

Bones of Betrayal – Oak Ridge based novel

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 25, 2008)

Dr. Bill Bass and Jon Jefferson (writing team known as “Jefferson Bass”) have completed the next “Body Farm” novel. This one is set in Oak Ridge. Publication is planned for February, 2009.

On Thursday, November 20, 2008, Rebecca Leigh Fraser, an Oak Ridge photographer and I took Dr. Bass and Jon to three locations in Oak Ridge featured in the *Bones of Betrayal* novel to take photographs for the book cover. We also photographed a scene at the swimming pool of the Alexander Inn, but doubt it will be used. That pool is just not very photogenic!

First we visited the historic guard tower atop Pine Ridge near the city's water treatment plant in early morning light. Next we stopped by Katie's Kitchen where the sun shone on the historic silo/guard tower and the beautiful fall leaves of a Black Gum tree. Finally we photographed them inside the historic Graphite Reactor.

Rebecca was really taken by the control room there and felt it best represented the era being described in the story. I expect to see a photograph of the control room prominently placed on the book's dust cover.

The *Bones of Betrayal* story has a unique twist to it. While the setting is in modern day Oak Ridge, the story also includes much intrigue about events in the Manhattan Project era. The story line includes the memories of an elderly lady going back to the early years of Oak Ridge.

It has been a pleasure for me to work with Jon on this project. He began by letting me suggest where the Manhattan Project murder victim might be found buried. We toured across Chestnut Ridge south of Y-12 near Building 9213 and also near Katie's Kitchen some few miles southwest of 9213 but on the same side of Chestnut Ridge. He liked the second location better...because of the silo, I believe.

When he told me the modern day murder victim would be found in the historic Guest House/Alexander Inn's swimming pool, I included that in the *Historically Speaking* column of May 20, 2008, where I introduced the idea of the novel being set in Oak Ridge. The novel did not have a name at that time and we also sought a name from readers. Several were suggested and passed on to Jon and the publisher.

I wanted to use a photograph of a body in the pool to illustrate the article in May. So with the help of Bill Wilcox, my dear friend and someone who is game enough to try about anything creative, we staged a photograph of a body in the pool. It was made by putting Bill flat on his back on a table and using Photoshop to put him in the pool. I had some fun doing that!

I showed the photograph to Jon and he sent it to his publishers. They had a fit! Wouldn't let me use the photo because they were afraid the image would get picked up on the internet and cause more than a little difficulty for them and the upcoming book. So, only a few people ever got to see mine and Bill's masterpiece where he was the “body frozen in the pool.”

Jon has continued to check the historical accuracy with me as he wrote the story and when the manuscript was completed he graciously allowed me to read it in its entirety. I enjoyed that!

He also requested some historic photographs for illustrations and I sent him several Ed Westcott images. Speaking of Ed, he has a prominent role in the novel. I told Jon that was special. Ed has even agreed that they could use his name as the photographer in the story...great! He fits right in. Of course, Jon uses some literary license with Ed as he does with other characters, so you may see a side of Ed that no one knew existed...and doesn't exist except in Jon's head.

As you might expect, a calutron girl plays a key role in the story as do a few other readily identifiable characters from the Manhattan Project era. There are some unusual events that relate to espionage and some details of the work done during the war, but the main story line remains in today's Oak Ridge.

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Jon kept telling me that he was spending time in the underground storm drains of Oak Ridge and I had no idea what he was doing with that. It does fit in, but I won't tell you how. That will be one of many surprises you will find in the novel about our city.

I will tell you that Arpad Vass, real-life Oak Ridge scientist and his "sniffer," used to detect gases from decomposing corpses, is featured in the novel. He plays a key role in the discovery of the actual burial location of the victim of the war time murder.

In a factual and recent use of this new technology, Vass used his device in California to hunt for other possible victims of Charles Manson. He has also used it for other such detective work, so it is a natural for this novel.

Jon and Dr. Bass were here last week for some photographs at the locations featured in the book. As mentioned earlier, I had a blast working with Rebecca Fraser to get dust cover photographs. The photos used to illustrate this column were made then.

Having read the manuscript, I am getting excited to see the book. Having helped with the photographs, I am gaining more and more ownership for the project. But I am proudest of all to have been asked to review the historical facts used in the story. I surely hope I have not missed some important detail.

The manuscript has been kept under tight wraps and closely controlled. I was sworn to secrecy before being allowed to review it. Once I got it, the next several days were devoted to it. I found it to be scientifically believable, humorous with excellent interplay between main characters.

As an example of the humor mixed in, Dr. Bill Brockton (loosely patterned after Dr. Bill Bass) uses a chainsaw to remove the frozen body from the pool and wouldn't you know it, he loses the thing in the pool when he slips on the ice and drops the chain saw smack dab in the middle of the hole he had cut to remove the body. Of course, he grieves over that chain saw periodically throughout the rest of the book.

Other characters are interesting as well. While Ed Westcott's photograph plays a key role in the identification of the exact location of the war time burial, visits with a calutron girl by Dr. Brockton brings intriguing facts to light about the way things really were in Oak Ridge during the war years.

Through her story, Brockton learns details about the interactions and goings on at the government sites that make him believe that he is really digging up some most unusual and maybe little known facts about the war years and how the secret of the atomic bomb might have been compromised. He comes to think the key is the buried body near an unusual government facility that a photograph shows has a silo that is not really a silo.

The modern day murder story also has its mystery. What killed the 93 year old scientist? Why? Who? All such questions take the reader through the detective work necessary to solve all the murders in the story. They are all linked in most unusual ways.

The story gets dangerous when radioactive materials are involved in the crime. This aspect of the story seems natural for Oak Ridge, as the needed expertise is available and used and the technology is here to deal with the situation. This too is handled quite realistically in the story.

I think you will find this fourth Body Farm novel to be something that will cause Oak Ridger's to swell with pride. The story is full of Oak Ridge. Most of the events take place here. All of the intrigue is based on Oak Ridge elements.

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The people featured in the story are likeable characters and seem very much like what we would expect to find, yet they are shown in enough detail to let the reader, in many cases, identify them with people we have known in Oak Ridge. You might even see yourself in some of the characters!

In Bob Fowler's recent article in *The News Sentinel*, where he announced the new book, Dr. Bass is quoted as saying this novel is "a bit more complicated" than the first three and he also said this one is his favorite. I expect it will be your favorite as well.

February, 2009, will be here before we know it. The unveiling of the book will be held here in Oak Ridge. The book and the promotional tour will bring Oak Ridge to the attention of readers who otherwise might not know of us. Heritage Tourism will benefit from this exposure.

It is good to be the setting of a major crime novel...notoriety is good for business! Our history is a strength that is well used in *Bones of Betrayal* – enjoy the read! I certainly did.



Dr. William Bass and Jon Jefferson pose near Katie's Kitchen for potential cover photos being taken by Rebecca Leigh Fraser for the upcoming Oak Ridge based novel, *Bones of Betrayal*

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Dr. Bass and Jon pose in Rebecca's favorite setting, the control room of the Graphite Reactor



Rebecca poses them at the base of the guard tower on Pine Ridge overlooking the city

For more photos by Rebecca Leigh see: <http://www.photographybyrebeccaleigh.com/galleries>