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## PUBLIC SAFETY WRITERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER VOLUME XIII SUMMER 2009 Special Conference Highlights Newsletter

Editor: Marilyn Meredith, [mmeredith@ocsnet.net](mailto:mmeredith@ocsnet.net)

This is your newsletter, please contribute articles, your news, book reviews, or anything else you think might be of interest.

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### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The PSWA conference held in Las Vegas June 17-21 was, in the words of its participants, "possibly the best one ever!"

Coming to the conference from all across the country, each attendee brought a wealth of knowledge and experience which all were more than willing to share. Among the group were an expert on police vehicles, a retired member of the REAL Miami Vice squad, a comedy writer from New York, an active duty Chicago area cop with more 12 books and 60 short stories in print, a criminal appellate attorney from New Orleans, a poet from Houston, the editor of an online LE website, a college professor from California, a mystery writer who writes about astrology, a retired parole/probation officer, an editor from Washington state, an award winning writer from Michigan, a firefighter from Detroit, a publisher from Illinois, the owner of Pun & Oink Productions, a cartoon illustration company, a court-qualified forensic handwriting expert, a California author of more than 20 books, a mathematician and playwright from New Mexico, a freelance writer from Oregon, a federal probation officer from Sacramento, a 21-year veteran of the Suffolk County NY Police Department, a forensic scientist from the REAL CSI Las Vegas, a Vietnam veteran who writes about his time as a combat MP, a partner in a Dallas movie development/production company, a retired Oakland CA beat cop and a best selling mystery writer who is a retired journalist. And, that's just a start. Imagine, if you will, what it was like to have THAT group all in one place together for three days!

The program included:

Mistakes that Make Us Cringe in Books, TV and Movies  
The Deadly Writing Sins  
Writing for Trade Publications  
Turning Your Book into Celluloid  
Forensic Handwriting, Examination and Motivation  
Promotion Old and New: In Person and on the Net  
Logistics of Writing  
Fact to Fiction  
Writing Forensics Right  
Character Building  
From Hard-boiled to Darn Near Cozy, and Why I Dunit  
Publishing and Editing  
Writing for the New Media  
Where are We? How Important is the Setting?  
Putting Comedy in Your Mysteries (Can Murder be Funny?)  
Wave of the Future? Electronic Publishing

Attendees also had plenty of time to network, ask questions, buy the wide array of books brought by published authors and, on the final day, many had the honor of receiving awards in the annual PSWA writing competition.

Plans are already underway for the 2010 conference, tentatively scheduled for June in Las Vegas. More details about the conference will be posted on this website soon so be sure to check in often. Although we all agree this year's conference would be hard to beat, with the large amount of talent in our membership and the enthusiasm of the many volunteers who give of their time and talents to make this organization grow and thrive, we're certainly going to give it a try!

If you haven't yet joined PSWA, take the time to visit the pages on this site and see for yourself the many benefits membership has to offer. And, begin planning right now to join us for conference 2010!

Marilyn Olsen  
President  
Public Safety Writers Association

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## PSWA CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### FACT TO FICTION

Member Sunny Frazier, did a bang-up job telling us how to turn real events into fiction—focusing more on short stories, but her ideas could definitely be used for novels too. She told us to pull away from the facts as they only matter when writing true crime. She also reminded us we could change the ending and give it an inventive twist.

My favorite quote from her handout was this: "Romance writers try to make couples live happily ever after. Mystery writers tackle injustice and right the wrongs. Fantasy writers bring magic back to our jaded realities. Horror writers remind us things could be worse. Historical writers give us the past. Sci-Fi presents the future."

One person's fiction is another's truth.

And she said, "Cops have the material but are used to writing reports."

Sunny Frazier, author of *Fools Rush In* and *Where Angels Fear*.  
<http://www.sunnyfrazier.com>

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## HOW TO SURVIVE THE FIRST PAGE READ THROUGH

Award winning author, Betty Webb told how not to begin a novel as well as how to do it. She also gave us some wonderful tips on first-page no-no's. She reminded us that style and structure are the two main elements of a story.

She suggested having one dead body in the beginning and another in the middle.

This was a great quote: "Good books are not written but rewritten."

Tension needs to build on every page.

A strong arc of action is what sells a book.

Betty Webb writes eight hours a day, every day. No wonder she's an award winning writer.

