

Taipei to establish a foothold in the US as a hedge against political or economic uncertainty at home. The parents bought a house in an affluent neighborhood, enrolled the kids in school, then jetted back to Asia (the dads were called astronauts) to oversee family businesses. Some left behind nannies or an auntie but the kids I ended up calling Jonathan, 18, and his sister Zoe, 14, were alone, unless you counted the elderly Chinese housekeeper who didn't speak English. Parenting was done electronically and when Dad visited L.A. on business.

"We've been on our own so long that we really don't know what it's like to have parents," Jonathan told me, staring at two large screen TVs. One was tuned to a Chinese satellite channel. The other to MTV. Just like the two lobes of his brain, I thought, wondering whether he ever heard static as the circuits crossed.

Later, a youth counselor at a Rosemead clinic told me that alienation, lack of parenting and loneliness ate away at youngsters like Jonathan. Most avoided trouble but others joined Asian youth gangs like the Wah Ching, the V Boys or the Black Dragons, working as hired muscle for older gangsters from the Chinese triads. Parents sitting in safe old Taipei had no idea of the scary stuff lurking in our upscale American suburbs. The neighborhoods might look like movie sets,

but when trouble went down it was a John Woo movie, not *American Graffiti*. Guns and no roses, and 1,001 ways for a kid to go bad, when he's 16 and hurting deep inside.

I wrote a long piece for the *Times* about Jonathan and Zoe, but it didn't satisfy me. I chafed at the limitations of journalism. I wanted to crawl inside their heads, imagine what happened to them and their friends long after I had filed my story and gone home.

Each night, the voices of the San Gabriel Valley replayed like a broken tape loop in my brain, clicking and whirring in a multitude of languages. They were the voices of fear, resignation and hope. A microcosm of our society. A glimpse into an unwieldy future. Soon after that, I started writing what became my first book.

I called it *The Jasmine Trade*. It was a finalist for the Edgar and launched my mystery writing career. Six books later, I'm still as besotted with Los Angeles as ever. It's an endlessly renewing creative spring. It's home.

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Who Polices Los Angeles?

by Gay Tolti Kinman (Alhambra, California)

Who polices Los Angeles?

Los Angeles County has 88 incorporated cities, the largest being the City of Los Angeles. Sheriffs serve as law enforcement in counties, and police in cities.

Most cities, such as Inglewood (where the Los Angeles International Airport is located), Santa Monica, and Beverly Hills, have their own police department—otherwise, they can contract for service with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's

Department (LASD), which many do, such as West Hollywood.

However, when a murder is committed in a city, such as Alhambra (think Phil Spector), which has its own police department (APD), LASD is involved because of their lab facilities. Both departments, APD and LASD, work together but the evidence is collected, processed and preserved by the LASD lab. LASD is the entity that works with the Los Angeles County Dis-

trict Attorney's Office (LADA) to take the case to trial.

And speaking of labs, both LAPD and LASD have their scientific investigation units (think CSI), the Los Angeles Regional Crime Lab, in a brand new building on the campus of California State University at Los Angeles (CSULA).

In my children's books, adult books and short stories, many times my setting is a fictional town, Mirasol, which shares a border with the City of Los Angeles. *Super Sleuth: Five Alison Leigh Powers Mysteries*, a collection set in Mirasol, is discussed in my column "The Children's Hour."

Death in a Small Town (Hilliard and Harris, 2006) features Jo Peters, a burned-out Assistant District Attorney (ADA), who briefly works for a law firm in Century City. It's not really a city, but an area of the City of Los Angeles, land formerly owned by a movie studio, and now the site of high-rise buildings housing prestigious law firms and other tony establishments. Jo has a death-defying encounter with an unhappy client over a criminal matter, even though he was acquitted. (Some people are just never satisfied!) She decides to leave the criminal world for good, and applies for a part-time job as a city attorney in her home town—Mirasol.

All criminal matters in the county are worked by the DA's Office. A City Attorney handles only civil cases. Most cities can't afford their own legal staff, so they contract with private law firms that specialize in municipal law. In this book, Jo works for a law firm, but has an office in Mirasol's City Hall. Since she no longer does criminal work, she thinks she's home-free from murder and mayhem. Not!

