

# ROBIN BOWLES

WRITER AND INVESTIGATOR

## About my books so far ...

In 1997, after reading a story in the *Sunday Age* about a re-opened investigation into the twelve-year-old mystery of the death of a young Victorian country housewife, I took a year off from my then very busy business to write a book. This book, *Blind Justice*, an investigation into the death of Jennifer Tanner, became an instant best seller—to everyone's surprise—especially mine! It was published by Allen & Unwin in July 1998 and has been re-printed 8 times, with sales around the 20000 mark. It dealt with my own investigation, alongside the police, of the sudden and unexpected death of a Bonnie Doon housewife, who was shot twice in the brain and once through each hand, but incredibly, was buried as a suicide. Twelve years later, the police, having some new information, decided to re-open the case. It was the story about the re-opening of the case that I read in the paper and which fascinated me so much I knew there must be a book in it—and I'd always wanted to write a book. Following the release of this book, the State Coroner reopened the inquest into Tanner's death and called me as a witness because my research, during an interview with a key witness, had revealed information the witness had refused to share with the police.

Having caught the 'writing bug' I embarked upon my second book, *Justice Denied*, also a best seller. This book, when released, caused controversial discussion at many levels in the community about the mysteries surrounding the disappearance and death of Moe toddler, Jaidyn Leskie. A book was published before mine, written by a police roundsman journalist, praising the police for their excellent investigation. The police refused to assist me with my book, so I had to obtain the relevant information through 'other channels'—including extracts from the police detectives' notebooks—which revealed material very critical of their conduct of the investigation. *Justice Denied* was published in October 1999 by Macmillan and has been reprinted 4 times, with sales exceeding 25000. It is now available as a Five Mile Press new edition.

Within days of the book being released, the State Coroner ordered an inquest into the baby's still-unsolved death and shortly after, the Homicide team which conducted the police investigation was disbanded. *Justice Denied* was very controversial, as it asserted that the police did a very poor job and were blinkered in the investigation. The jury thought so too, as they acquitted the only police suspect. Since then there have been three inquests into Jaidyn's death, trying to address the questions I raised in my book. Each has been less satisfying than the last and the finding from the most recent one still provides no answers about the identity of Jaidyn's killer.  
( Coroner's website currently down!)

My third book, *No Justice*, is about the discovery of the skeleton of a transsexual prostitute (Adele Baily) which had been hidden in a deserted mineshaft for seventeen years. The book was designed as a companion volume to the Jenny Tanner story, as the discovery of Adele's skeleton caused Jenny's case to be re-opened. I traced Adele's life back through the sixties and seventies, finding her former friends and workmates, discussing transgender, police culture, prostitution and murder. I mixed with former crooks, interviewed brothel keepers, retired police who'd spent time in jail and a big sub-culture of transsexuals to conduct the research for this book. It subbed in at around 10000 copies prior to its October 2000 release (Macmillan) and is now available as a Five Mile Press new edition.

My fourth book, *Taken in Contempt* (Macmillan 10,500 copies) was released on 1 October 2001 and was re-printed on 21 October (2000 copies) to meet sales demand. To meet public demand, due to the rising awareness of this phenomenon, a new edition was published by Five Mile Press in 2007. It is a semi-autobiographical account, of my son's child being abducted to France. His story is used as a thread to link a number of other people's stories about how they too have been affected by the little known phenomenon of international parental kidnapping. This is increasing each year as more inter-country marriages take place. Re-abduction, illegal border crossings, bureaucratic obstructions and international incidents are presented as a tightly woven thriller with poignant undertones—because one of the kidnap victims is my own grandson. This book has been issued by the Attorney General's Department to all Central Authorities dealing with international child abduction. The issues I raised resulted in a study by the International Social Service being funded and a support service being established for left-behind parents ( *Living in Limbo*)

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My fifth work, *What Happened to Freeda Hayes?* was released in October 2002 and is now available as a Five Mile Press new edition. It is about the devastating effect on three people's lives of being charged with the wilful murder of Freeda Hayes, a 48 year old lady who was dying in extreme pain of renal cancer. With only weeks to live Freeda died suddenly in hospital in allegedly strange circumstances. Her doctor and her brother and sister, ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances, were all charged with her murder and tried in October 2001 in the WA Supreme Court after a committal hearing had found they had no case to answer. The Director of Public Prosecutions proceeded with the charges anyway. However, the jury acquitted all three in ten minutes. After a 20-month ordeal, they were left to deal with Freeda's death and try to pick up the pieces of their lives, the doctor's reputation damaged, the brother's business in shreds and he and his sister paying loans of up to \$100,000 each from retirement funds, with no prospect of compensation. How can the law intrude so drastically into people's lives—and who did kill Freeda Hayes?

My next project, *Dead Centre* (Random House) the most ambitious to date, was an investigation into the police investigation into the disappearance and probable death of British backpacker, Peter Falconio in the Northern Territory in July 2001. To research this book I travelled over 30000kms around Australia and interviewed more than 150 people, including the man accused of Peter Falconio's murder. I examined the police investigation, forensic glitches and am the only writer granted over 50 hours' access to Bradley John Murdoch while he was awaiting trial, during his trial and since. The book reached No. 5 on the Bookscan Bestseller List within 3 weeks of its release and still attracts many comments to my website (the first time I included a feedback address).

Between *Dead Centre* and my next true crime book, I decided I would put my experiences as a licensed inquiry agent (PI) into a fictionalised version and write a novel. This pleased my fellow Sisters in Crime, as I was at the time the only Sister in Crime who wrote non-fiction. The novel, *The Curse of the Golden Yo Yo* (Five Mile Press) is based on a true story about the yo yo and its attendant curse, told to me over a few beers by a former crook, now going straight. The rest of the book is total fiction, although those who know me might recognise some elements of location or characterisation. All names, locations and events that have the slightest basis in fact have been totally distorted to protect the guilty. I had great fun writing it as I didn't have to worry about all those legal and research issues that dictate the writing of true crime. My first novel was followed by *The Mystery of the Missing Masterpiece*.

A book that caused some controversy when it was released in October 2008 developed from the number of questions I am asked during my many talks around the country. Why doesn't the law always deliver justice? Why are some pieces of evidence allowed in trials and others kept from the juries? What has happened to some of the key characters in some of the cases I and other true crime writers and justice campaigners have highlighted over the years? Five Mile Press asked me to write a book about unanswered questions from the Australian courts—*Rough Justice* (October 2007). The book is controversial and takes on a few exalted conventions, with the help of many justice campaigners around Australia and interviews with those who have received rough justice at the hands of the legal system. Comments are invited on the issues discussed.

My new book, *Blood Brother-Justice* at last-has evolved from an interest in a case that I've had for almost 13 years. I first heard the story in 1998 and it has popped in and out of my life in various ways since then. It is a family saga in a way, but also a serious look at the way one person, with enough dedication and determination, can eventually obtain the justice he was seeking. The outcome brought tears to the eyes of many—tears of relief, tears of anger, tears of sorrow—and tears of total grief. The conviction in Sydney's Supreme Court fifteen years after the event of Jeffrey Gilham left a young family without a husband and father and sent a man to jail who had borrowed fifteen years from answering to the law about the murders of his family in 1993.