To learn more about the dark Lean Jones mysteries, go to <http://www.bettywebb-mystery.com>

For the funny Gunn Zoo mysteries, log onto <http://www.bettywebb-zoomystery.com>

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## LOGISTICS IN WRITING

Member Sarah Cortez gave us some great tips on how to organize our time for writing.

Break projects into tasks

Create a list with detailed times

Create self-imposed deadline for projects

Create a master list

Prioritize

At the end of the day make a list of what you need to do tomorrow.

\* \* \*

## WRITING FOR TRADE PUBLICATIONS

--Maintain relationships with the publication and the editors.

--Need to submit something more than a personal story.

--Must be accurate, verify facts and the spelling of names.

--Brush up on your photo skills so you can submit photos too.

--Don't simultaneously submit articles—though you can rewrite articles and submit elsewhere.

--Writer article about PSWA

--Be sure to read the publication before pitching an article.

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## MISTAKES THAT MAKE US CRINGE

--Procedural problems, using lights and sirens when it would alert the criminals, like when responding to a bank robbery.

--Using probation and parole interchangeably.

--Having lieutenants going to the crime scene and doing the leg work.

--Crime stoppers not portrayed correctly.

--Ties with short sleeved shirts.

--Attorney coming in and questioning continuing—doesn't happen.

--Females not wearing hair up.

--CSI people walking all over the crime scene.

--Not turning on the lights to see the crime scene.

- Lack of research by authors concerning gun use.
  - Every state has different laws, but constitutional law is always the same.
  - New Orleans cops are not a bunch of crooks.
  - The way Law and Order gathers evidence it would probably be suppressed.
  - Cops lose interest when the book is wrong.
  - No one in police work has an empty chamber in gun.
  - Use the proper jargon for the appropriate area.
  - Suspects talk different depending upon the time period.
- (There was much, much more—this was a great panel.)

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Marilyn Meredith did a presentation on e-publishing. If anyone would like a copy of the handout, email her with the request at [mmeredith@ocsnet.net](mailto:mmeredith@ocsnet.net)

There was far more, if you missed the conference be sure and watch for information concerning next year's.

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## THE PROBLEM WITH CREATIVITY

By **Betty Webb**, one of our speakers at the conference

Today I sat at my computer for a full eight hours, attempting to write on ***The Koala of Death*** (the follow-up to the award-winning ***The Anteater of Death***) before anything really happened. Eight hours of zilch! But when things finally did begin to happen, the ideas that came were pure gold. The eight hours before that, however, were ghastly. Clumsy sentences that went nowhere. Hackneyed ideas that had been used time and time again by other writers. Cardboard characters that refused to come to life. Nothing but junk, junk, junk.

Poor ***Koala!***

Non-writers often believe that creativity is easy, that it's something we were "born with", that we writers just sit down and our ideas automatically come to us as easily as switching on a light. But we writers don't have built-in light switches. We're just human beings -- complex people who have lives outside of our writing. We have relatives who are in trouble, friends who are ailing, spouses with whom we are quarreling. Heck, we may even be going quietly nuts all by ourselves!

The mistake so many beginning writers make is that they think they need to work out their problems and "get clarity" before starting to write. But the opposite is true.

Experienced writers know that when we approach the stories we're working on, we approach them with a load of personal baggage that would break an elephant's back. Yet still we write. Three-quarters of what we turn out during those difficult times may turn out to be crap, but it's that one-quarter of gold that keeps us writing.

<http://www.bettywebb.blogspot.com>

**Betty Webb**: Author of **Desert Cut**, **Desert Run**, **Desert Shadows**, **Desert Wives: Polygamy Can Be Murder**, and **Desert Noir**. Coming Dec. 2009, **Desert Lost**, another polygamy-based mystery. "Eye-popping," *The New York Times*. "Socially conscious mysteries," *Publishers Weekly*. Also, the humorous zoo mystery, **THE ANTEATER OF DEATH**. All by Poisoned Pen Press. [www.bettywebb-mystery.com](http://www.bettywebb-mystery.com) and [www.bettywebb-zoomystery.com](http://www.bettywebb-zoomystery.com)

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## PUTTING HUMOR IN YOUR MYSTERIES

**By Dawn M. Kravagna (Dawn participated in a panel of this title and kindly wrote the following article for the newsletter.)**

Why write comedy? Are humorists merely the jesters in the writing community, jangling our scepter of broken bones and dancing about in an oddly-matched outfit, scrambling for a few crumbs of dignity? Are we merely cultural distractions, mesmerizing an audience with the sprightly tunes of our verbal violins while Rome burns down around us? Or does humor have real value in our culture?

