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Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You
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Q: There seems to be a rather striking spiritual/mystical element in some of the stories, when the officers feel the presence of a victim. Katherine wonders "how dead we ever really are." How should a reader understand these encounters in the larger context of the collection? Does constant exposure to death tend to make believers of those in such fields, or does it depend on the individual?

A: I know from speaking with police officers around the country that my experience of death is not unique, that the essence of a person lingers after death. Certainly there are some officers who will "pshaw" this idea or can't bring themselves to even contemplate it; that is partly their personality and mostly their defense mechanisms. However, no matter your personality or disposition, seeing a body brutalized is deeply unsettling—whether from a traffic accident, homicide, suicide, or accidental death. I can only speak for myself, although other officers have echoed my experience: you enter a scene with a job to do and a large part of you does that job—secure the scene first and foremost then deal with the victim, friends and family, the perpetrator, the evidence, call for support (detectives, ambulance, crime scene, coroner, district attorney, child services, etc). You work efficiently and professionally, because that is the job. But another part of you—for some this may be a very small part, for others like me, it's larger—is registering the emotional impact, is seeing the person who is dying or dead as a human being. And if you are paying attention, if you are really seeing, opening your heart for even a few seconds, you connect with that person, you feel them, you see them alive; their life force touches you. It is a precious moment, this honoring, and the longer I worked the job, the more I sought out that moment where I stood over them, or if they were in the process of dying, touched them. It was necessary for me to do this in order to psychologically and emotionally survive the constant exposure to death.

I deeply believe that if we take someone else's life, whether justified or not, or if we are in the presence of someone who is dying or has died, a part of that person lives on in us. In "Finding a Place," Liz says, "I remember every call I worked—every fatality, every homicide, every suicide, and it colors everything I do." In other words, those people and their deaths have become a part of her, just as Jeffery Lewis Moore has become a part of Katherine and Jeannette has become a part of Sarah.

If it is a gift, if we are willing to see it as such.

Q: In your years in the police force, were you similar to any one of the characters profiled in the book? Is there a character that you are particularly fond of, or liked writing about?

A: Certainly I mined my own experience as a police officer in writing these stories, particularly with the details, like the gun rubbing a permanent bruise on the hipbone, the weight of the gun belt (and the challenge of using the bathroom), the difficulty with bullet-resistant vests fitting a woman's physique.

But in terms of actual events, there are only two stories that closely mirror my own life: "Finding a Place" and "Taste, Touch, Sight, Sound, Smell." The young man on the interstate whose head Liz holds together is pretty much word-for-word a fatality wreck I worked from beginning to end. The young man who died, his name was Carlos, was from Mexico. His sisters came to the hospital and couldn't speak or understand English. Trying to convey to them what had happened to their brother was quite difficult emotionally. I've never forgotten him or that night. After that accident, I started thinking about leaving police work. I couldn't hold, or lock away, what I was experiencing and seeing and dealing with day after day anymore. It took another two years before I left, though, and, like Liz, I also left the police department after I was involved in a bad wreck, although my accident didn't involve someone dying, fortunately; but I was in rehab for about 15 months afterward.

"Taste, Touch, Sight, Sound, Smell" is also fairly autobiographical, although I was never married. Those are my childhood memories, the calls I worked, the way I was trained and trained rookies.

The other stories are fiction pulled from my own experiences. For instance, Jeannette's death in "Keeping the Dead Alive" comes from a crime scene photograph I saw when I was in the police academy; it haunted me from the day I saw it. "Under Control" is based on a shooting I worked—although in real life there was no mother, my father has never been a cop, I don't come from an abusive family, and I had control of the gun within seconds of entering the room. But again, the vision of one brother shooting another in front of their paralyzed father stayed with me. "Something About a Scar" is based on an actual event that happened to a friend of mine in Texas, but there was no Cathy in real life.

All my characters are close to my heart, and I have great compassion for them; I admire their strength and understand their flaws. But if you pushed me into a corner and made me pick one, I'd select two: Katherine and Sarah. Both could easily have become novels; I inhabited them completely while I was writing their stories.

Q: A constant irritant for the women officers in Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You is that nothing seems to fit. From the bulletproof vest to the shoes, all police clothing and equipment appears to be meant for men. Is there a reason for why the force does not accommodate women on such small yet practical matters?

A: Women are still a very small minority on any police department. Most of us had to have our pants altered, and from what I understand that is still often the case. From a business standpoint, manufacturers of police equipment and clothing see little to no return on their investment in designing clothing and equipment for women; there are too few of us. So often it has less to do with the department than it does with manufacturers, that famous "bottom line."

