

We Remember David Thompson

Jon Jordan

This issue is dedicated to David Thompson. If you are unfamiliar with David, you will soon have a good idea who he was and why we are using the space to talk about him.

I first came in contact with David because of Crimespree and his working at an independent mystery bookstore. Murder By The Book carries Crimespree and David very quickly became a cheerleader for what we do. It soon became obvious that he loved all things mystery. He started his own small publishing imprint, Busted Flush Press, and we began helping each other when we could. This led to us becoming friendly and spending more time on the phone and hanging out when we could.

When people from St, Louis came to me about putting on a Bouchercon there I thought of David immediately. His love of the genre, his enthusiasm and energy, were exactly what a Bouchercon chair needs. The only way I could get him to do it was to agree to do it with him—which led to some fun conversations with our wives!

As part of our prep Ruth and I went to Houston and spent a few days with David and McKenna. They never stopped moving, they were running the store, setting things up, working on Busted Flush. And they were still wonderful hosts. We had a great time. And what we did more than anything else was talk books: over dinner, over coffee, while driving and while they worked in the store.

This love of books and of all things mystery brought David and I together. It is the glue that holds this community together. It was other things that made us really good friends. Our love of music, the fact that we had a similar sense of humor. It was so much fun when we were together, David and I going off on rant or rampage about how much we loved an author or a movie or any number of things, our voices getting louder and faster. And I could look over at Ruth or McKenna and see a grin and maybe a rolling of the eyes and know that they saw how similar we were in a lot of ways.

We debated whether Spider-man or Batman was a better character and why. I teased him about his driving and he made fun of my constant need for coffee. He laughed at my jokes, not to be polite, but because he thought they were funny. And I laughed with David because he could be damn funny. Watching David watch a baseball game was a perfect example of his excitement for all things. Being around David meant having fun, and coming out of each encounter with him that much smarter.

David's friendship has made me a better person. His outlook was always one of compassion and in the spirit of helping other people. He helped authors find readers and readers find books. He gave great advice to new authors, and commiserated with authors who have been around the block a few times. David saw the best in people. He treated everyone fairly and with respect. He was certainly a lot more patient than I am.

David being gone is hard on me. It's selfish, I know, to feel deprived of his voice and his laugh. It's unfair that McKenna and his family have to feel what I'm

feeling multiplied. And it's unfair that if you didn't know David, dear reader, you never had the chance to meet him or get to know him the way I did.

I'm trying to keep being a better person. I find myself thinking more times than not, "What would David do?"

David would listen, and David would try to help.

I miss David, everyday.

Chris La Tray

Today is a sad day in the mystery/crime writing world; very sad. If you are part of this community, this is no news to you, but a man I didn't know as well as I'm sure I eventually would have, but still called my friend, passed away suddenly yesterday; David Thompson of Busted Flush Press, and Murder By the Book bookstore in Houston. It's a loss that is still reverberating through the tight-knit group of people who were fortunate to know him.

I met David just about a year ago. I was new to the whole crime writing thing, and still exploring and learning about the various authors and must-read books. I was in Houston for work, and visited the store. I knew David worked there, but didn't know him, had never even spoken with him. That changed. I looked around the shop and had a couple books in my hands at checkout. He immediately engaged me in conversation, and before long we were chattering away like old friends. His enthusiasm for books and writing was infectious, and I was filled with an energy to attack my own work with renewed vigor. I walked out of the store loaded down with books that introduced brand new waves of book-geek excitement, as well as new authors I'd never read; Dan Simmons' Joe Kurtz crime books. Megan Abbott. Tom Piccirilli. I was after a Duane Swierczynski book and left with three (Duane's own tribute to David is a must read). Hell, David's enthusiasm for Swierczynski has made me such a fan that I've written the man's name so much over the last year that I don't even need to check the spelling anymore.

Since then I've been in weekly contact with David. When I told him I had a novella coming out next spring, he extended an open invitation to do a reading. He hit me with book recommendations he thought I might like, remembering the stuff I was into. He'd sometimes see me on Facebook and just start a "how's it going" chat. He was on me constantly about registering for NoirCon, and meeting up with him again to knock back a couple beers was one of the things I was looking forward to most. He was just a straight-up, genuine kind of guy that was quick to offer support and encouragement with my own writing.

