

Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

Barri L. Bumgarner



Novelist, Author, Teacher

Lecture Topic: "Inspired by the Dark -- Let Fear Work for You!"

**Thursday, November 15, 2007
from 7 to 8 pm
at Barnes & Noble-Ladue
8871 Ladue Road, Ladue MO 63124**

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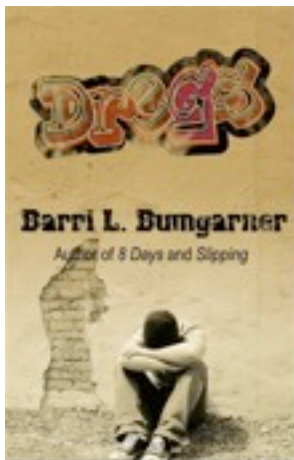
BARRI L. BUMGARNER'S brand new novel, *Dregs*, touches on a topic most Americans have first-hand experience with: peer pressure. As her first young adult novel, Bumgarner tackles the tough issues of bullies, steroids, and what it takes to push a teenager to bring a gun to school. The book has already received attention from notable award committees.

Bumgarner's previous novel, ***Slipping***, received Missouri Writers' Guild Best Fiction 2005, runner-up. *Slipping* has received rave reviews from national radio host Jim Bohannon and Tyrone Banks of the Washington Post. Her short story "Retribution" currently appears in ***Mysteries of the Ozarks, Vol. II***.

Bumgarner's debut novel, ***8 Days***, is currently in its second print-run. Barri also freelances for *Crescendo* and *Family* magazines. In 2005, she received Best Technical Article honors for her education articles, awarded by the Missouri Writers' Guild, and in Writer's Digest 72nd Annual Writing Competition honors. ***Playing the Line***—a prequel to ***8 Days***—will be released in fall 2007.

Ms. Bumgarner, a former teacher at Oakland Junior High School, is a graduate assistant at the University of Missouri-Columbia while completing her Master's and beginning her doctorate. She is a graduate of Long Ridge Writers' Institute, learning under the tutelage of Edgar Award winning author Carolyn Wheat. Along with nearly thirty poems, Barri has published over fifty articles for statewide magazines and short fiction in *Rock Springs Review*, *Missouri Teachers Write*, *Every Day is Father's Day* and *Well-Versed*. She is the Publicity Chair for the Missouri Writers' Guild, is a board member of Missouri Center for the Book, and is at work on her sixth novel. For more information, visit her website at: www.barriLbumgarner.com.

Recent Books by Barri Bumgarner:



- Paperback
- ISBN: 0979385709
- Pub. Date: April 2007
(Young Adult)



- Paperback
- ISBN: 0977160114
- Pub. Date: November 2005

[Click here](#) to read an excerpt of *Dregs*!



- **Paperback**
- **ISBN: 0974084891**
- **Pub. Date: September 2004**

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Read Our Interview with Barri Bumgarner:

SLWG: Where are you from originally?

BLB: I was born in Lebanon, Missouri, then spent a year in Florida before I went to college at SMSU (working on that whole MSU thing...), had to try a stint living in Texas because my whole family's from there and I'd been told all my life not to mess with Texas...instead, I moved back to Missouri and in my first novel decided to make all the bad guys from the Lone Star state...mess with it I did!

SLWG: How has your environment/upbringing colored your writing?

BLB: It has totally colored my writing – my mom took me to see *The Exorcist* when I was 10! Aside from that twisted little tidbit, she read to me when I was really little and read things like Whittier, *The Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam, and a great deal of other very literary poetry. She has always read constantly and so have my brothers. I saw that and absorbed it!

SLWG: When and why did you begin writing?

BLB: There are a lot of funny stories about this. My mom says I started writing stories in lieu of all the tall tales I told neighborhood friends. I was known for my active imagination and being prone to exaggeration. ☺ When I was 7, I wrote a whole slew of stories and poetry, tied it together with yarn and called it *The Works of Bumgarner*. I was a pill! On the back of my 4th grade report card, my teacher Mrs. Elam wrote, "I hope your dream of becoming a writer comes true." I didn't even know I'd shared that dream! Wow!

SLWG: When did you first consider yourself a writer?

BLB: I published a short story when I was in 7th grade (13 years old) right after I'd read *Salem's Lot*. After that, I always said I'd be famous just like Stephen King (keep on dreamin'...) But probably the point I truly believed in myself was in 1993 when I got poetry published nationally. I'd written pretty seriously in college but never submitted anything. In 1993, I got over 30 poems published, then started working in earnest on novels.

SLWG: Who or what inspired you to pen your first book or major work?