In "Blown Away" (*Futures Mystery Anthology Magazine* Jan-Feb 2004), an airline VP is killed. Since Jo is only working part-time as a City Attorney, she is hired by the airline owner as a P.I. The question Jo asks is "Did the shooter miss and hit the wrong person?" Jo teams up with the Chief of Security for the airport, who is a retired

LAPD officer with whom she had worked while an ADA. The other person who joins them is the head of the airline's security force. Lots of different agencies involved, and the airport is in LAPD territory.

I've also written a few short stories in which Jo is still an ADA. Jo handles a hot case in "The Locked Car" (www.terra-media.us/burst/Winter2007.html). A Los Angeles City mayoral candidate is caught with the body of a rival in his trunk (and a live one in his bed). Jo doesn't think he was that desperate to win the election. She works this case with Adamo, who is an Investigator for the D.A. He's a recurring character.

Another area of Los Angeles that I've used as a setting for several stories is the Huntington Library. It's in San Marino, a city within L. A. County that has its own police department (SMPD), which the Library uses. However, the Library has its own security force, and my heroine, Jane Jillson, is in a newly created (fictional) position as investigator.

In "The Corpse Flower" (www.fictionwise.com and www.emgpresents.com), a photographer of the famous plant is murdered on the grounds after dark. In "Coyote's Find" (www.fictionwise.com; www.shredofevidence.com; and www.crimeandsuspense.com), a skull is found in an undeveloped part of the grounds. "The Fire Drill" (www.fictionwise.com and www.crimeandsuspense.com) takes place in the research library and involves a newly discovered page of Shakespeare's folio that someone kills for. For the murders, Jane works with an LASD lieutenant.

Another series set at the Huntington involves two library school students from the University of Southern California, located on the southern side of downtown Los Angeles. "Miss Parker and the Cutter Sanborn Tables" (in the *SINC/L.A. Anthology A Deadly Dozen*, UglyTown, 2000; also at www.crimeandsuspense.com), was an Agatha Award nominee. Hsing and Kris solve the

crime using the Cutter-Sanborn Tables, a clue left by their murdered cataloging teacher, and something only library workers know about.

The sequel, “A Death at The Huntington Library” (www.amazon.com) has them in the book stacks with the body of an Acquisitions Librarian who has been killed in an unusual way by the moveable shelving.

Spyder is the hero of a third series set on the Huntington’s ground. He is a bumbling thief who is always trying to run off with something, but is constantly thwarted. I’ve written the Spyder stories with Dr. Jill Cogen, now a retired librarian from the Huntington. “Spyder’s Plant” in *Gone Coastal* (Seven Sisters Press, 2006) tells his tale of woe as he tries to steal the famous Stinky Plant, which only blooms once a century, and is highly sought after in the plant trade.

In another SINC/L.A. anthology, *Murder on Sunset Boulevard* (Top Publications, 2002), “Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid” features Officer Agnes Graham, an LAPD officer in 1942 Hollywood. She teams up with a P.I. named Marlowe to investigate a suspicious jury member on a con-

troversial trial in Superior Court in downtown Los Angeles. In “Mean Streets” (www.amazon.com), the two solve a murder at dinner in a posh Hollywood mansion involving a director, a studio doctor, and a corpse in LAPD territory.

“Vengeance Is Mine” features two former LAPD officers. Angie and Lara are beyond disillusionment with the justice system and start their own P.I. agency. Their clients are wronged victims and families. In the “The Folsom Case,” (www.backalleywebzine.com), they search for a prisoner who was released through clerical error—it happens! This is a guy who should not be on the streets, and the family of his mutilated victim want justice.

I have several other stories set in Los Angeles and some of its features are part of the story—freeways in “A Darkened House” (www.shotsmag.co.uk); and an earthquake in “8 lbs.” (www.twilighttimesbooks.com)

Sometimes who polices Los Angeles is a mystery!

mind, confirming my memory may be rusting at the edges, but is otherwise manning the barricades vs. Father Time.

