



Lori Andrews tours the National Museum of Health and Medicine, one of the settings in her genetics thriller, *Sequence*. She is in front of a bone from the leg of Union General Dan Sickles, who used to visit it on the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, where it was shot during combat and amputated.

Gene Expression

Lori Andrews

Associate Vice President, Distinguished Professor of Law, and Director for Science, Law, and Technology

As an internationally renowned genetics expert, Chicago-Kent College of Law Professor Lori Andrews has made a name for herself in many professional circles, including law, technology, public policy, and ethics. With the June 2006 release of her first novel, *Sequence*, she has added mystery writing to the list.

What is your book about?

The main character, Alexandra “Alex” Blake, is a young biologist who has just taken a two-year post at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, D.C., to sequence the 1918 Spanish Flu. Her boss pulls her away from her work and into forensics. Alex finds herself tracking a serial killer, and that’s just the beginning of her adventure.

What inspired you to try your hand at fiction writing?

In 1995, I chaired a working group on the ethical, legal, and social implications of the Human Genome Project for the National Institutes of Health. In the process, I became more and more interested in the impact of genetic technologies on individuals and how to protect the rights of individuals. I decided that a mystery series would be a way in which I could bring some of those issues to the larger public.

When did you find time to write?

I wrote *Sequence* a few years ago while I was a visiting professor at Princeton and had no administrative responsibilities. My second novel, *The Silent Assassin*, which will be coming out in the spring, was easier, because I had already created a setting and knew the characters very well. I love writing, so I fit it in wherever I can—on planes, for example, and in the nooks and crannies of life.

What did you find most challenging about writing this novel?

Although I’d written a number of nonfiction books, after the first draft of *Sequence* I realized that I had no sense of physicality. For example, someone can’t get shot and talk normally five seconds later. That was the biggest issue—leading an academic life of the mind, and then writing about very physical, tangible things.

Are any of the characters autobiographical?

The interesting thing about making up characters is that you can give pieces of yourself to each of them. Barbara, the focused lawyer in the novel who shows up completely prepared for meetings, certainly reflects a part of me, but Alex—who’s the type to jot all of her notes on the back of cash station receipts—is part of me, too.

How has the experience of writing this novel changed you?

It’s brought more nuance to my ethical analyses. For example, in the novel, Alex secretly tests her boyfriend’s DNA because she suspects that he might be the killer. In real life, I would completely fight against that, but now I can better understand how people get into these situations, and I think my policy work is better for it.

What do you hope your readers take away from the book?

I hope they have a fun read, but I also hope they think about the fact that genetic technologies raise some profound challenges for our society. We’re going to be the generation that decides things like whether an employer can use genetic tests to determine the potential cost of hiring someone with a predisposition to cancer, for example, or whether children can be genetically enhanced.

Sequence is due out in paperback in April 2007 and *The Silent Assassin* will be published in May 2007.
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faculty Q&A

QUOTABLE

“We cannot wait for the system to have a major catastrophe before we start worrying about it.”
—Professor Mohammad Shahidehpour on the “Dallas Morning News,” explaining why the federal government should force power companies to complete system overhauls.