BLB: A combination of boredom, a compulsion, and my first year students. I was teaching in Louisiana, Missouri. It was 1991. I'd bought a brand new Toyota Celica that I couldn't afford, so I got a summer job at Casey's. After my first year teaching, I was happy to have a "no-brainer" job, however it got boring. I'd read a lot of little things I'd written to my 7th grade students, and they'd prompted me to publish them. I laughed. But one night at Casey's, there were no customers, so I pulled out a tablet of pizza order forms and began writing chapter one of a book on the back of those forms. Anytime I had free time, I always felt compelled to write... That night, I ended up with about 4 chapters that are now published, and fairly well intact, as chapters 3-6 in my first novel, *8 Days*.

SLWG: How long did it take you to complete this work—from idea to acceptance by a publisher?

BLB: From that first night at Casey's, I wrote about ten chapters and then put it away. When I moved to Columbia in 1992, I picked it back up over the course of the next 5 years and finally finished what was then called *Meltdown*. I met my publisher, Janet Musick, at a writing event in 2003, pitched a different book to her, and she said, "I don't want any of that Oprah crap." So I told her about *Meltdown*. She loved the idea, told me to send her the manuscript, and from there, it was only a matter of time before she offered me a contract (January 2004). Some have taken much less time – I wrote *Slipping* (first called *can't catch me*) in 1998 in less than a year, then pitched it to Janet and revised/edited it in about 8 months.

SLWG: How long did it take for you to actually hold the published work in your hands—from acceptance by the publisher to release of the final product? Was it worth it?

BLB: You know, that was the coolest part about going with a smaller press. Janet got so excited about this book that she "jumped" it to the top of their list. It was slated to come out in ~2 years. Instead, she got it out in about 9 months after the point of contract signing. Of course, we did 8 rewrites in that time frame, so it was crazy-busy!

SLWG: Please describe the research process that goes into the writing of your work.

BLB: Wow...research is one of the most fun parts of my job. I love it. I seldom do any pre-research (except for my true-crime book, which is so different from all my other work), instead I research as I go. For instance, when I was writing *8 Days*, one of the things that got me put on the FBI's watchlist was that I spent 3 solid days surfing the net, ordering articles, and researching chemicals of mass destruction, chemical warfare, and the silos that companies like DuPont have. I was

able to call some military facilities on the phone and ask them questions! But when we were doing rewrites after September 11th, it was much more difficult to find much of that information...though not impossible! I stumbled across the chemical cocktail my killer used in *Slipping* while reading an online article about Russian armies and how they debilitated the Chechen rebels. It even described how to make it!

All in all, I do a great deal of research, even for my fiction writing. I think the most engaging reading has to be believable, even in fantastical situations.

SLWG: What advice can you offer authors who have finished a first book-length manuscript and now seek to market it to a publisher?

BLB: Never give up. The industry is about perseverance and motivation. I also highly recommend being involved in critiquing groups. My novels group has made me such a better writer! Being around writers by going to conferences, workshops, even taking classes...these are the things that make us better at our craft. If you want to play for the St. Louis Cardinals, you have to learn the mechanics, practice everyday, play in the minors, and then, if you're lucky, you get called up to the Bigs. But everything you do before that is what determines whether you get there or not.

SLWG: What advice can you offer an author who has sold a first book—with respect to working with an editor or negotiating the terms of the contract?

BLB: Consult an attorney. My first contract was flawless, but the only reason I knew that was because I had a lawyer read it. I also had a writer friend read it. Don't be so star-struck that you don't think before you leap. There are some shady companies out there, and some high-risk self-publishing companies disguising themselves as mainstream publishers. Don't be fooled!

As for working with an editor, that's a shift for most writers. You can't be married to your every word. Realize that the editor does this for a living and knows what she's talking about if she says a scene doesn't work. Accept it, get over it, and let the material go. You can save it for another book or story, but divorcing yourself from a chapter or an excerpt will save you a lot of grief, because the editor will almost always win. What that also does if you *really* like a section they want you to cut, they'll listen if you are adamant about it. You've set the precedent that you believe they're good at what they do, but when you really want to go to bat for a scene, they'll be more willing to have some give and take later when you've proven yourself.

SLWG: Who or what has most influenced your writing style, and in what way?

BLB: Reading across genres has influenced me...and exploring different genres. I took part in the Missouri Writing Project, and that impacted my writing style a great deal. It acquainted me with creative nonfiction, which I fell in love with and now teach at MU! My novels group has influenced my style a lot, telling me what I'm good at and things that really hit home about my writing.

Several people have influenced me as well, especially my best friend Marsha. She's the one in 1993 who said, "Why don't you send some of this stuff in?" She also pushed me hard to start submitting my manuscripts when I'd written books.

Sometimes the closest friends are those who know you well enough to know when they can push! I also had some amazing English teachers (Kathy Street, Helen Breedlove, and Nancy Walker) who really motivated and inspired me. At SMS, Dr. Walker truly made me believe I was good enough to publish.

SLWG: Which genre are you most comfortable writing?

BLB: I'm comfortable in several genres: Thrillers, YA, and just basic contemporary fiction. The one area I'm in that I experience any discomfort is True-Crime. It's so unknown, and for much of the time, I feel like I'm learning as I go.