Why even bother asking the question?

Having been considered an intellectual in college, I've often pondered: Why focus on humor (or cartoon illustration) when there are so many worthy causes to fight for? It's my belief that if you cannot answer that question satisfactorily, you won't sustain the enthusiasm to sit at a keyboard for hundreds of hours, laboring in isolation over a script or novel.

Sure, there's the King Croesus of television comedy, Jerry Seinfeld, who became a multimillionaire with his hit series, but most people are able to sustain their enthusiasm for an endeavor much longer when their motivations are altruistic.

Fortunately for you, my dear reader, I've compiled a few motivations below.

1. Modern research has verified the veracity of the ancient proverb, "Laughter is the best medicine" (Proverbs 17:22). In their July 2008 magazine article for *Ladies' Home Journal*, authors Adrian Gostick and Scott Christopher detail not only several positive physiological effects of laughter, but also discuss how the very act of anticipating a laugh is good for your health. Laughter promotes physical health in the muscular, skeletal, vascular, immune, hormonal, and circulatory systems. A good laugh can even increase your energy levels. (See also their book: "The Levity Effect: Why It Pays to Lighten Up".) Over the years, I have noticed that, as they age, humorless persons are more haggard in their appearance than my more jovial and relaxed acquaintances.

2. As Julie Andrews once sang, humor is the sugar that can make the "spoonful of medicine" more palatable. Christian author, James Watkins, introduces serious topics in his books, such as death, with humor to appeal to teenagers. And, as we all know kids hate lectures, it's a way of capturing their attention in a media soaked environment. As Rush Limbaugh quipped during his radio program, (paraphrasing), "You can educate more people through humor than with a sermon" (and keep them awake longer, I might add).

3. Humor eases tension and makes your coworkers less crabby, momentarily breaking their focus on what is distressing them. Often my coworkers and I will spout a quip when the atmosphere becomes too tense in the office. It is easy to tell who is stressing out, because they become short-tempered and snappish (or pretend not to hear you asking a question). Levity can help coworkers coexist peaceably, improve their job review scores with the boss, and react more calmly to unexpected occurrences by not being too tightly wound. It is also a way of interacting socially without having to get involved in a long or overly personal conversation during work hours.

While I am trapped with multiple personalities not of my own choosing in the workplace for far too many hours each week, police officers actually go out and seek interaction with less than admirable persons. Several police officers have told me that dark humor helps them to cope with the high stress of their occupation. Since my dog cannot accompany me to work and kiss my face and sit in my lap to help me to relax, humor is a way of releasing stress in a socially acceptable manner. (As opposed to insult humor, which is not recommended as a way to interact with your coworkers.)

(Which reminds me of an incident some years ago in a health food store. I couldn't quite recall the correct name of a product line called, "Kiss My Face," and unintentionally startled one of the staff when I asked her for assistance in locating an item. Apparently

she was preoccupied with the objects she was shelving and only heard me say, "Lick My Face." Fortunately, I was able to quickly correct her misconception.)

4. Humor helps to focus attention. Speakers and preachers are advised to begin their talks with a funny anecdote, to put the listeners at ease and induce a sense of connectedness. (Also, that they can trick you into thinking you're going to be entertained instead of skewered or educated! And it's a lot easier to hear the speaker when the guy next to you isn't snoring loud enough to compete with a jackhammer because he's bored.)

5. You can lampoon a politically incorrect topic or satirize a powerful entity, such as a government, without suffering the consequences of addressing the topic directly or in an alarmist fashion; in other words, offending with a smile. And you can always resort to that catchall defense: I was *just* kidding! Or: You misunderstand me, sir; please remove those handcuffs. One of the most famous examples is "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift, a witty commentary on 18th century English society.

