



Interview with JoeAnn Hart

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KENNEALLY: Good things come from small presses, says author JoeAnn Hart. Her latest book, a mix of a memoir and a murder mystery, was published in April by the University of Iowa Press. As an author and a reader, Hart champions the small presses for taking big risks.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Dozens of independent standalone publishers continue to dot the literary landscape in the United States. They survive against all odds, building catalogs of works that range from experimental to controversial. Among the titles are occasional bestsellers, but that is hardly the point. JoeAnn Hart argues that these small presses make our bookshelves more diverse and our cultural existence more interesting. She joins me today from her office in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Welcome to Beyond the Book, JoeAnn.

HART: Hi. Hi, Chris. Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to chatting with you, because you are a defender, a champion, a beneficiary, as well, of small presses, and you've outlined for me some of the important reasons that we all should join you in that cause. Your new book is just out from the University of Iowa Press. It's called *Stamford '76: A True Story of Murder, Corruption, Race, and Feminism in the 1970s*. We'll learn about the book in just a bit. But for a small press like the University of Iowa Press, which has published that book, turning to you as an author with real experience, that must be a win-win situation for you both.

HART: Oh, it is. I'm so happy to be with the University of Iowa Press. My agent had sent this manuscript around to the big presses, and really nobody – the editors said that while they loved it, couldn't put it down, but didn't know how to market it, because it is controversial material having to do with a bow-and-arrow murder and biracial relationships and corruption.

So I did a search on *Poets & Writers'* database for small presses, which I can highly recommend, and I found out that the University of Iowa Press actually did true crime, which is what this is known. So I just sent a little query, and he asked for a couple of chapters, and they took the whole thing. So I was very happy to have it there at the university press.



I've been with a boutique press before, a small press, Ashland Creek out of Oregon, for a previous – for a novel that was environmentally leaning, a dark comedy about plastics in the ocean. And Ashland Creek Press does environmental literature. So we were an excellent fit as well.

KENNEALLY: One of the points that you're making there when you're speaking about your own two books is the specialty – kind of the niche that the small press often targets – in one case, true crime, in the other, environmental issues. That's one of the reasons you think that small presses are so important is their niche approach, the targeting, the aim they have. So they know how to find the reader.

HART: That's right. Many small presses are mission-based. They believe – they want to publish books based on social justice or books just by women. Kore Press is just female authors. Beacon Press, which is a large small press out of Boston, is actually associated with the UU Church.

KENNEALLY: For our listeners, JoeAnn, UU – Unitarian Universalist Church.

HART: That's right, yeah. I call it the UU, because I am a UU. But yes, Unitarian Universalist Church, and they are definitely mission-based for social justice, although they do some poetry – Mary Oliver, for instance, they have published. Poetry especially – if we didn't have small presses and university presses, poetry, which is like the very words that help us understand human experience, big publishers hardly publish any poetry. So university presses have always published poetry for that reason, and the same with small presses.

And as the big presses published less and less fiction, especially short fiction and other genres – they're looking just with an eye on a bestseller – that the small presses and university presses are doing much more of that, as well, including something like my book, which is true crime, which doesn't even seem like a university would be publishing that. But it's considered sociological as well.

KENNEALLY: Share with us the author experience working with a small press. I understand that there is often – if there is an advance, it's a small one. Usually there is no advance. But what do you get instead?

HART: That's true. There is almost never an advance with a small press or a university press. Most writers are not in it for the money. They write because they love writing or they need publications to stay teaching in university jobs. A small press is very hands-on. The editorial experience is just wonderful at a small press, because they only have a few titles a year, so they're very invested in the titles that



they do take. The editing process at the University of Iowa Press was extensive and wonderful, and I had a great relationship with every editor I worked with there.

At big presses – and I have also been published with a big press. My first book was a novel by Little, Brown. The editors themselves are doing so much more than just editing that they're often farming out the editorial part of getting a book in production. Yeah, go ahead.

KENNEALLY: Well, JoeAnn, for so many authors today, it's a lot of work not just to write the book, but to see the book through publication and beyond – to see it marketed well, to see it try to at least reach an audience. Tell us about the small presses and how well they work with authors as far as marketing.

HART: That's right. So they tend not to have big marketing departments, but they usually make up for that with huge enthusiasm. And they know how to steer an author to do – towards social media and speaking engagements. It's actually – they do a lot of what the big publishers do. Not all books get big marketing behind them at big presses. So at small presses, they are very attuned to their readership, so reach these readerships with your book – with the book that you've written for them.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about your new book, which is from the University of Iowa Press. It's called *Stamford '76: A True Story of Murder, Corruption, Race, and Feminism in the 1970s*. That covers a wide range.

HART: It does. I know. (laughter)

KENNEALLY: And we are speaking here about Stamford, Connecticut –

HART: That's right.

KENNEALLY: – a place that you lived in and found yourself at the center of a very unusual experience, once that you returned to after more than three decades.

HART: That's right. So Stamford – I lived there for one year, in 1975 and '76, and I was in a biracial relationship at the time, and another biracial couple, the white woman was killed by a bow and arrow and found in a shallow grave. And then a few weeks later, her black boyfriend got shot and killed by the police. Decades later, I decide I've got to find out what's happened, because it's still an unsolved case. I spent 20 years investigating, researching what might have happened to those two young people in Stamford at the time.



There is a great deal of sociological work there, of being in that particular time and place, which is what I think attracted the University of Iowa Press – what was it like to be a young woman at the very beginning of the second wave of feminism in the early '70s? What was it like to be told you can do anything and then set out with sort of no skills to do anything? And also, everybody wanting to be an equal with men, and if you're an equal of somebody who's a drug dealer, that can get you into big trouble.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. Your story does gather together a number of threads and reveal the social fabric of New England at that period of time – sort of the end of the countercultural revolution, the beginning of a world that we would recognize today. A very interesting story, and we wish you the very best of luck with your book, and we appreciate your take on the value of small presses. We've been speaking today with JoeAnn Hart, author, novelist, journalist. JoeAnn Hart, thank you so much for joining us on Beyond the Book.

HART: Great. Thank you so much, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The complete Beyond the Book podcast archive is available at beyondthebook.com. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on CCC's Beyond the Book.

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