

# System Scene

## October 2006

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### Upcoming Events

- November 7, Dodge City Gaming Workshop
- November 13-19 Kansas Reads to Preschoolers
- December 8, Liberal SWKLS Executive Board and Cataloging Workshop
- 2007
- January 29-April 30 Kansas Reads: The Learning tree by Gordon Parks
- March 14-17, Albuquerque MPLA Conference
- March 20—Summer Reading Workshop

## State Librarian Tours Southwest System

by Emily Sitz

We had the pleasure of whisking State Librarian Christie Brandau around to destinations in SWKLS last August. Planning Christie's tour was no easy task I assure you—so many libraries and so little time! My first thought was to show Christie the far corners of our territory- Morton Co., Greeley Co., Edwards Co., Comanche Co. but then we only had one day. And we did want to stop at a few libraries. We settled on traveling out to Fowler, Meade, Kismet, Sublette, Montezuma, Dighton and back to Dodge City.

Each library we visited was unique. Each had its own "feel", a result of the community's history, the library's role in that community and the personalities of the staff. We heard about destructive storms and successful summer reading, we met dedicated board members and were greeted by library cats. We saw amazing special collections. How many of us make a point to visit libraries—in our own region?

The regional tour gave us a powerful perspective. While enjoying the differences between the libraries, we noticed similarities, common themes: the need for a new or enlarged facility, concerns over decreased valuations and populations, the cost of postage and its affect on a tight budget... We talked with Christie about agri-business, rural schools and small towns, community pride—life in Southwest Kansas. We hope she will come back for another tour-- we have so much to show. In fact, this trip inspired a new column in the System Scene featuring a member library in each issue. Watch for it in the next issue; we hope you enjoy it. Christie noted her visit to SWKLS in her blog , "Travels with the State Librarian" <http://ksstatelibrarian.blogspot.com> .



**Fowler Public Library - Marilyn Dewell, Board Chair; Christie Brandau; Shirley Randall, Librarian**



**Meade Public Library - Susan Greene, Board Chair; Christie Brandau; Linda Kobs, Director; Banny Orme, Meade County Governor's Appointee to SWKLS Board**



**Montezuma Township Library - Emily Sitz; Christie Brandau; Sara Powell, Director**



**Kismet Public Library - Louise Wyrick, Board Chair; David Reed, Librarian; Christie Brandau**



**Lane County Library - Christie Brandau; Ruby Martin, Director**



**Haskell Township Library - Jamie Wright, Director; Christie Brandau**



**Ness City Public Library - Jean Schlegel, Director; Christie Brandau**

# Emergency Preparedness Workshop

by Carolyn Guernsey and Patti Cummins

As I write this account of the Emergency Preparedness Workshop held in August there is a tornado warning for the Ensign area – a good reminder that having a plan for responding to emergencies is a must for all libraries!

So often we think about emergency preparedness as being “only” for those big catastrophic events that will “probably” never happen. What I particularly appreciated about Rebecca Elder’s presentation was her reference to emergencies of all types and sizes. The books or cassettes that come back “buggy.” The roof that leaks and soaks the carpet in the children’s area. The overflowing toilet in the men’s restroom. These are things that can – and do – happen any time anywhere.

**Day One** of this workshop emphasized the planning process. Gather your institutional history (that window that leaked during the driving rainstorm five years ago will probably leak again!). Consider what risks are likely for your location and type of facility (are you close to a river? what types of natural disasters occur in your area?).



Rebecca Elder visits with Joan Weaver during small group session

Your disaster plan should include contact information for in-house personnel; facility information such as where water, gas and electricity shut-offs are; emergency service providers including first responders and recovery assistance specialists, lists of emergency supplies; salvage priorities, evacuation plan, insurance information, and a list of who has copies of the plan.

There must be more than one copy of the plan, and all copies must be kept up-to-date. There should be a copy in the library, and it should be accessible at all times the library is open. Other copies should be in the hands of the library director (off premises), staff or board members who would be called on in case of an emergency, and first responders.