Similarly, the French playwright, Moliere, satirized religious fanaticism in "Tartuffe" and greed in "The Miser." Humor allowed Moliere to critique the social issues of his time in a way that encouraged positive reformation, rather than sourly criticizing and condemning and coming off as a mean-spirited misanthrope. I encourage you to consider this option if you want to arouse sympathy to your cause rather than just bring the ire of a group or persons down upon you. Mozart's famous opera, "The Marriage of Figaro," is a comedy which pokes fun at the friction between the social classes of his time.

6. Comedy can provide a temporary escape from the harsh realities of life in a positive and healthy way. I find that reading the newspaper comics or a good comedy mystery novel provides me with a happy place that I can escape to temporarily, refreshing me mentally and emotionally so that I can better handle the rigors and sorrows of life. However, I do know a guy who prefers to read gritty realistic thrillers, because he "prefers to read about people who are having a worst day than he is."

7. Humor can break the buildup of tension in your story so that you don't emotionally exhaust your reader/audience. Just as opposites on the color wheel can be placed adjacent to one another in a picture to optimize their brilliancy, contrasting moods in your story can intensify the drama. One way to do this is to introduce a sidekick into your work whom the lead detective can play off of. I use a loony and unpredictable character named Crazy Cal in my Cattle Capers(tm) stories. Shakespeare's "Hamlet" is famous for the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who interrupt the play with a comedy sketch.

8. A funny character is more likable. People prefer to hang around others who are amusing and jovial, rather than someone who is sour and grumpy. Janet Evanovich has sold millions of books and propelled herself multiple times onto the New York Times' Top Ten List with her zany, self-effacing bounty hunter, Stephanie Plum, who suffers no lack of strange situations and characters to involve herself with. And, despite what Ivy League-trained authors may try to convince otherwise, readers are more engaged and loyal to characters whose fate they are interested in. Myself, if I don't like the main character(s) in a novel, I don't care what happens to them and am not motivated to continue reading; caring is what convinces the reader to turn that page to see what's going to happen next. Is Elizabeth going to marry Mr. Darcy? Will Stephanie finally make up her mind whether she will marry long-suffering Morelli or continue to tango with Ranger?

9. Lastly, humor can assist someone to see a situation from a different viewpoint. Woody Allen is famous for addressing topics from a unique perspective, such as his famous quip about death: "***I am not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens.***"

--<http://www.CattleCapers.Com>

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#### INFORMATION ON SOME ELECTRONIC TOYS

**By Tim Dees**, who also presented at the conference.

iPhones and Kindles are indeed wonderful products, but they aren't the only electronic toys you can use to read books and periodicals.

The [Sony Reader](#) is the device offered under the coupon Keith mentioned. It's intended to compete directly with the Kindle from Amazon. The Kindle will download content wirelessly via a Wi-Fi link. The Sony Reader requires you connect the device to a computer to download content. There are over half a million books in the public domain you can download for free. For more recent content and periodicals, you can go to [Amazon.com](#), [eBooks](#), [eReader](#) and other providers. You buy books and subscriptions to magazines and newspapers more or less the same way you make any other purchase over the web. The content is immediately available after purchase. Most of the vendors maintain a record of what you bought and allow you to download it again at any time, just in case you lose the original file or change reader devices.

Being a gadget freak, I've been using smartphones like the Treo and iPhone for quite a while. I presently have an iPhone 3G with 8 GB of storage. The newest model, the iPhone3GS, was just announced and will be available in about a week from AT&T in the United States. The new model has twice the capacity of the 3G (the 3Gs came in 8GB and 16GB models, where the 3GS will have a choice of 16GB and 32GB), a better camera, the capability to record video, and a built in magnetometer for use as a compass and for other navigational applications.

An iPhone serves as a telephone, a personal digital assistant (PDA), an iPod music player, and a platform for the several thousand applications written especially for the iPhone. Many of the applications are free for downloading, and the others cost \$0.99-\$5.00 with a very few more than that. The number of applications and other information you can store on an iPhone is limited only by the memory of the device. Okay, not quite-- you can have an upper limit of 148 applications on an iPhone, even though you might have memory left over. If you really need more than that, buy another iPhone.

The only people who run out of memory on the iPhone are people who store a lot of video, photos or music on their phones. The other files, like books and periodicals, don't take up that much room. On my iPhone, I have the following loaded as we speak:

- 259 songs and podcasts
- 4 video clips, for about 44 minutes of viewing time
- 134 photos
- 75 applications
- 30 full-length books (including the Bible in 14 versions and translations)

After all this, the memory on my iPhone is only about one-half full.