There is also the very real issue of women officers not complaining about these things, except among ourselves. Women in police work are relatively new; the first female officers were commissioned in 1973 after a group of women sued the Seattle police department for the right to serve as police officers (not meter maids or doing paperwork). We have to work much harder than a man to prove ourselves worthy of the job out in the field; we pick our battles, and for so long complaining about clothing and equipment didn't rank as high as

worth and respect and the right to patrol alongside men. I can't help but wonder if our female soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan aren't dealing with the same practical issues, both big and small.

Change comes slowly, and generally it's one woman at a time choosing to take a stand. I nearly was fired for refusing a new service weapon. When our department switched from .38s to .357s, the grip on the 4 inch revolvers were too big for my hand (and a number of other officers' hands, female AND male). Three-inch .357s were available for detectives, and those did fit my hand. My riding partner at the time, Marian McLin, and I had agreed that whichever one of us was called down to Supply first for the new gun would refuse it and request the three-inch model. I got the call first, and when I refused, all my supervisors were called down to Supply. Each of them ordered me to take the four-inch .357, and each time I refused. Finally, the commander of uniform patrol was called in, an imposing man who was not fond of women on the department. He gave me a direct order: "Officer Drummond, you are to accept your new service weapon." I replied, "Sir, I respectfully decline because doing so would put my life and lives of others in danger, and I would be unable to perform my job." (My knee was trembling; I'd like to think my voice wasn't.) He made me hold the four-inch model in my hand and accused me of not trying hard enough to reach the trigger. My sergeant pointed out that the tip of my index finger barely curled around the trigger and the strain was evident in my hand. There was a long silence, and I thought, "Okay, this is it. He's going to fire you." Refusing a direct order is a fireable offense. The commander turned to the Supply officer and said, "Give her a three-inch," and walked out of the room. From that time forward, officers—female and male—could choose the model that best fit their hand.

I'd like to believe that the issues with clothing and equipment, as well as the larger issues women police officers have to deal with, will begin to disappear as we see more female supervisors and police chiefs like in San Francisco and Boston. But it is a hard culture to change and deeply male entrenched. A friend, Valerie Arnold, who just retired from the Baton Rouge police department as a lieutenant, told me, "I have a love/hate relationship with the police department. I loved the job, but I hated the 'good-old boy' system that still exists today."

Q: Which authors have been most influential to your own writing, and which authors do you like reading simply for pleasure?

A: Tim O'Brien has had a great impact on my work. I read *The Things They Carried* while I was in grad school, starting to work on this collection. His book about soldiers in Vietnam opened up a whole new world to me, a way I could approach writing about police work in a literary and lyrical way and yet still integrate the details and dailyness of life that I wanted to convey to readers. I've lost count as to how many times I've reread that book.

When I was a police officer, I read all the Joseph Wambaugh books; that certainly influenced my own work in terms of pacing and scene. I'm not nearly as funny as he is though.

Annie Dillard's work taught me so much about the importance of detail and choosing the right word. Setting is an integral part of my fiction, and I learned how to do that precisely and economically from her.

Andre Dubus (senior), Alice Munro, and Chekov taught me everything I needed to know about constructing short stories and the importance of writing about the human heart, always. I still read and reread their work. I'm currently rereading Richard Bausch's work; he's another master of the short story.

I read widely, mostly literature, narrative nonfiction, literary mysteries. I find even books that I'm reading for pleasure can teach me something; I truly believe that a writer is in apprenticeship to her craft always. I've read Kent Haruf's *Plainsong* at least five times. Recent favorites include Tim Gautreaux's *The Gathering*, Edward Jones's *The Known World*, and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dewbreaker*. Liam Callahan's *The Cloud Atlas* is a marvelous book, as is Sarah Stone's *The True Source of the Nile*. Other authors whose work I'll buy as soon as it comes out include Richard Russo, Ann Patchett, Margot Livesey, Barbara Kingsolver, Pete Dexter, Ursula Hegi, Jeffery Lent, Russell Banks, Brady Udall, Michael Ondaatje. I could go on and on, but I better stop.

Q: Would you consider writing a memoir? What is your next project?

A: Actually I have a memoir in progress, *Losing My Gun*. I've been publishing chapters as essays in literary magazines over the past two years. But that project has been temporarily shelved while I work on my first novel, currently untitled. Like *Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You*, the setting is Baton Rouge, and the main character, Anna, is also a police officer. She has returned home to solve the mystery of her mother's murder. Her mother burned to death when Anna was four; a black man was arrested and incarcerated, but Anna has come to believe her father was responsible for her mother's death. I'm interested in exploring the impact of generational secrets as well as racism in south Louisiana. And that's all I'm telling you for now!