In the event of a disaster you will not be able to save everything. Know what is worth saving – local history collections, photographs, and other materials that could not be replaced will be your first priority. Rebecca emphasized that it is important to have a relationship with the first responders (firemen, police, etc.) in your community. Know them and make sure they know you. Make sure they have a copy of your disaster plan and know your priorities. Invite them to walk through your library so they are aware where the most valuable materials are located.

**Day Two** was the “hands on” part of the workshop. What do you do when there is an emergency? First you must assess the damage and find how much has been damaged, what kind of damage it is, and what kind of material has been affected. Then you set about stabilizing the environment. We learned there are different methods of drying material: air drying, freeze drying, vacuum freeze drying and thermal vacuum drying.

It was suggested that every library keep a plastic trash can with salvage supplies inside. That includes: paper towels (plain white) or Pellon interfacing for interleaving, freezer paper or blank newsprint for wrapping, rubber gloves, plastic milk crates to stack material in to dry or freeze, Mylar polyester sheets to separate sheets of wet paper. There are lots of other supplies you will need when the disaster happens such as rubber boots, brooms, mops, aprons or smocks, sponges, nylon fishing line and clothespins, blotter paper, Lysol liquid or rubbing alcohol, and a camera. Also equipment like dehumidifiers, grounded extension cords, fans, portable generator, pallets, safety glasses, portable tables, portable sump pump, wet vacuums and hard hats may be needed.

Ways to clean and salvage material from mold and information on how to prevent new mold from developing was also discussed.

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## Emergency Preparedness Workshop (continued)



**Sara Powell and Virginia Johnson examine water damaged materials**

Library materials such as books, papers, CD's, cassettes, DVD's, etc. were placed in tubs of water and we got to actually try to rescue these items. We had first hand experience on interleaving with paper towels, how to dry CD's and DVD's, how to separate sheets of wet paper using the mylar polyester sheet. We also learned how to wrap books that were going to be shipped off to Conservators or Specialists.



**Denise Johnson, Aggie Doll, Marilyn Keating and Kathy Leon work with water damaged materials**

**We ended the workshop by dividing up into small groups and deciding the steps of how to handle a mock emergency in a library. All in all it was a very informative and interesting day.**

## Rural Sustainability Workshop

A rural sustainability workshop was conducted by Cindi Hickey of the State Library of Kansas on Friday, September 22 at the Learning Resource Center in Dodge City. 25 librarians and trustees attended.

After a welcome and introductions, Cindi discussed the Rural Library Sustainability Continuum, which is a three-year project designed to provide rural library staff with resources to address their unique challenges and responsibilities. It is funded through a grant by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and is a collaboration between Webjunction, State Library agencies, and rural and small library staff throughout the US.

Cindi also introduced participants to the Webjunction Kansas web site. The site has an array of online training in programs available such as Word, Excel, and Quickbooks, just to name a few. Webjunction also provides access to TechAtlas – a web based technology planning tool that helps in assessing and maintaining technology in libraries. Workshop participants were given a tour of TechAtlas, and its usefulness in developing a comprehensive technology plan was discussed.

The workshop was very well received. In addition to Cindi's presentation, brainstorming sessions gave participants the opportunity to interact and learn from each other. In small groups, participants came up with strategies for improving their library connections, technology connections, upgrade and maintenance, staff and patron training, funding, outreach and advocacy.

Participants in the workshop developed an action plan for implementing sustainability strategies in their libraries, and selected at least two activities from the action plan to implement in their local communities in the next three months. Participants were encouraged to share their workshop experiences and resources with their co-workers and administration. Progress is to be evaluated through surveys and self assessment tools.

Workshop participants — Don't forget the follow-up sessions November 8 and December 6. Watch KANLIB-L and the System list for details.

