



## THE LAWYER'S BOOKSHELF

REVIEWED BY BRETTE McWHORTER SEMBER

### *The Quiet Game*

By Greg Iles. Dutton, New York, N.Y. 433 pages, \$24.95.

**T**his novel centers around an old, unsolved, apparently racially motivated murder in Mississippi. Penn Cage, the main character, is a young, recently widowed Houston capital murder prosecutor who also happens to be a best-selling crime novelist.

Penn and his young daughter are recuperating from the recent death of his wife when he returns to his roots in Natchez, Miss. to dig his father out of a blackmail situation. In the course of his visit, Penn meets Caitlin, the attractive new female newspaper editor and happens to discuss a 20-year-old unsolved racial murder, the Del Payton case, which occurred in the town when he was a child. His comments are printed and the case again comes to the forefront of the city's consciousness, with different factions in the town actively seeking different results. Penn is alternately pressured to solve the case and to let it lie.

In the course of all of this, his high school sweetheart, Livy Marsten, comes to town and his recently wounded heart does a tailspin. He learns that Livy's father, Leo Marsten (who viciously attempted to ruin Penn's father years ago) is somehow involved in or connected to the Del Payton case. Penn and Caitlin work together to uncover the truth behind this poorly investigated crime. The FBI director becomes involved and Penn's life and the lives of his family members are endangered. Penn ends up with only a few days to solve the case. The solution is exciting, spell-binding and thrilling.

In the course of solving the Payton murder, Penn must defend himself in a related civil lawsuit (the explanation for this is too ridiculous to even describe). The courtroom scenes are short on reality and are far more sensational and exciting than reality usually provides. Lots of details are lacking, and the rationale for how he ends up defending the case just does not fly. The reader cannot help but feel that Penn should have just walked away from the whole ugly mess.

**D**espite the excitement at the end of the book, the effort it takes to get there is hardly worth the payoff. The book is overcrowded with events, both past and present, that drag out the story. Penn must protect his father from a blackmail scheme, relive memories of his life with his wife, protect his family from snipers, rescue someone from a fire, be a great dad to his young daughter, relive romantic moments with Livy, witness an execution, mourn a close friend, deal with a paternity matter,

fly to Montana twice, test his survival skills, defend a lawsuit and juggle two women he is attracted to, despite having been widowed less than a year.

One or two of these things alone are enough for a book, but the truckload of events that Penn must wade through are just unbelievable. The author has many writing talents: creating suspense, evoking emotions and bringing Southern scenery alive. However, he has too much going on in this book for the reader to be able to keep it all straight. The Del Payton murder itself is very complicated, involving so many people and so many motives and circumstances that it alone is practically overwhelming. The additional events simply overload the reader. The book could have been cut by at least a third and retained its main story line and interesting characters.

Many events just do not add up as Iles expects them to. Throughout the course of a few days, many, many people are killed or seriously injured. There seems to be little law enforcement response to any of these events. Penn spends much time lamenting the fact that his relationship with Livy ended with little explanation after high school. But, despite the fact that he feels he lost the love of his life, he apparently made little effort to try to win her back or to get answers from her. His decision to leave his job and sell his home in the midst of the mayhem in Natchez seems ill thought out and untimely.

The final proof that Penn needs to conclusively solve Payton's murder is sprung on him in the final moments of the civil trial, shocking him — but no surprise at all to readers who have waited 200 pages for Penn to catch on. Perhaps the biggest frustration was not being able to reach into the pages and grab Penn by the shoulders and shake him until he did so.

The author does, however, create interesting characters. Livy is particularly fascinating, and Ike, a police officer who helps Penn solve the case, is also someone who keeps the reader guessing. Unfortunately, there are just too many characters, as there are too many events. After a bit, some of the names begin to blur and the reader just wants to push through all the extraneous material and get to the end.

*The Quiet Game* is a pleasant, if confusing, book. Once you start it, you will want to find a way through the snowstorm of events so you can find out the truth.

**Brette McWhorter Sember**, a non-practicing attorney and freelance writer, is the author of *How to File For Divorce in New York*, *Landlords' Rights and Duties in New York*, *How to Form a Corporation in New York*, and the upcoming *Tenants' Rights in New York* (Sourcebooks).



# Travels with books

**P**lanning a trip? Help your child anticipate the trip and record the adventures with these great books for on-the-move fun.

**Kevin Takes a Trip** by Liesbet Slegers (Kane/Miller, ©2002, \$7.95). A little boy goes on an airplane with his grandma for the first time. Designed for toddlers, this little book will help explain an airplane ride. The whimsical drawings make the thought of an airplane ride fun.

**Red Moon Follows Truck** by Stephen Eaton Hume and Leslie Elizabeth Watts (Orca Book Publishers, ©2001, \$16.95). A boy and his parents undertake a long driving journey to move to a new place. As they drive, the boy encounters new places and new experiences, but the moon always follows him. His mother explains that the moon is like their love for him—it will always be there. The thought of this continual companionship makes the journey easier for him. The illustrations lend magic to the special moments in the story.

**Tom Mouse** by Ursula K. LeGuin, illustrated by Julie Downing (Roaring Book Press, ©2002, \$15.95). Tom lives in a train station but has a burning desire to see the world. He sneaks onto a train and begins his journey. Every night he looks out the window at his friends, the stars. Soon, the compartment he is in is occupied by an older woman. He tries to hide but can't help dancing in the moonlight and snacking on her food. She sees him but lets him be. When she finds out that the trains are fumigated if mice are discovered, she sug-

gests that he leave with her and she will take him on all of her travels. Together they see the world. Longer than most picture books, this is a story for a preschooler with a long attention span. The illustrator has brought the story to life with warm, energetic drawings.