I also have a number of recorded books I purchased from Audible.com, which is another service that maintains an eternal archive of everything I have ever purchased from them. At any time, I can go back and download any of the books I want onto my iPhone, or purchase some more. Recorded books, being sound files, take up quite a bit more space than text books. Still, I could easily get 20 or more full-length books onto the iPhone, keep everything else that's there, and have room to spare.

On the iPhone, the text books are text books and recorded books are sound files. The iPhone has no provision for reading a downloaded text book to me out loud. The Kindle has a text-to-speech feature, where the device will use a voice synthesizer to read text out loud. Reviews of the voice quality and accuracy are mixed. The Sony Reader does not have this.

Previous to the iPhone, I used a series of Palm Treo smartphones. The Treos do most everything the iPhones do, but take a different approach to it. The Treo has a hardware keyboard (meaning it has actual keys) and a smaller display. On the iPhone, the display covers almost the entire front of the device, and the keyboard and other buttons pop up as touch-sensitive areas when needed. The hardware keyboard is much faster, but then I don't do a whole bunch of typing on a smartphone.

Blackberrys are another option, but they are very limited in what additional applications they can run. Blackberrys are best for people who send and receive a lot of e-mail via their phones.

I take my iPhone (and before that, my Treo) everywhere, so if I find myself with a few idle moments, I can pull up a book and start reading. The books open to wherever I left off, and I can create electronic bookmarks and notes that will store with the book file. With a Kindle or Sony Reader, I would have to carry a separate device that was a one-trick pony. The displays on the Kindle and Reader are much bigger than on the iPhone, giving more of a "book" experience, and the batteries will last longer. But, given that I always have the iPhone with me and charge it every night, I find that much easier to use.

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### MEMBER NEWS

The Ripon Police Car Show is Saturday October 3, 2009 at the Ripon Community Center from 8:00-AM to 3:00-PM. The show usually has 85--100+ restored police, fire, and emergency vehicles on display. There is also a patch and badge collection/show and a mini-swap meet for emergency equipment such as lights and sirens.

Ripon is about an hour's drive south of Sacramento off of Highway #99 and 10-miles north of Modesto. There is a park near by for the children to play and food will be available during the show.

The website is listed below. You can contact Darryl Lindsay at his cell: (650) 743-4486 if you have any questions.

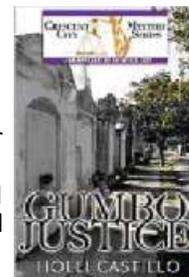
John Bellah

<http://www.riponmenloparkpolicecarshow.com/>

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### GUMBO JUSTICE

New Orleans can be a dangerous place. Especially for a prosecutor. Ryan Murphy is an assistant district attorney who likes her Tequila cold and her cops hot. With a mouth that doesn't know quite when to stop, her attitude plays well in front of a jury, but has a tendency to tick off judges, defendants, and other attorneys alike. Battling demons from her past and checking her self-destructive streak take a back seat to her ambition, and she's not above skating the line just a little to get what she wants. It seems her hard work is just about to pay off. If she snags a detective in the process, well, that's just a little lagniappe for her trouble. Life should be good. Enter a demented psycho, with a plan to ruin Ryan's life before he ultimately kills her. Set against the backdrop of pre-Katrina New Orleans, Gumbo Justice is the first in a series that follows the tumultuous life of prosecutor Ryan Murphy.



Available at Amazon.com, Bn.com, and Gardendistrictbookshop.com.

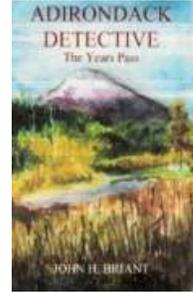
For more information, see [www.Gumbojustice.net](http://www.Gumbojustice.net), or [Hollicastillo.com](http://Hollicastillo.com).

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## FROM AN ARTICLE ABOUT MEMBER JOHN BRIANT

### John Briant Brightens Day with Discussion of His Adirondack Detective Series

by A. Rock



Within the diversity that is the legend and lore of the Adirondacks, our beloved playground also provides an insatiable backdrop for drama and literature. Local Adirondack enthusiasts and adventurers often seek the timeless excitement of outdoor activities so familiar to upstate recreation. For a quiet moment with a good book, John Briant not only loves to read, he loves to write, and write with the voice of experience about detective tales enhanced by the aura of the Adirondacks, its rugged people and the quaint towns so much a part of them.