# From the Cataloger's Desktop

## *A Sampling of New Acquisitions from Member Libraries*

By Bethany Levraut, Cataloging Coordinator

### Judge & Jury.

This recent legal thriller from James Patterson and Andrew Gross delivers what FBI agent Nick Pellisante always thought was impossible – the capture of Dominic Cavello, the mob boss dubbed “The Electrician.” When the plan to prosecute goes awry, murder and justice become the order of the day.

### House.

Supernatural thriller authors Frank Peretti and Ted Dekker have co-authored this story about a killer's deadly game. A lone tin can is dropped into this “house,” and you must comply with its rules.

### Angels Fall.

Romantic suspense fans won't be disappointed by Nora Robert's tale of a young chef's recovery from near death in a shooting spree. Former Bostonian Reece Gilmore moves to a small town in Wyoming to recover from her experience back east – only to find that crime has followed her there.

### Hey, Good Looking.

A heartwarming story from Fern Michaels, this tale set in Baton Rouge tells the tale of two families and their various associations. Excellent characterization and narration detail the breach – and eventual reconciliation – of the two families throughout the years.

### Pets in America: A History.

Katherine C. Grier, an expert on material culture, describes the changing notions that have defined pet ownership throughout time. The roles pets play in our culture are examined in various viewpoints, drawing on diaries, photographs, illustrations, and magazines. The book is a human-animal relationship narrative to rival any Jane Goodall text.

### Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War.

Nathaniel Philbrick's account of the early years of Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts, is a well-researched, stark account of the brutality of America's early history. The fifty year interdependency of the first settlers and the Wampanoags gives way to war as the heir of the chief Massasoit begins a 14 month period of war that claimed 5,000 lives.

### A Family of Poems: My Favorite Poetry for Children.

Caroline Kennedy's compilation of poems does more than just republish material into a collaborative format – throughout, she draws on the tradition in her family of children selecting poetry to give to their parents as presents instead of traditional gifts. A wide variety of styles and large illustrations make this book a colorful and almost tactile experience.

## Another Scam to Know

### About

By Charlene McGuire

If someone from a financial institution calls you, security experts now recommend that you hang up and call them back, not at a number they provide but at the number listed on your credit card, bank statement or in the phone book to verify they're really who they claim to be.

Another scam growing in popularity is the fake collection agency letter. People are receiving letters claiming they owe money to some "original creditor" they have never heard of, threatening litigation, etc. The letters are not from just one creditor or of one particular amount. A check of the person's credit report does not show any of these supposed debts. But I wonder how many people get these letters and make the mistake of calling the "collection agency" to dispute the claim, and are then asked for their social security number or other information to "verify" their identity. If you get such a letter and know you don't owe the money, don't respond. Send it to the state attorney general's fraud investigation division.

# The Value of Video Games

by Charlene McGuire

*"Games are widely used as educational tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses... Games require players to construct hypotheses, solve problems, develop strategies, learn the rules of the in-game world through trial and error.*

*Gamers must also be able to juggle several different tasks, evaluate risks and make quick decisions... Playing games is, thus, an ideal form of preparation for the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as some forward-thinking firms are already starting to realize."*

*The Economist, August 4, 2005*

Most people make the mistake of assuming that there is no educational, social, or cultural value in video games. I would, respectfully, disagree.

Videogames foster independent decision making - every action a player takes must be considered in light of short and long term goals. A wrong decision means that you miss out on important information or events or you "lose."

Videogames are also a great way for children and teens to learn that old adage "if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again." In many games you are returned to a save point if you fail at the task or you can always start over. The benefit to this is that "losing" is an anticipated part of the game, and there is no stigma to not being able to complete a level on the first (or second, or third...) attempt.

Most of the current crop of video games are highly interactive, and include built in social networking, whether via text or voice chat. Many games require the player and their friends to work together as a team to complete all of the missions. There are social implications beyond that of in-game communication as well; many teens and young adults play games, and regard game playing as critical to their social interaction - it is what they do when they get together - the same as we did when were young with board and card games.