**The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Vacation** by Jan and Stan Berenstain (Random

House, ©1989, \$3.95). This wonderful book has long been a favorite at my house—probably because we've experienced our share of vacation disappointments! Papa Bear plans a family vacation at a cabin in the mountains; he is sure it will be the best time they've ever had. But, the cabin is dirty, the roof leaks, the lake is mucky, the boat sinks, and the stew he makes is just awful! It

looks like a complete disaster—until the bears get home and relive it through the photographs they've taken. Suddenly they see the humor in the situation and are able to laugh together at the horrendous time they had. While the book doesn't offer much encouragement for those who have vacation disasters, it does show that sometimes even the worst times can make the best memories.

**Kid's Trip Diary** (Marlor Press, ©1998, \$6.95). Designed for children ages six to 12, this is a complete trip journal. It begins with some pre-planning—what the

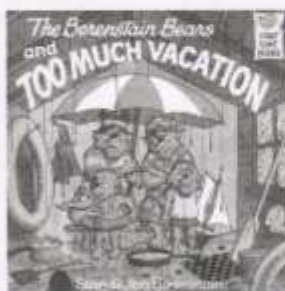
child is anticipating and what she wants to bring along. There is a large section of two-page spreads where the child can record what she did that day, including what the weather was like, what was eaten, what was bought, and what she liked the best. The back of the book contains a small section of games and activities to play while on the trip.

**Kid's Travel Fun Book** by Loris and Marlin Bree (Marlor Press, ©2000, \$6.95). Also for

children in the six to 12 age range, this book contains lots of games, puzzles, and creative space for kids to use while traveling. There are the usual word games and puzzles, but also some great activities with paper, toothpicks, pennies, and other small objects. The book includes space to draw things seen on the trip and pages to write about things that happened.

**Fodor's Around...With Kids**. Fodor's, known for its popular travel guides, now has a series of travel books designed for families. The books are small (just the right size to stick in a diaper bag) and are wonderful for parents

or for late elementary



## New National Parks Camping Guide

Get the most from your next national park visit with the *National Park Service Camping Guide* to over 400 scenic campgrounds and 25,000 sites. This easy to use 256-page book includes all national parks, recreation areas, monuments, lakeshores, scenic rivers, seashores, historic parks, and preserves. Campground listings include the name and location, when they're open, number of sites, camping fees, RV length limits, length of stay limits, amenities, reservation information, and much more.

If you want to know where to camp in National Park Service areas, you'll want this book! Not sold in bookstores. Available in limited supply for \$12.95, plus \$3 shipping, from the

middle school kids read on their own. The book consists of 68 two-page spreads featuring family-friendly activities, sites, and hotspots. Each "great thing" do together provides a family-focused description, basic facts such as hours, phone numbers, and location, as well as fun facts which will interest kids. Each page also includes "Kid-Friendly Eats," information about where to eat, and a "Keep in Mind" section that offers great tips designed to make it easier to get around, save money, and avoid places where younger children will be unhappy or get into trouble. There is also a section at the back of each book with travel games and activities. The series includes locations such as Boston, Miami, Washington D.C., London, San Francisco, Paris, Chicago and many more. The books are priced at \$5 each and written by area parents.



## Hoots, Haunts and Halloween Capers — for the Young Reader

By Brette McWhorter Sember

Get your family in the mood for pumpkins, ghouls and ghosts with these spooky Halloween reads:



**A Trick or a Treat? A Not-Too-Scary Window Surprise Book** by Keith Faulkner, illustrated by Manbar Chauhan (*Dutton Children's Books, \$10.99*). The trick-or-treaters in this book see scary silhouettes through windows, which are revealed as everyday people and objects when the page is turned. The scary twist at the end of the book isn't going to give anyone nightmares, and the book is great at encouraging imagination.



**The Scariest Monster in the Whole Wide World** by Pamela Mayer, illustrated by Lydia Monks (*G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$15.99*). Thea is tired of wearing the beautiful Halloween costumes her parents favor and this year wants to be the scariest monster in the whole world. Thea and her parents go round and round till

Grandma steps in and makes sure everyone gets what they want. This book will hit home with early elementary schoolers, who often have their own contrary notions about what makes the perfect costume.



**Make Your Own Halloween Treats** by Sonali Fry, illustrated by Judith Moffatt (*Scholastic, \$6.99*). This activity board book lets toddlers and preschoolers use the enclosed stickers to decorate Halloween party treats. The story shows children the treats at the party and encourages them to decorate their own on the facing pages. This will give them something to do other than hyperactively jumping up and down for the week before Halloween arrives!



**Out of the Night** by Lola Schafer, illustrated by Roby Gilbert (*Whispering Coyote Press, \$6.95*). A little boy reads in bed and is visited by fantastic witches, bats, trolls and dragons. His imaginary creatures disappear when dad reminds him of the time. One last scary surprise catches readers, only to bring laughter at the end. This brightly illustrated book will be a year-round favorite and might help with the monster-in-the-closet syndrome.



**John Pig's Halloween** by Jan L. Waldron, illustrated by David McPhail (*Puffin Books, \$6.99*). John Pig is too scared to go trick-or-treating with his friends, and stays home alone. A visit from a friendly witch inspires him to cook and decorate for Halloween. John shares his creations with the witch's ghoulish friends. When his friends arrive home, they expect to find a sad and lonely John, only to find a house full of warmth and treats for them to share. The story sends a needed message that Halloween is about friendship and sharing. The lavish costumes are a feast for the eyes.