SLWG: Have you written, or do you ever plan to write in other genres? Which ones?

BLB: Yes, that's one thing I love about the 3 books I've released... they're all very different. I like not being typecast, even though most people think I love to "kill" for a living. I've written sci-fi, thrillers, literary, mystery, true-crime, journalistic articles, humor, young adult...you name it, I'm willing to try it. The areas I'll stay away from are historical (though I love to read it) and romance. I'll throw in some romance in my other books, but that's not a genre that trips my trigger.

SLWG: What are your current writing projects?

BLB: I'm finishing the prequel to *8 Days*, and it's called *Playing the Line*. It should be out next spring. I'm working on another Young Adult novel called *Cruds and Blips* using the same characters from *Dregs*, but the big project I've got on the backburner is a true-crime book based on a Columbia cop who was convicted of murder in May of 2005. I have exclusives with both the convicted cop and the victim's family, so I just sort of lucked out in that regard. I've interviewed ~100 people, including the cop, and have spent many hours at the Columbia Police Department sifting through evidence, understanding the court documents, and just making sure the case makes sense. It doesn't, so I think that's what will make it a good book. Aside from the fact that the conviction was just overturned and the cop is going to get a second trial! This book got me an agent in California (Ashley Grayson).

SLWG: What books or authors have most influenced your life? Did they also influence your writing style or goals?

BLB: Several writers and/or books have influenced me in different ways. As a kid in 7th grade, I'll never forget reading *Salem's Lot*... I was so mesmerized by the story and by Stephen King's writing that I vowed then and there to be just like him. Later when I read his book *On Writing*, it really opened my eyes to being critical of other writers! Pat Conroy's lyrical prose changed the way I describe; James Patterson's quick-paced books altered my view of chapters and chapter lengths; and quite a few YA authors (Joyce Carol Oates, Sharon Draper, Todd Strasser, Terry Trueman) showed me that young adult novels could be cutting edge and cross into the adult market. One author who's influenced me in too many ways to express is Truman Capote. His nonfiction book, *In Cold Blood*, his short stories in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*—if I could capture the essence of a moment like Capote did, I'd be complete as a writer.

SLWG: What are you reading now?

BLB: I finished the last Harry Potter last night! It was amazing. I just re-read *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* for a class, and I know why Maya Angelou is one of the best in the craft. I recently finished *Odd Thomas* by Dean Koontz, and I have to say, for those who think Koontz is just a horror writer...wow! The writing was so eloquent and literary, yet quick-paced and engaging like a thriller. He's another incredible writer most people have typecast, and they're doing themselves a disservice if they have!

SLWG: What new author has captured your interest?

BLB: I love Billie Letts, Sue Monk Kidd, Wally Lamb, and Alice Sebold. They've each only written a few books, and I hope they write more! There's also a young man in Springfield, Henry Stratmann, who writes flash fiction, and when I read his first book *Eye Has Not Seen*, I was floored! He said I was a huge motivator for him when he saw me speak, and now he and I are collaborating on an academic book for teachers, using his flash fiction! It's called *Lessons in a Flash!* Reading Workshop guru Cris Tovani is writing the foreword!

SLWG: Name one person that you feel supported your writing goals outside of your family members. Explain.

BLB: My best friend Marsha Tyson has been amazing. Probably without her motivation, I wouldn't be published now.

SLWG: How do your family and/or friends feel about your writing pursuits in general?

BLB: They're totally impressed, supportive, crazy! My mom said it has made her life complete, that she can live vicariously through my successes! I'm supposed to buy her an island...I keep telling her I'm working on it!

SLWG: Do you regard your writing as a lifelong career?

BLB: Absolutely...I went part-time as a teacher in 2002, determined to "make it" as an author. I decided to finish my Masters and pursue my PhD to lend credibility to myself as a writer in the literary market. Once I finish, I will be able to devote all my time to being a full-time author. Having a publicist now has helped a lot.

SLWG: What is the one piece of advice you would give to someone who seeks to be a successful writer?

BLB: Get involved in the writing community: conferences, workshops, local groups...you get better at anything you do by practicing and surrounding yourself by people who do the same thing.

SLWG: If you had to do it all over again, would you change anything?

BLB: I think I'd have hired a publicist sooner. I love marketing my books, but I spent more time marketing than writing last fall, and I'd have benefited from having my publicist then.

I also would have starting writing seriously as a career sooner!

SLWG: Tell us your latest news!

BLB: My young adult novel *Dregs* is being considered as an ALA Notable Book, it's being considered for a Gateway nomination as well! With all the research I did with school violence, I'm now an expert in the field, and because of that I speak frequently at schools about recognizing and preventing school violence.

SLWG: Is there anything we didn't ask that you would like to share?

BLB: Researching school violence ended up becoming my Master's Thesis as well as a thread of my dissertation, all from the research I did for *Dregs*. I've also created a documentary for the topic.