If you read up a little on the subject you will also find that video games are being widely used in several physical motion areas: studies have shown that surgeons who play video games have finer small motor skills; physical therapists are using them for patients who have had surgery affecting fine motor skills such as hand surgery. Some doc-

tors are recommending video games to help combat the stiffening from arthritis.

Like movies, many video games are based on books (Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and even Stuart Little) or true life events. Unlike the movies, videogames may actually have a leg up in this area as players are interacting with the events and characters in the stories rather than merely watching events as they unfold.

As with any media - video, musical or even books - there are different levels of value, depending on how you define that elusive quality. Just as you might not expect the same level of educational value from a Janet Evanovich novel as that of, say, Jane Austen, (while you may well enjoy Evanovich a lot more) you do not expect the same level of educational value between two video games.

Comments have been made about the sedentary nature of gaming in light of current obesity rates. I would point out that people see value in watching the ballet, theatre, and reading. All of these activities are sedentary as well. So, the only real difference is your perceived value of the media event to which you were participating.

The argument against video games is more or less the same argument that the library world had against videos in the library twenty to thirty years ago. One of the realities of life in this time is that visual media, whether it be movies or video games, is increasingly important to our population. Video games and the like are no longer a fringe activity practiced by anti-social teenaged boys in dark basements, but rather a mainstream activity engaged in by a large portion of the population. Libraries can, and in my opinion should, leverage that interest and attempt to engage players and render the library valuable to them as well. It is part of the mission of libraries to provide for the recreational needs of its patrons. And as I have often heard some librarians say, "These patrons are your future board members."

Some libraries offer RuneScape tournaments or Dance Dance Revolution game events every month. These are historically well attended and the majority of the attendees are not regular library users. While the attendees may not utilize the library at the time they are attending, the libraries have increased their visibility and made the library less "institutional" to this demographic. Hopefully this will encourage gamers to use the many other services that are a library's primary focus.

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# The Value of Video Games

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Really, in the end it is all about the value you perceive in the thing. I personally, enjoy playing computer games. I have very fond memories of my husband and two sons and I huddled around our computer playing games when our children were younger. We would take turns and when one person passed a level the next would take a turn. If someone got stuck and could not pass (usually mom and dad) the next person would get us to a new level. We have a great time - laughing and working together to defeat the level.

Average age of digital game player: 34.  
83 million game players worldwide as of 2003.  
24% of gamers are over 40.

Southwest Kansas Library System

## **Gaming Workshop** **Programming for Young Adults**

Tuesday, November 7, 2006

10 a.m.—3 p.m.

Lois Flanagan Room

Dodge City Public Library

Presented by

Diana Trinkle, Nortonville Public Library

Chris Rippel, Central Kansas Library System

# New Dodge City Public Library Director

Dodge City Public Library welcomed their new Director, Cathy Reeves, in September. Cathy served for 25 years as Director of the Learning Resource Center at Dodge City Community College. During that time she has been actively involved with SWKLS, serving on various System committees.

Cathy holds a Masters of Library Science from Emporia State University and has been active in KLA/CULS. She got a jump start working with DCPL staff earlier this fall when she served as storyteller for the Smart Start program there.



Cathy stated, "I'm really happy to be at Dodge City Public Library and look forward to working with the System and with the other librarians in southwest Kansas."

# DOPA : What is it and how it might affect your library

by Janelle Jarboe

DOPA stands for the **Deleting Online Predators Act** (H.R. 5319). The U.S. House of Representatives passed the amended version of this bill on July 26, 2006 requiring schools and libraries receiving E-Rate funds to block access to social networking sites. The act passed 410-15 and will head to the U.S. Senate this Fall. The idea is to protect minors from online predators when parental supervision is not available. The act also requires the institutions to be capable of disabling the restrictions for “use by an adult or by minors with adult supervision to enable access for educational purposes.” At first this may seem like a good thing, but the act may limit access to a wide variety of websites. Some of these websites may contain harmless and educational material.

