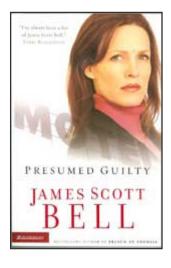
Readin' & Writin' With Lauraine- November 2006



Getting this column written has been a challenge. In the first place we are traveling; I have along with me *Presumed Guilty* by James Scott Bell as my book of choice for this month.

However, my husband and I are on our maiden bus tour, meaning the forty-foot Greyhound type bus is now somewhere near useable and we have learned lots of lessons. Someday there will be a novel about this trip, when I am able to look back and laugh.

While you won't laugh a lot in books by James Scott Bell, you will have to keep reading into the night to see how he works out the plots for his legal suspense novels. As far as I'm concerned, look out Grisham, make way for Jim Bell. In *Presumed Guilty*, Pastor Ron Hamilton is the head of dynamic and growing church, his life looks rosy to all those around him, until the body of a young porn star is found in a seedy hotel and all fingers point to Ron. While the media crucifies him, which seems to be the norm these days, his wife, Dallas, follows her heart and logic on her search for the truth. Until a dark secret from her past almost does them all in.

I like page turner novels, the kind that keep you guessing right up to the end, but without all the blood and mayhem of so many of the suspense thrillers. I want finely crafted characters whose struggles and foibles I can empathize with. Characters that I can root for. All of Bell's books have those ingredients.

So, how does he do that? He spends time plotting to make sure the actions lead to suspense, the major question always being: Will good win over evil, in spite of all the mistakes the characters make? Plotting takes sitting down with paper and pencil or a keyboard and figuring out all the things that could happen to keep the characters from getting what they want. You do this for all the major characters in your book. In this case, Ron Hamilton is one plot line and Dallas Hamilton, another. Usually in suspense or mystery writing, which are two separate genres, the reader also follows the plot line for the bad guy or guys. As the author weaves these plot lines together, he must keep putting in false clues, or red herrings to keep the reader guessing.

Some writers write notes on colored Post-its to move around on a board to keep their plots straight, others use 3x5 cards, but the rule stays the same: the characters must get into deeper trouble as the book goes along, so the author must up the ante to keep readers reading. While all novels have some suspense in their plots, readers expect those labeled 'suspense' to be true page turners.

To learn more about plotting, take one of your favorite novels and make up notes or index cards for the conflicts you find in them. Then lay those notes out on a board and voila, you have a visual in your quest for plotting. So you too, know how they did it. You'll find copies of Jim's books at Books and Crannies here in California, or at your favorite local Christian bookstore.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all, and until next time,

Happy Readin' and Writin' from Lauraine.