All of this kindness he showed a guy who just happened to show up in his store with a bunch of enthusiasm for something he was also passionate about. It speaks to the strength of this writing community, something so weird to me coming from the generally cutthroat and jealousy-ridden world of independent music. I've met some great people through Mr. Thompson, and I am very sad

that I won't be able to have that beer with him.

Based on the tributes various people have posted of their own -- like this one, or this one, or this one, and this one too -- it is clear the man influenced many people every bit as much as he influenced me. Like I said, today is a sad day. He was a well-loved man that will be remembered for a long time. I feel for his close friends and his family. He will be missed.

My last talk with David Thompson by **Ali Karim**

The fragility of life never ceases to trouble me, and the terrible news of the untimely passing of David Thompson proves how troubling this life truly is. There are far more qualified people to talk about David and his contribution to the crime fiction genre than I, but the short moments I shared with him remain precious. I would bump into him at Bouchercons, and we would talk about the various books 'that hit the spot'. My last meeting with David was in Indianapolis in 2009, when I picked up several Busted Flush Press books by Reed Farrel Coleman. As ever, if you could have bottled David's enthusiasm about books and life, you'd be a rich man. We had a long talk about 'The Tower' the wonderful collaboration between Ken Bruen and Reed Coleman that David published. David immediately thanked me for supplying both Busted Flush Press and Crimespree with a photo of the two authors from the previous Bouchercon [held in Baltimore]. I was flattered that David used the photo for inside of 'The Tower'. David and I talked about the many books we'd been reading, and I appreciated what he did at Busted Flush and I promised one day to come to Murder By The Book next time I was in Texas. During the weekend at Indianapolis, we bumped into each other several times, and as ever he was always surrounded by friends and colleagues. I recall sitting close to him during the Anthony Awards Ceremony, in the second row behind Michael Connelly and his group from Little, Brown. He may have been a brilliant publisher, a brilliant bookseller but his real talent was being a genuine and wonderful guy to be around. His energy and enthusiasm hugely infectious; and his generosity - legend.

David Thompson leaves behind a huge vacuum, and my thoughts are with his family and friends as his early and unexpected passing is an immense tragedy to all who shared time with him. In his short life, he cast a gigantic shadow, which makes the world just that little bit darker, but let's celebrate his life and achievements, as the memory of his presence will always make me smile

Michael Koryta

It's impossible to overstate the sense of loss that David Thompson's far-too-early passing brings to the many who knew him. I remember our meeting -- at Alafair Burke's apartment following the Edgars, when my first book was out and I was a stranger to all and David, as was his way, made it a point to try and make me feel as if among old friends. Amazing how swiftly he could do that. By the

next time I saw him, he truly felt like an old and dear friend, and he always will. I'm thinking now of each visit to the store, of each meal shared and each book recommended and each deeply appreciated encouragement, and I'm overwhelmed by just how wonderful those memories are and thus how profound the sadness. David was about passion: for McKenna, for books, writers, friends, customers, dogs and all others who came his way. No one was more generous, more encouraging, and more sincere. My stops in Houston were, and will be, treasured moments because of the time spent with David and McKenna, all of the meals and drinks and laughs. His legacies are many and they are powerful and they are scripted in sincerity and generosity and compassion, truly rare levels of all the best qualities in a man.

Peter Rozovsky

I like to look for crime-fiction bookshops when I travel. When I visited No Alibis in Belfast, I rapidly forgot that I was shopping, and I felt instead that I was hanging out with friends. But no more than I did at Murder by the Book. At Partners and Crime in New York, I've gabbed away about crime fiction with one of the owners, who recommended an author I had not known before — just as David did when I visited Murder by the Book. At Sleuth of Baker Street in Toronto, it warmed my heart to see how comfortable the regulars were, how they were doing more than just transacting commercial business. And that's just how I felt in Houston at David's shop.

Why would anyone want to hang around after closing time at a bar when he or she could hang around after closing time at Murder by the Book with David and his customers, colleagues and friends?

Erin Mitchell

I never got to shake David Thompson's hand--never even communicated directly with him electronically. And yet when I heard the news of his passing, I was terribly sad. I "met" David about a year ago through the amazing crime fiction community on Twitter and Facebook. Having grown up on Ed McBain, James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler, I was an enthusiastic admirer of Busted Flush Press for their commitment to quality and independence. I realized David was an incredible person (in addition to being savvy and brilliant) as I heard stories from people like Jen Forbus and Alafair Burke about their times with David and signings at Murder By The Book. Many people are passionate about crime fiction, but few of us have the commitment and drive to contribute as David did. He left an imprint on people who met him, as well as those of us who now never will, and I am grateful for his legacy and light. His life was a gift, and his loss, a tragedy.