Social networking sites are classified as any sites that allow user accounts, public profiles and/or user forums. This would include websites such sites as myspace, amazon.com, yahoo, blogger, flickr, etc. Several of these sites have gotten a lot of flack and negative press. Saturday Night Live even recently did a myspace skit. But these sites also have beneficial uses. Many libraries use social networking sites such as myspace or blogger to communicate with patrons and the outside world. For example, in our system Liberal Memorial Library has a section on their website entitled “Library Tidbits” where they use a blog to share information with their library patrons (<http://liberalmemoriallibrary.blogspot.com>). Finney County Public Library has a myspace page that was created by and for the TALC (Teen Advisory Library Committee) Group (<http://www.myspace.com/fcpltalcl>). The teens administer this page and communicate with each other about upcoming TALC meetings, events, and fundraisers. Several library staff members and the library sponsor also participate.

Blogs and other social networking sites are used across the state of Kansas. Christie Brandau, the State Librarian has a blog where she shares her experiences traveling across the state (<http://ksstatelibrarian.blogspot.com>). The Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library has a myspace page (<http://www.myspace.com/tscpl>). On their page they share library events, library information, new books, etc.

If DOPA becomes law in its current state some patrons would not be able to access these resources from inside their own library. There is also concern about

how HomeworkKansas or KANAnswer would be affected. Even though patrons aren't required to create profiles, chatting is involved in using these services. Some interpretations of the act include blocking chatting.

## Talking Points

(taken from *The Current Legislative Challenge: DOPA and the Participation Gap*. Robert P. Doyle, Illinois Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/dopa.pdf> )

- Education, not laws blocking access, is the key to safe use of the Internet. Libraries and schools are places where kids learn essential Information literacy skills that go far beyond computer instruction and Web searching. In deed, DOPA would block usage of these sites in the very environments where librarians and teachers can instruct students about how to use all kinds of applications safely and effectively and where kids can learn to report and avoid unsafe sites.
- Limiting access to social networking sites in E-rate schools and libraries will have little impact on the overall problem since young people access these collaborative sites from many locations and over a period of time. If children are going to get into trouble online, chances are it won't be at school. They'll be home, they'll be at a friend's house, or they could even be using their mobile phones completely apart from adult supervision. Schools and libraries are relatively protected environments where adults are never far away and, for the most part, computers are in public locations that make it difficult for users to hide what they're doing.
- While seeking to protect children from predators, H. R. 5319 would impact a wide range of social networking sites that are used daily by millions of Americans. DOPA is much too broad. It proposes to block access to beneficial collaborative Web applications and resources.
- DOPA ignores the value of interactive Web applications. New Internet-based applications for collaboration, business, and learning are becoming increasingly important, and young people must be prepared to thrive in a work environment where meetings take place online, and where online networks are essential communication tools.  
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## DOPA : What is it and how it might affect your library (continued)

- Local decision making — not federal law — is the way to solve the problems addressed by DOPA. Such decisions are already being made locally, in part due to the requirements of the Children's Online Protection Act (COPA) for E-rate recipients. An additional law is not necessary.
- DOPA would restrict access to technology in the communities that need public access most. H. R. 5319, as presently drafted, would require libraries and schools receiving E-rate discounts through the Universal Service Program to block computer users from accessing interactive Web applications of all kinds, thereby limiting opportunities for those who do not have Internet access at home. This unfairly denies the students and library users in schools and libraries in the poorest communities from accessing appropriate content and from learning how best to safely manage their own Internet access in consultation with librarians and teachers.
- School officials note they are faced with a new problem of monitoring students' and teachers' use of the Internet on personal laptops on school grounds.

Interested in learning more about DOPA? The following web resources were used to aid in writing this article and are excellent resources. Most of these resources were taken from ALA (American Library Association) or YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association).