After a lifetime as an authentic investigator for the New York State Troopers, not just one shadowing the danger for the day, John Briant's "One Cop's Story: A Life Remembered" catapulted his interest into a compelling pastime as the author of several detective stories. An overview of his series and inspiration will be the subject of a "Meet the Author" program at the Brantingham Public Library on July 17, 2008, from 1-3pm, with a book signing to follow. His summer agenda also includes being at the Adirondack Company in Tupper Lake on July 19th with five other authors from 1-4 pm to chat and sign books. On July 20th, John Briant will be at the Adirondack Reader in Inlet from 11 to 1 pm. to offer food for thought via his Adirondack inspired detective tales of mystery and adventure.

John H. Briant had long wanted to be involved in police work, despite its difficulties and dangers. When the challenge of becoming a New York State Trooper became a possibility after honorable discharge from the 27th Division of the US Air Force, he rose to the opportunity. He remained in the service to the public for 28 unforgettable years, 14 in uniform and 14 with BCI. Upon a well deserved retirement the challenge became, other than helping his beloved wife Margaret at home, since he already had a bachelor's degree, what further direction would he take? Well, as one used to writing tickets and reports, writing seemed a natural, at least to Briant.

It has often been said that one should write about what one knows best, and detective work is second nature to John. Long an Adirondack resident and a frequent visitor to the Old Forge Public Library, John eventually was bitten by the bug, and it was not simply the super sized Adirondack mosquito, but the incurable writer's cramp that comes from the compulsion to imagine, to write, and, if possible, to become published. Thus, he transitioned from merely borrowing books to participating for a decade or so in the Library's special Summer Writers' Workshop, funded by the New York Council for the Arts, where he honed his motivation and his skills.

There he shared shop talk with enthusiastic writers such as Leslie Bailey, now editor of the Adirondack Express. He learned from such luminaries as Dr. Katharyn Howd Machan of Ithaca College and the revered Dr. Anne La Bastille, who have each been one of the many Directors of the Old Forge Summer Writer's Workshop, now in its twenty-ninth season and ever popular under the long standing guidance of full time library director, Ms. I. Worthen. He found it "a very inspirational program."

In regard to popularity, John Briant's first work to be printed was ***One Cop's Story: A Life Remembered***, which he had first worked on through the summer workshop, and which Margaret helped edit. The publisher was very pleased with the novice piece as the voice rang knowledgeably and true. This autobiography was well received, and a new career was launched.

Combine his passion for writing with his knowledge of detective work, add Adirondack ingredients which he knows first hand, add loyal K-9 Ruben, loving lady Patty, and piece

the clues--a series of sure fire winners has resulted, published by Chalet Publishing Company. Deep in the High Peaks bad things can happen and in the best of small, closely knit towns trouble may brew. Not to worry, Jason Black, the main character is hot on the trail, literally, of trouble makers, miscreants, thieves and missing persons.

***Adirondack Detective*** is in its fifth printing, and several others have followed. ***Adirondack Detective Returns, Adirondack Detective III, Adirondack Detective Goes West, Adirondack Detective: A New Beginning.***

Dr. Katharyn Howd Machan, Briant's editor, has targeted his next book to be on the market by spring, 2009. It is ***Adirondack Detective: The Years Pass.***

For a leisurely summertime read, grab a sweet tea and a good book. For entertaining insight into one author's detective work with an Adirondack bent, come to the Brantingham Library and meet John Briant on Thursday, July 17, 2008, to the Adirondack Company in Tupper Lake on July 19, or the Adirondack Reader in Inlet on July 20th for a few choice words on some easy, interesting reads. In August, John Briant and several artists and authors will be part of an "Artisans and Authors" fest in Boonville at Dodge-Pratt-Northam Art and Community Center. So as one can see, this trooper is light on his feet and still gets around plenty. With due speed, legally, of course, plan an Adirondack adventure, and a first hand ticket to a good detective story.

Look for John Briant's books: <http://www.capital.net/com/jbrnt/start.htm>

**The End**

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