

Bones of Betrayal – interview with the authors continued

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 2, 2009)

In the last *Historically Speaking* column we covered the first nine questions of the interview with the writing team of Jon Jefferson and Dr. Bill Bass telling some details of how *Bones of Betrayal* came to be the next **Body Farm** novel. Now, we conclude that interview as we prepare for the release of their new novel on Tuesday, February 3, 2009, at the New Hope Center at 7:00 PM. Tickets are available for \$25 in advance by calling 865-523-8008 or e-mailing info@knoxheritage.org. Proceeds go to support historic preservation in Oak Ridge. Now for the rest of the interview.

10. Do you plan a sequel? Will there be another “Manhattan Project” novel?

“Well, there is a loose end that’s left untied at the conclusion of this book, so a sequel is a strong possibility. There’s also a rich vein of other Manhattan Project material that could be mined for other books as well.

11. Do you know yet what the setting for the next novel will be?

“Not yet!

12. Jon, what is your connection with Oak Ridge?

“I moved to Oak Ridge in 1980, fresh out of graduate school, and took a job at ORNL as a writer and editor. I did a monthly newsletter for the Lab’s staff, and worked on the ORNL Review, and created a telephone and computer newslines for the staff.

“Later I did brochures, magazine articles, and videos about the Lab—its R&D work and its history. I lived in Oak Ridge until 1992, when I moved to Knoxville, and I did writing and video work for the Lab until 1997, I think. I also worked for Planned Parenthood of East Tennessee, which is based in Oak Ridge, from 1986 to 1990. My kids grew up in Oak Ridge, and I have good friends there, so my roots—and my respect—go very deep.

13. So, did you actually explore the storm drains in Oak Ridge? Was that spooky?

“I did do a bit of storm-drain spelunking, to research a scene that’s set beneath the city. William Westcott—Ed’s son—was the one who first suggested the idea of using the tunnels somehow in the story. As a kid, William used to play in the tunnels, and he offered to show me around a bit.

“He and I went through a pair of pipes that start over near the tennis courts along Tennessee Avenue; we emerged on the other side of the Turnpike, right in front of the McDonald’s that’s in front of the DOE building. Then I explored a couple of tunnels on my own—one was the huge pipe, seven feet in diameter, that empties into the stream behind the library; I popped up out of that one right in front of Taco Bell, and I’m sure I looked like a crazy man, with my headlamp and flashlight and a coating of cobwebs and grime.

“The spooky one was a tunnel that starts on the hillside above Jackson Square, at the far end of the practice field that adjoins Blankenship. That one sloped steeply downhill in some places, and it had a couple of vertical shafts. As I was climbing down one of those vertical shafts, I realized that if I fell and got seriously hurt, I probably wouldn’t be found until a monsoon washed my body out the other end of the tunnel!

14. What are your thoughts regarding saving the Alexander Inn?

“The Alexander Inn played host to the greatest minds of the Manhattan Project—Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, General Groves, and others. It was a crossroads of genius, but now it’s literally crumbling away. I find that very sad, and I don’t understand why the city is allowing that to happen—it’s an eyesore and a firetrap, when it should be a place that’s honored and

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preserved. I hope the city, local preservationists, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation can find a way to save it, but I'm afraid time is running out fast.

15. Tell me about your fascination with the “Calutron Girl” who is photographed by Ed Westcott as a solitary figure with the Calutron controls. Why is she so intriguing to you?

“Are you kidding? She's gorgeous! Okay, actually, there's more to it than that: She's gorgeous, and she's an emblem, and she's an enigma. I had seen lots of pictures of ‘calutron girls’ over the years, and knew the names of a few, but I only recently saw this picture, and I had no idea who she was.

“But what really got me fascinated was this: one day I was emailing that photograph up to the Art Department at Harper Collins—I sent them a whole bunch of Ed Westcott photos I thought they might want to consider using as art in the book—and for some reason, her photo switched from a positive image to a negative. And although the photograph itself was striking, the negative was absolutely amazing—beautiful and somehow haunting.

“Crazy as it sounds, this haunting image of a mysterious young woman working the controls of a calutron became the picture I had in my mind when I wrote the character Beatrice.

16. How about that lady who is walking out of the plant and passes by the time clock? What makes her an interesting character?

“Ray, I'm not sure people will “get” this unless they see the clip (to help you readers, this lady is seen walking out of Y-12 in both *Secret City: The Oak Ridge Story – The War Years* DVD by Keith McDaniel and in *Y-12's New Face* DVD produced by Y-12 Video Services and showing constantly at the Y-12 History Exhibit Hall in the New Hope Center - Ray), but what makes her interesting is combination of things: she's a pretty, willowy woman with long, wavy hair; she's mysterious, behind those sunglasses; and she seems strong and confident, the way she strides past that camera without even bothering to give it a glance.

17. As a writer, do you generally use real people as the basis for your characters? I know you base Bill Brockton loosely on Dr. Bill Bass. How do you accomplish that? Does Dr. Bass get to critique Bill's actions in the novel? How does Dr. Bass' character lend credibility to the novel's leading man?

“(Jon:) Some characters are based on real people—in fact, some real people appear in our novels under their own names—most notably, Art Bohanan, a nationally renowned fingerprint expert who worked for years as a criminalist at the Knoxville Police Department. We wanted a character like Art in the books, as a police sidekick to Dr. Brockton, and Art agreed to let us borrow freely from his real life—including his name, so long as we'd promise that the character ‘Art’ would not cuss and would not do anything illegal.

“As for Dr. Brockton, well, I'd be crazy not to borrow the world-renowned forensic expertise of Dr. Bass. I'd also be crazy not to give Dr. Bass's cheerful, charming personality to Dr. Brockton.

“Here's a guy who's up to his elbows in death and dismemberment, and he somehow manages to put a smile on everybody's face. If you're going to go walking down the dark alleys of the human soul, it's comforting to have a cheerful guide!

“One key difference between the real-life Dr. Bass and the fictional Dr. Brockton is that Brockton isn't married, so he's free to have the occasional romantic adventure, or misadventure. Actually, he's a lot more prone to having all sorts of misadventures than Dr. Bass is. In that respect—the penchant for colorful misadventures—Brockton bears more resemblance to Jon Jefferson than to Bill Bass.

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18. What is your favorite Body Farm story?

This one, of course!

There you have it. I hope you agree that the insight into stories in *Bones of Betrayal* and the thought process that went into the creation of this intriguing murder mystery was in itself an interesting read. You should now know just enough to pique your interest sufficiently to bring you to the New Hope Center on Tuesday evening at 7:00 PM, February 3, 2009.

Come and get your book personally autographed by Dr. Bass and Jon. AND see Arpad Vass (the real detective) and his Sniffer. I believe he is planning a demonstration...wonder what "dead body" he will discover right there on the stage of the New Hope Center auditorium? See you there!



Jon Jefferson knells beside the frozen swimming pool at the Alexander Inn – the location of the first murder victim AND where Dr. Brockton loses his chainsaw in the opening pages of *Bones of Betrayal*

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Jon Jefferson explored the storm sewer system in Oak Ridge. Here he poses in a large pipe to simulate the journey. Actually he was much more appropriately dressed and did NOT have a Geiger counter!