

A Midwest Connections Pick!

MISSING MARK

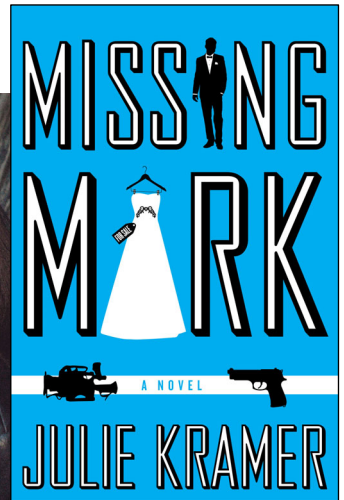
by Julia Kramer

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Fiction / Mystery & Suspense



JULIE KRAMER: ON WRITING

- 1. You're a career television news producer. How has your background in journalism helped you become a novelist?**

First, I've interviewed hundreds of people, many on the best or worst days of their lives. I believe listening carefully for the most intriguing parts of those conversations helped me develop an ear for dialogue. Also, I used to produce and write a television newscast. Both anchors had different personalities, cadence, and vocabularies. When I switched stories between them, I found I wrote differently to reflect those distinctions. I think that skill taught me nuances in crafting dialogue.

Second, deadlines didn't scare me.

Third, research was second nature.

Fourth, I learned to type fast and write tightly.

Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, I've covered such a variety of events and people, that no plot or character from my imagination seems over the top. I absolutely believe the adage, truth is stranger than fiction. Because I've lived it in my day job. Other writers sometimes hold back, thinking, "No one will ever believe that." My advice to them is, because of what people see on the news each day, you can go further than you think. For example, what if I were writing a novel about a woman driving cross-country to kill a rival for her boyfriend's affection and she wore a diaper to avoid bathroom stops? And what if I made her an astronaut? See what I mean.

- 2. Why did you decide to write fiction?**

All journalists think they have novels inside them. Eventually we have to put up or shut up. Whenever I was writing news stories, I often thought, darn the facts. Work would be so much easier if I wasn't bound by facts. But when I started writing fiction, it was hard. Making stuff up seemed like cheating. I found myself wishing I had some facts. I had to work through that dilemma. So many people now tell me, "What a fun job, writing books!" All I can say is, writing a novel is a painful process. It hurts.

3. Do you base characters on real people in your life? How do you come up with names?

People always ask that, and I tell them they're a combination of everyone I've ever worked with, for, or against in the world of news. Naming characters is hard for me. I chose Spartz to honor my mom because that's her maiden name. But, in most cases, I open the phone book and point. My friends and relatives now all want their names to appear in future books. But that is problematic. They all want to be the hero. They all want to be beautiful. No one wants to be the villain. No one wants to be fat or ugly or stupid. So, I'm sticking with the phone book.

4. How much do you know about your endings when you start your beginnings?

In both cases, with *STALKING SUSAN* and *MISSING MARK*, when I first started writing, I had no idea who the killer was. That came to me in the course of telling the story. I thought if I was surprised, maybe readers would be, too. I realize there will always be a few sharp minds who figure out the "Who Done It" ahead of time. That always happens. And congratulations to them; but, I hope they are equally intrigued by the "Why Done It" in the stories. As a reader myself, I often find that motivation even more interesting.

5. Talk about your use of subplots and re-occurring characters.

I wrote a sequel because I felt I wasn't quite done with the characters in *STALKING SUSAN*. I was eager to see what would happen next in Riley's life and whether there might be room for Nick Garnett. And as newsrooms across America are struggling in a media meltdown, I also wanted to reflect that change in the story line. In real life, I'm more of a cat person than a dog person, but I became fond of Shep and wanted him to be a hero in his own subplot. Real K-9 units do worry about their star dogs becoming targets in the drug war. But, I hadn't seen that premise used in a novel before and thought that would be an interesting role for him.

JULIE KRAMER: ON MISSING MARK

1. In *MISSING MARK*, how did you decide to focus on missing people as an adventure for protagonist Riley Spartz?

In my debut, *STALKING SUSAN*, a TV reporter discovers a serial killer targeting women named Susan. I didn't want to write back to back serial killers (even though I've been told they sell well) because journalists cover a variety of stories, and I wanted to reflect that in this series. In real life, I've covered numerous missing people, including some of the most high profile cases in the country: Jodi Huisentrut (Iowa), Jacob Wetterling (Minnesota), Audrey Seiler (Wisconsin), and Shawn Hornbeck (Missouri). I wanted to give readers a provocative look at how newsrooms decide which missing people get publicity and which don't. It can be controversial. When I started out writing *MISSING MARK*, my missing person character was a woman. But, when a young man in my neighborhood went missing while home for the holidays, I changed my missing person to a man because I wanted to draw attention to how difficult those cases can be for families and law enforcement, as well as news organizations.

2. "Wedding Dress For Sale: Never Worn" ...how poignant is that?

A woman's wedding dress is the most emotional piece of clothing in her wardrobe. I've always been fascinated by the back story of why a woman would part with it. Hard economic times? Memories of a relationship gone bad? A nagging feeling in her gut that she should break the engagement? I thought readers might be curious as well.

3. Where did you get your inspiration for face blindness in the plot?

While working as a freelance producer for the *Today Show*, I interviewed a woman afflicted by prosopagnosia for one of the first national news stories on the developmental disorder. I continued to be intrigued by face blindness. At first, my editor was skeptical about using the concept in a novel because it was so new. But the journalist in me thought, "Great, I'll be first." The obvious plot device would have been to create a face blind victim unable to recognize her attacker. I thought it might be more unexpected to use the disorder for a villain's motivation. I found myself pondering how important facial recognition is to social success and the controversy over face transplants. I also like teaching readers about something new, whether it's prosopagnosia or how newsrooms function behind the scenes. If readers can learn while being entertained, I think they appreciate that combination.

4. Until the case of the missing groom turned into a murder investigation, reporter Riley and bride Madeline seemed to be on the path to friendship. What made them chummy?

On different levels, they're both lonely. Riley has a successful career that's brought her professional kudos, but not many personal connections. In *STALKING SUSAN*, she suffers a tragic loss that makes friendship even more difficult. Madeline has money, but also lacks friends. She too has suffered a loss of love. The grief theme allows them to be candid with each other in a way they can't with others. When journalists conduct investigations, they often become close to the family whose story they're trying to tell. The family often becomes even more attached to the reporter because someone is finally listening to their pain. Journalists need to guard against losing objectivity in such cases. The relationship, at least until the story is concluded, needs to remain professional. But we are all human, and as journalists our creed is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

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