Suzanne Arruda

This week, the mystery book world was stunned and saddened to learn about the sudden passing of David Thompson of Houston's Murder by the Book and Busted Flush Press. I had the pleasure of meeting David when I was a green new author. He'd personally invited me to do a book signing at the store and it was the first time I'd gone afield to do an "event." He made me feel like I was already an established, famous author, sharing his love and knowledge of books with me.

In an era where authors and publishers worry about Printed books vs electronic, a person who loved books as much as David was a godsend. We can only pray for someone else to pick up the torch and carry on.

My heartfelt sympathy to his beloved wife, McKenna Jordan for her loss.

McKenna and the staff of Murder by the Book are hosting a special tribute to David which you can find here <http://www.murderbooks.com/>

I know I can't make it, but I encourage anyone who knew David or who just appreciates a good mystery to raise a glass of whatever you have on hand, be it a margarita or tea, and drink a toast to him.

Here's to you, David. We'll all miss you.

Keith Rawson

I never met David face-to-face, but over the last year, anytime I e-mailed him with one stupid request or another (Usually for help in contacting an author to set up an interview or to see if galleys were available of new BFP titles.) we'd end up e-mailing back and forth for days discussing books and the authors we enjoyed reading. David lived the type of life in the crime community that I aspire to achieve. He served as an example and as a mentor. I'm shocked and I'm sad

Jen Forbus

I will forever remember the very first time I saw him in person. He was speaking to someone and I was just going to wait until he was finished so I could say "hi." He looked up and caught my eye and asked whoever he was speaking to to excuse him a minute; then he walked over and wrapped me in a big hug. He treated me as though we had known each other all our lives. That's the kind of person David was. He could make you feel as though your presence was the most important, your thoughts the most valued.

David introduced me to so many new books, and he'd let me run on and on about a book I was reading and it was never weird to him. He always had time. His enthusiasm fueled my enthusiasm; it was contagious. David loved connecting people with books, and he touched so many lives through his work both at Murder by the Book and his Busted Flush Press.

While my friendship with David was short, he left a monumental impression on me, on who I am. I'm a different and better person for having known him. As I

continue to blog and weasel a place for myself in the crime fiction community, it's my hope that I can honor him and what he stood for by singing the praises of the hidden gems, by connecting people with books, and by being the best friend I can be.

Where ever my friend is now, he's talking up Reed Farrel Coleman, Daniel Woodrell, A.E. Maxwell, Don Winslow...Thank you, David. Thank you for your friendship. It is and always will be a priceless treasure.

--Jen Forbus

Ben Leroy

David Thompson, a passionate champion of crime fiction and advocate for authors, passed away last night. He was only 38 years old.

I have never met a guy who was as genuinely excited to talk about books and the people who write them as David. He introduced me to new authors through recommendations and handshakes at events. With the exception of his wife, McKenna, I don't know that David Thompson loved anything more than books.

My first interaction with David was back when Bleak House Books was finding its way in the crime fiction community. He was warm and welcoming, always willing to offer his keen insight into the crime fiction community, glad to put me in touch with an author or an agent I didn't know (because he seemed to know them all), and validating the editorial selections we'd made.

Over time we got to know each other on both a professional and personal level. He started Busted Flush Press, a house whose main focus was bringing back books that had gone out of print. It was then that I was able to return some of the courtesy that he had so graciously given to me. I answered questions for him about starting a publishing company and what he might expect along the way.

It was clear that the rest of the crime fiction community felt the same way—we all had a chance to repay him for his kindness and his support. Authors, other publishers, reviewers, and mystery readers spread the gospel of his new venture with the same genuine enthusiasm that David had always given us.