The Traitor in Us All, as example, centers on a struggling American actor and troubadour who left Los Angeles for East Berlin and became the biggest superstar in Iron Curtain countries before the Berlin Wall came tumbling down.

I knew him on a first name basis, heard his story firsthand, and we corresponded about his hopes and dreams for a future back in the states.

It’s in the book, some of it anyway, along with the made-up parts that’ll probably draw a bit of flak from readers who recognize the inspiration behind my fictional “Dan Boone” and feel com-

pelled to set me straight. (If you wind up among them, thank you in advance.)

I expect fewer corrections, if any, if a piece of nonfiction I’ve been puttering with off-and-on ever manages to see light of print in the ever-shrinking world of publishing. It’s called *The Autograph Book: Confessions of an Autograph Hound in the Golden Age of Hollywood*.

Yes! I was that hound—a bright-eyed, chunky pre-teen who prowled movie studios and show business haunts, chasing after autographs from stars when they were really stars and bore names like Clark and Gary, Gene and Cary, Cagney and Tracy, Olivia and Joan and Loretta and Lana—not a Paris, a Lindsay or a Tiffany in the bunch.

The Autograph Book is full of anecdotal tales drawn from star encounters on the many Sundays I spent hanging out at the stage door entrance behind the Vine Street Playhouse, home to the weekly Lux Radio Theater broadcasts of hit motion pictures retooled for the airwaves, and down the street at the old NBC building at Sunset and Vine.

Here’s one of them:

Miss Bette Davis

Bette Davis was finally doing Lux.

She arrived late for that Sunday rehearsal, jumping from a car that began pulling away barely after she slammed the door behind her. Rushing for the stage entrance, she apologized loudly as she cleared us from her path with a swimming gesture. She promised to return during the lunch break. Then she would sign for everybody.

She promised.

Sure.

That ruse was hard to buy by now. It was a frequent finesse from stars lower on the ladder than the estimable Miss Davis, who virtually had the top rung all to herself.

Sure.

As lunch time neared, the regulars took positions front, side and back, monitoring all the exits. Some were already betting that Bette would eat her meal inside, sharing sandwiches with cast and crew or holing up in the isolation of her dressing room.

The tall, heavy metal doors opened. Out came some of the cast regulars and production personnel.

Out came Bette Davis.

“Okay!” she called out to no one in particular. “I’m ready if you are!”

We rushed in and crowded around. She began signing, urging us to step back, let her breathe. She wasn’t going anywhere.

She paused some minutes later to wonder out loud if everybody who had been there in the morning had waited for her. She didn’t want anyone disappointed.

As she continued to sign autographs, looking up from time to time when her name was called out by an anxious photographer, actor Gary Merrill drove onto the lot and into a parking space bare steps away from the stage entrance. It was the same car she’d raced from that morning. Merrill, her husband at the time, stayed inside the car, watching the scene play out.

After Miss Davis had signed the last autograph, posed for one more photo, and checked to make sure everybody was satisfied, she joined Merrill in the back seat of the car. They ate lunch from paper bags, keeping both doors open to provide a degree of coolness for their unusual parking lot picnic. We kept a respectful distance, trying not to stare too hard or be too obvious.

When she headed back for rehearsals after kissing her husband adieu, we burst into spontaneous applause for the lady.

She waved at us with her cigarette hand, the cigarette raining ashes, and laughed a Bette Davis laugh before passing through the open metal doors.

Here’s the autograph: i125.photobucket.com/

A Novel Approach to the Truth

by Robert S. Levinson (Los Angeles, California)

Grabber opening line goes here....

Okay, now that we have that out of the way—I’m seven novels to the good with an eighth, *The Traitor in Us All*, due out after the first of the year. All of them have L.A. and environs at their root and feature some link to some aspect of show business, for one major reason among several—I don’t have to spend a helluva lot of time on research.

Movies. Music. Theater. Television. Fine Art.

Been there, done that, been around those worlds in eighty ways, so blending truth into my fiction rarely takes more than some modest fact-checking, even though accuracy is less important to the story than to satisfying my own peace of