

Grandfather's jewelry business inspires author's series

By **Patrick Varine**
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As a child growing up in the Forest Hills area, Lynn Franklin's trips with her grandfather provided nearly all the source material she would need for a career as a mystery author.

She would accompany her grandfather, carrying his battered briefcase past buildings with barred windows, where someone had to unlock the door before you could go inside.

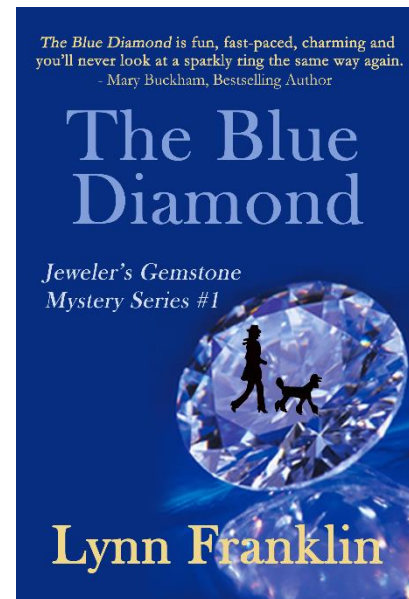
"The whole atmosphere — gray buildings, barred windows, buttons to gain entry to a world where the very walls glittered with jewelry — offered perfect settings for a would-be mystery writer," Franklin said.

Franklin's grandfather was a trained jeweler who ran a watch-repair and jewelry business out of his Forest Hills home.

He also served as a courier for jewelry stores and merchants in the Pittsburgh area, and would have Franklin accompany him on local buying trips.



The first entry in "The Jeweler's Gemstone" novels, "The Blue Diamond," is available as an e-book.



That world so intrigued Franklin — now a resident of Sunderland, Md. — that she decided to base a mystery series around it.

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It is Franklin's first novel, after being published previously in newspapers, magazines and anthologies.

Franklin, 57, spoke with the Progress recently about her grandfather, and where the Jeweler's Granddaughter will be sleuthing next:

Q: As a child, when your grandfather would have you carry his briefcase, did you have a fully formed idea of just how valuable its contents were?

A: It was pretty obvious that a lot of money was involved. I also learned early on to “read” the labels on jewelry boxes. If you know what you’re looking for, you can tell the wholesale price of jewelry — my grandfather’s cost. I’d often practice by turning over jewelry items while Grandpa transacted his business.

Q: You said you saw your grandfather as “a combination of Santa Claus, James Bond and Indiana Jones.” What about him, and his work, inspired that larger-than-life image for you?

A: The grandparent/grandchild relationship is a special one, and “The Blue Diamond” celebrates that relationship. My grandfather — like Kimberley West’s grandfather in the novel — talked to me as if I were an adult. He told me stories about diamonds, gemstone history and growing up in Switzerland (his family moved to the U.S. from Bern when Grandpa was 17 years old).

One of my favorite stories was an actual fish story. Grandpa grew up in Bern, Switzerland, near a deep lake that was fed by underwater streams. When he was 16, he came across some fishermen complaining that a “sea monster” had started eating all of their fish. As he stood on the shore talking to them, something struck a nearby duck, pulling it underwater.

Grandpa quickly baited his fishing hook and cast it into the water. Within minutes, something large snapped up the bait.

I can close my eyes and still picture Grandpa miming his fight with the “sea monster” and finally dragging it ashore. Grandpa described his catch as six or seven feet long, scaly with a long, teeth-filled snout. It was a prehistoric fish of some sort and the local museum had it stuffed and mounted with Grandpa’s name on it.

That was my grandfather: Powerful enough to land a sea monster, suave enough to traverse the glittering world of diamonds,

gentle enough to painlessly remove gravel from knees and elbows.

Q: You actually got certified as an accredited jewelry professional with the Gemological Institute of America in order to have all the jewel details as accurate as possible. Why did you opt for that, as opposed to working with someone on a consulting basis?

A: My grandfather’s business was small; he mostly worked out of his house. In “The Blue Diamond,” I wanted to portray an actual independent jewelry store. Given that, I thought studying for the accreditation would broaden my understanding of the business. Turned out to be a good move because I learned things about the gemstones and the jewelry business that I wouldn’t have thought to ask a consultant.

Q: While “The Blue Diamond” is a work of fiction, did your grandfather ever find himself in a hairy situation with respect to his business?

A: Not at all. I guess that battered old briefcase served its purpose: No one ever suspected he was carrying a fortune in jewels in that thing. Good thing, too, because Grandpa was one of those trusting souls who was a friend to everyone.

Q: You also note on the book cover that this is the first entry in the “Jeweler’s Gemstone Mystery” series; what other adventures are in store for Kimberley West?

A: Each book in the series will feature a specific gemstone. In the next book, Kimberley and her grandfather dodge killers and old nemeses while investigating a ruby discovery in Pirate’s Cove. All of the beloved characters from “The Blue Diamond” are back, with some getting to play an expanded role in the mystery. In one of the future books, Kim and Grandpa will finally take that trip to Crater of Diamonds — with deadly results.

Patrick Varine is an editor for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 412-320-7845 or pvarine@tribweb.com.

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