

Writing Mysteries Cures Cancer

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

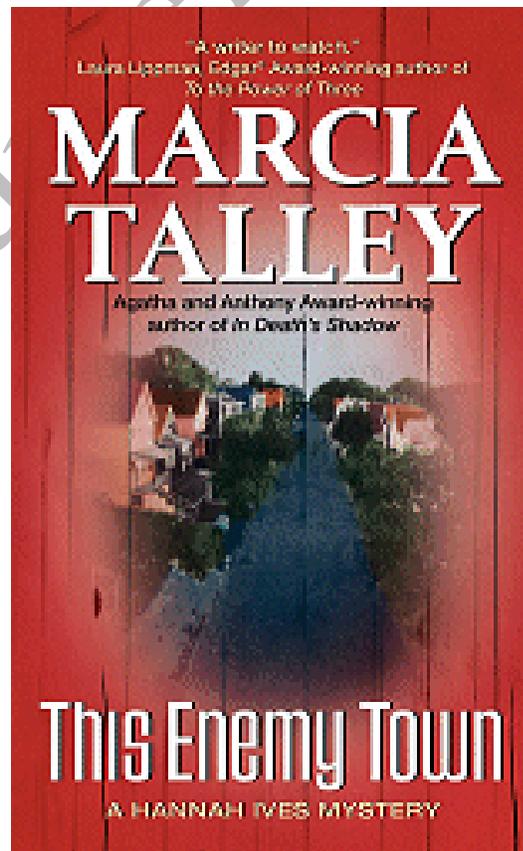
In keeping with what editors and publishers believe most readers want, crime fiction these days often centers on professional crime-solvers — the police, forensics teams, and less frequently, private investigators. The world of amateur sleuths is less often explored — which is what makes sharing this week's pick all the more enjoyable.

Marcia Talley

Born in Cleveland, after travelling as a military brat (her father was a career Marine officer) Marcia Talley returned to Ohio to earn her BA from Oberlin College, where she met her future husband, Barry. In 1971 they moved to Annapolis, where Barry took a post at the United States Naval Academy. For many years Marcia worked as a librarian, but in 1993, after a second bout with cancer (the first had occurred ten years earlier), she decided that stress was the cause, and abandoned her one-hour-per-day commute to take up mystery writing full time. Marcia believes that her change in lifestyle contributed to saving her life.

I first met Marcia at the annual Mystery and Crime Fiction Conference at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1997, where she was helping to put on a writing workshop, and working on her first novel. Less than two years later *Sing It to Her Bones* was published and went on to win the 1999 Agatha award for Best First Mystery Novel. Marcia has followed her success with four other novels in the Hannah Ives series, as well

as collaborating with other crime writers on two other novels (*Naked Came the Phoenix*, 2001, and *I'd Kill for That*, 2004), as well as nearly a dozen short stories. Marcia and her husband Barry (now Director of Musical Activities at the U.S. Naval Academy) still live in Annapolis, Maryland, with their cat, Tommy. When she isn't writing, they spend much of their time traveling or sailing on their 37-foot sailboat. Most people would say she deserves it.



This Enemy Town
(Avon Books, 2005)

This Enemy Town — the title is taken from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* — suggests that a sense of place is central to this tale, and indeed it is. Set in Annapolis, Maryland, the story revolves around events at the US Naval Academy during rehearsals for a midshipmen's production of the musical *Sweeny Todd*. Hannah Ives is a homemaker whose husband teaches at the Academy. She is delighted to get out of the house and help with the musical production, until she finds herself caught up in a murder. A woman staff member at the Academy who had previously accused Hannah's husband of sexual harassment is found dead, shortly after a confrontation with her. An eyewitness places Hannah near the scene of the crime, and just when it seems things couldn't get worse, the murder weapon turns up with Hannah's fingerprints on it. Don't you just hate it when that happens?

When NCIS and FBI investigators seem ready to hang her out to dry for the crime, Hannah must rely on her own wits to clear herself and find the culprit. In a tale that offers something for

everyone, Hannah's exploits will take Talley on a journey that involves her own experiences as a longtime cancer survivor, life at the Naval Academy, an insider's appreciation of the play *Sweeny Todd*, the Pentagon, and the war in Iraq.

Access into hidden worlds

Marcia Talley adroitly weaves together a complex and original story of sex, life-threatening illness, vanity and greed. She writes with a fresh voice about an original setting, while giving us insights into three worlds we rarely have access to: the U.S. Naval Academy, a behind-the-scenes view of preparations for a stage musical production, and the emotion-ridden world of a woman confronting breast cancer while trying to hold her life together. A satisfying read on several levels, *This Enemy Town* is the fifth book in the Hannah Ives series. If you enjoy it, go back and begin with *Sing It to Her Bones*, the first in the series.

Jim Napier can be reached at
jim.napier52@gmail.com

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