*The Current Legislative Challenge: DOPA and the Participation Gap*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/dopa.pdf>

*Teens & Social Networking in School & Public Libraries: A Toolkit for Librarians & Library Workers*

<http://teentechweek.wikispaces.com/space/showimage/SocialNetworkingToolkit.pdf>

*DOPA Information Packet: A Resource for Librarians & Library Workers*

<http://teentechweek.wikispaces.com/space/showimage/DOPAInfoPacket.pdf>

Interested in getting involved in legislative advocacy? The following resource from YALSA offers some great pointers.

*A Legislative Advocacy Guide for Members*

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/>

[LegAdvocacyGuide.pdf](#)

There are also several online safety sites. Here are few recommended ones:

<http://www.netsmartzkids.org> – has lots of fun games and ideas for teaching online safety.

<http://kan-safe.info> – a site created specifically for Kansas libraries. Contains examples of internet policies, online safety sites, child friendly browsers, child friendly search engines, etc.

<http://www.safekids.com> - contains lots of great resources such as Kids Rules for Online Safety and Guidelines for Parents.

# What I'm Reading

This new column in the *System Scene* will provide all of us – System staff and member library staff – to share books we have found interesting with the rest of the library community in southwest Kansas. We're starting out with staff selections but welcome you to contribute selections for future editions!

## Emily Sitz –

Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch series is one of my favorites. Vietnam vet Bosch is a flawed man, a rogue detective trying to find a place within – or without – the bureaucracy of the Los Angeles Police Department. The legions of Bosch fans are undoubtedly awaiting the release of the newest offering, *Echo Park*, in October. I would guess though that not many Bosch fans are anticipating the latest mystery by Deon Meyer which is due out next spring.

You may be asking who is Deon Meyer and why should Bosch fans be interested? Meyer, a South African author, has been touted by at least one reviewer as the South African Michael Connelly. Comparisons to Connelly aside, I am intrigued with Meyer's post-apartheid setting for mysteries in which members of the South African Police Force are featured with characters shifting in and out of major and minor roles.

While he is a recognized writer in South Africa, Meyer's American mystery debut was *Heart of the Hunter*. Following the success of that title, his other two mysteries up to the present, originally written in Afrikaans, have been translated and are available in the States. So, enjoy a new Connelly this fall and then acquaint yourself with Meyers...just in time for his new spring release.

## Beth Levrault –

*The Archivist: A Novel*. By Martha Cooley.  
“With a little effort, anything can be shown to connect with anything else: existence is infinitely cross-referenced. And everything has more than one definition. A cat is a mammal, a narcissist, a companion, a riddle.” Such is the beginning of Martha Cooley's 1999 novel *The Archivist*. Although I picked up this novel simply because of the title's relevance to my job as cataloger, the crux of the novel expands far beyond preservation or archiving. Literary themes such as betrayal, religious intolerance and conversion, The Holocaust, and suicide form the basis of the novel. Ambitious themes such as these interact with the beauty and complexity of a human relationship that

is in some ways forbidden to create prose that conveys love and hate as often simultaneous emotions. Narrated by the voice of a Matthias Lane, a late 60s archivist at an unnamed east-coast university, his relationship with a graduate student interested in the T.S. Eliot letters he keeps brings up questions of destruction versus preservation. How much are we willing to keep, and how much are we willing to let go? The parallels in this novel at times could be myriad and unapparent at first, but, as is quoted in an Amazon.com review, that complexity can be “more like life than some of us care to admit.”

## Janelle Jarboe –

I recently listened to *Red Lily*, the third and final book in Nora Roberts' “In the Garden” trilogy, which I checked out and downloaded this book from the Kansas Audio books, music & more! site. This series takes place in and around Memphis, Tennessee. The trilogy is about three women Stella, Rosalind and Hayley who all come together seemingly by chance. All three women come to live in Harper House where they have several run-ins with the family ghost, Amelia. This last book centers on Hayley Phillips, a young mother living in the mansion with her young daughter, Lily. Throughout the book, Amelia's presence becomes stronger her behavior becoming more erratic. Hayley, the other women, and men in their lives know they must find a way to put Amelia at peace at last.