About a month ago, David and I had a lengthy talk about some of the challenges that come with running a publishing company. As exciting as it can be to publish new authors, or, in David's case, to bring back books that were out of print, the actual machinery of the publishing industry is less thrilling—often guided by stressful deadlines, personality conflicts, and low pay. It's a business, but I think we all wished it stopped at the celebration of written art. It would be so much more gratifying if success were noted by the number of times a reader underlines a particularly beautiful passage, rather than the number of zeros on a balance sheet. When we got off the phone, I felt better, not just because David had a chance to get some things off his chest, but because it reminded me of what this business, what our lives *should* be about.

Celebrating the things we love.

Over the course of a few days, David and I talked extensively about joining forces. I looked forward to working with him, innovating and creating books that we loved, that we could bring to the mystery community with a sense of pride and accomplishment. David's time was better spent picking out books to publish and hand selling his favorites at Murder by the Book, than it was worrying about managing production or studying budget forecasts.

And then today I got the terrible news that David had passed away. I'm still trying to wrap my mind around how that could really be. Keep telling myself to wake up. I'm not sure what the future holds, but I know that David Thompson's impact on the world will be permanent and marked by a rare glow that we should all hope to leave behind.

Goodbye, friend. You will be missed. And you will be celebrated.

Rhys Bowen

I was in the middle of a book tour, in Portland and ironically dropped in at Murder by the Book in that city.

"I'm so sorry about David," the owner said.

"David?"

"David Thompson," she said. "Haven't you heard? He just died."

I shook my head. "Our David Thompson? No, I was at his store a couple of days ago. He was fine."

She shook her head, sadly.

I felt literally as if someone had punched me in the gut. I must have been his last event, and he was as bright and warm and welcoming as ever. Someone asked if they could get me a glass of water and he said, "I'm sure she'd rather have a glass of champagne," and produced one for me. This was sweet, remembering that I have often brought champagne with me to that store in the past. We had a lovely turn-out. I signed a lot of books, and when I was signing stock afterward David and I chatted about Busted Flush and his plans for it. He told me he was handing over the business side to another publisher--I'm a good editor and a not so great businessman, he'd said, grinning. McKenna was there, so was her mother, and Dean and on the way back to the hotel I commented how lovely it was that a young couple like them could follow their passion.

It still doesn't seem fair to me. I'm still angry about it.

I had known David since the first time I went to that store, in the late nineties. Those first signings maybe two or three people showed up, but I was still treated warmly and graciously. Then when the Royal Spyness series started McKenna in particular loved it. It probably wasn't David's cup of tea as much but they hand sold it like crazy and David would email me about the numbers they were selling. I am very conscious that whatever success this series is enjoying comes from people like them.

What I can't quite comprehend is that he won't be there next time around, welcoming me with a glass of champagne. My heart goes out to McKenna, and Dean and Martha and all who loved him.

Gerald So

"David was the first bookseller to believe in *The Lineup: Poems on Crime*, undoubtedly opening several more doors for us. *The Lineup #4* (2011) will be dedicated to David's memory and include a poem by Ken Bruen recommended by David."

JT Ellison

This morning, I woke to tragic news: David Thompson from the wonderful Houston bookstore *Murder by the Book* and publisher of the recently acquired *Busted Flush Press*, passed away suddenly yesterday.

The emotions we go through when we hear about senseless death are overwhelming. Pain, sadness, fear. Unworthiness, relief. Voyeurism. But mostly, just an overwhelming feeling of loss, of dislocation. I know that right now, my heart hurts.

As a wife, I can't help but feel such pain for McKenna Jordan, the love of David's life and the owner of *Murder by the Book*. I had the great honor of signing at the store back in January of 2009. It's a great place, so homey, exactly what you want from a bookstore. After, we hit the bar next door for beers, sat outside in the cool evening air and shot the breeze. It was a great night.

Now that David is gone, there will always be a mark in time for all crime fiction writers - when we signed before, and when we signed after. I know I've spent the day reminiscing - chatting with David at the Crimespre booth in Indianapolis, catching up at BEA, how kind he was when the hurricane came through Houston and we needed to reschedule my signing.

We've all lost a great friend, a lover of books with an insatiable sense of humor. My first reaction this morning was of shock, of course, but then, tears, then that creepy weirdness that always surrounds a friend's passing - last night I was deleting Direct Messages in my Twitter account. I came across a series of messages that David and I shared a few months back. I reread them, laughed again, and for some odd reason which I will never be able to explain, didn't delete them. Maybe it was the sense of inclusion that I got from having a DM from David Thompson. Maybe it was that they made me laugh, and I wanted to keep them around so I could revisit them and enjoy the conversation over and over. Or maybe, the universe was letting me know that we'd lost him.

