symonds and Jay Barber will give a talk on domestic violence and sex trafficking, open to the public.

Wes Wahrmund

6 p.m., The Bistro, 263 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2661.

Maggie & the Kats

6:30 p.m., Sweet Basil's Café, 271 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-1539, no cover, 21+.

Texas Hold'em

7 p.m., American Legion, 1216 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2973, 21+.

Saturday, Sept. 16

Buddy Walk

9 a.m., Quatat Park, 493 Oceanway, Seaside, 503-312-1378, www.sammysplace.info, \$8 to \$15. North Coast Down Syndrome Network and Sammy's Place hosts its annual Buddy Walk on the beach fundraiser, includes activities, music and more; registration required.

Writing Workshop

1 p.m., Hoffman Center, 594 Laneda Ave., Manzanita, 503-368-3846, www.hoffmanblog.org, \$40. Pauls Toutonghi will teach a workshop on "Writing with Balance."

Wes Wahrmund

6 p.m., The Bistro, 263 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2661.

Author Reading

7 p.m., Hoffman Center, 594 Laneda Ave., Manzanita, 503-368-3846, www.hoffmanblog.org. Pauls Toutonghi, author of "Dog Gone: A Lost Pet's Extraordinary Journey and the Family Who Brought Him Home" will be featured.

Sunday, Sept. 17

Legion Breakfast

9 a.m., American Legion, 1216 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, \$4 to \$8. Proceeds help support local veterans, families, community organizations and the high school scholarship fund; open to the public.

Muttzanita Festival

10 a.m., on the beach at Laneda Ave., Manzanita, 503-368-3436, www.muttzanita.com. The annual Muttzanita charity festival offers vendor booths, games and contests to keep festival goers engaged with like-minded animal lovers.

Evensong

6 p.m., Cannon Beach Community Church, 132 Washington St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-1222. Evensong features performers Jennifer Goodenberger and Wes Wahrmund, meditative songs and quiet reflection.

Monday, Sept. 18

Burgers & Jam

6:30 p.m., American Legion, 1216 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, 503-436-2973.

Tuesday, Sept. 19

Farmers Market

1 p.m., Hemlock/Gower streets near City Hall, 163 Gower Ave., Cannon Beach, 503-436-8044.

Wednesday, Sept. 20

Garden Club

Noon, Tolovana Hall, 3779 Hemlock St., Cannon Beach, www.tolovanaartscolony.org. Attendees should bring lunch, coffee, tea and dessert provided; annual dues are \$5, new members welcome.



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