I accidentally listened to this book not knowing it was part of the series. Honestly, I didn't know it was part of a series until about halfway in when I mentioned to one of my friends that I was listening to the book. The book can stand well on its own, but I wish I could have listened to its predecessors first. I currently have the first one, *Blue Dahlia*, downloaded to my mp3 player and the second book, *Black Rose*, on hold on Kansas audio books, music & more!. If you are someone who likes a touch of paranormal suspense, mixed in with some romance and humor I would recommend this book. The narrator, Susie Breck, did an excellent job of using her voice to distinguish several different characters. The way she used her voice to portray Amelia sent chills down my spine several times. You might want to make sure you leave the lights on. I know there were several parts that were a bit spooky even if I was listening to it while driving during the daytime!

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## What I'm Reading (continued)

### Charlene McGurie –

Last year I traveled about 20,000 miles on System business. If I did not have audio books to listen to, I would not enjoy my job as much as I do. I love to listen to mysteries. I identify with the characters that look at all the clues and try to figure out what happened. That is a lot like what I do in my job. I also identify with people who can not quit on something until they have figured it out.

I just finished Kathy Reichs' latest book, *Break No Bones*. This is the ninth book in the Dr. Temperance Brennan series. Kathy Reichs is a forensic anthropologist for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, State of North Carolina, and for the Laboratoire des Sciences Judiciaires et de Médecine Légale for the province of Quebec. Dr. Brennan, or Tempe as her friends call her, holds these same credentials. Kathy Reichs' books remind me in some ways of the older Patricia Cornwell books only better because the main characters are not at odds with one another.

*Break No Bones* takes place in Charleston, SC, which is where my oldest son now lives. I recognized many locations from the book. This thriller has intrigue, compassion, and a bit of romance.

*Break No Bones* was narrated by Barbara Rosenblat, who just happens to be my favorite audio book reader. She does an outstanding job of bringing out the personality of the characters. You would swear that you are listening to a dozen different people.

### Brett Bradley –

I've recently finished reading a book by Charles Seife called *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*. This book isn't at all typical of my standard reading fare but it was recommended to me by someone I trust, so I placed it on my wish list at half.com. When it became available at a good price, I bought it and put it on my 'to be read' book case, where it sat for about 3 years. Recently I pulled it off the shelf and decided to read it. I'm glad I did – it's a fascinating read. In it, Seife tells "the story of zero, from its birth in ancient times to its growth and nourishment in the East, its ascendance in the West, and its ever present threat to modern physics."

The origin of zero is interesting. Seife describes how the beginnings of mathematical thought derived from the need to count livestock, and to keep track of

property and the passage of time. None of these tasks require zero. You don't have to have a number to express the lack of something. Seife goes on to describe, in a very easy to understand manner, how the introduction of zero simplified the handling of fractions in early Babylonian mathematics, making the more cumbersome Egyptian system obsolete. He also discusses how the Greek and Romans hated and feared zero, and refused to convert to the Babylonian system. It seems that to some, zero was dangerous.

A large part of the book is dedicated to describing why various peoples resisted zero, and the consequences of their denial of zero. Seife compares and contrasts how the concept of zero was welcomed in the East, and feared and rejected in the West. It was interesting to read how cultural values and assumptions affected the way people accepted or rejected zero. The latter part of the book describes the role of zero in modern physics. The author does an outstanding job of giving clear, easy to understand descriptions of the techniques of calculus and the problems facing modern physicists.

According to Seife, "Zero is powerful because it is infinity's twin. They are equal and opposite, yin and yang. They are equally paradoxical and troubling. The biggest questions in science and religion are about nothingness and eternity, the void and the infinite, zero and infinity."

I have zero qualms about recommending this book. I learned many things from it that I didn't even know I didn't know, and it was a fun read.

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