In Memory of David Thompson

By
Lisa Unger

There is a misconception that the writing life is a lonely one. While it's true that we write in solitude, the business of publishing is foremost a business of relationships. Over the years, our colleagues become our friends. Maybe this is

true of all businesses, but none so much as publishing. Most of us come to the work of writing and publishing and selling books only out of love, because of our consuming passion for the written word. And in the doing of this work together, we become friends.

David Thompson was one of the first booksellers to invite me into a bookstore. I was a very shy, first-time author – terrified of speaking about my books. My parents were local to Houston, and my mother was a regular customer at Murder by the Book. I remember walking in for the first time and thinking, “Now, this is a bookstore.” I could feel the passion, the love. It radiated from the shelves. It radiated from people who loved books, and took great pride in sharing that with the world. The crowd in the store was largely friends and family; I am sure the talk I gave was not very good. But from the minute I walked through the door and saw David smiling at the counter, I felt at home.

When we lose someone like David, it hurts. It shocks us. It makes us angry, and so unspeakably sad. Of course, he was too young. There was just so much more he could have done, would have done. It’s an injustice, to be robbed of someone with so much life in him. And, yet, none of us is promised anything. Not a single moment with anyone we love is something we should take for granted. Because every moment we live to do the things that we love, to love the people in our lives, to follow our dreams and our passions is a gift. This is a cliché only because it’s so desperately true.

What gives me comfort when I think about David is that he was a person living his dreams. He made a life out of what he loved. He did with his time exactly what he wanted and was meant to be doing. I honestly don’t think many people can say this about their lives. So many people are walking around wishing that they were doing something else. Not Dave; his passion for his work was clear. I like to think that there was joy and excitement for him in almost every day. This means something. Maybe everything.

About a month ago, Gregg Hurwitz and I met in Houston to do a joint event at Murder By the Book. We went there for a lot of reasons: to see each other, to support a store that we both love and appreciate, and of course to hang out with Dave and McKenna. We had a good event, and then took David out to dinner. (McKenna was away.) We wanted to take him someplace great, to show our gratitude for the event and for his support. He wanted to go to Pappa’s BBQ. We ate pulled pork off paper plates and drank beer from plastic cups. But, you know what? It was great. Because we were together, talked about books and craft, and laughed a lot – which is probably what we all like best. When we said good-bye, we had every expectation that we’d see each other again, sooner rather than later. It’s hard to let go of that expectation. For me, he’ll always be there, behind the counter at Murder by the Book, smiling.

David Thompson was one of the kindest people I have ever met, in the business or anywhere. Since his passing I have thought about McKenna, his beautiful, bright and sweet wife every day hoping that she is as well as she can be, and that she is strong. Their relationship, too, started in that store, mingled with their love of books. I hope that all of her memories of David, and the love of family and friends will carry her through. In this business of relationships, where there is so much love for David and McKenna, I hope she knows she is not alone.

Daniel Woodrell

It's sort of strange to recognize how important to my own writing life David had become, without us ever meeting in person. I heard from him almost daily, and on some days repeatedly, and I know many others were in contact just as often. I could have described his enthusiasm and decency, his good taste in literature and powerful drive in support of those many writers he admired, but I had no physical image of him. We spoke on the phone and I thought he sounded young (and, damn, 38 is young) but I know voices can mislead, so I wasn't sure. He was such a can-do guy, and many of us writers are not in business matters, or perhaps I speak mainly for myself. I had already come to think that David and Busted Flush being there meant I should write exactly as I want to write, always, no apologies, no regrets, and if New York showed me to the exit, we could come up with something that would work just as well. That would've been fun. Among our most recent emails there were repeated references to bourbon, and it was not a negative sort of reference, so I was purt near certain a jug would be in our futures when we did finally meet, and I had the highball glasses all washed and ready, and...I think I'll stop.

Kelli Stanley

The first time I met Dave was early on, when I didn't know many people and was learning about the new world of books and authors. It was at San Francisco's Noir City in January of 2008 for the launch of the *A Hell of a Woman* anthology.

My first book wouldn't be out from its small press publisher until seven months later, and I was very much a newbie. Ed Kaufmann of M is for Mystery introduced me to Dave when I bought my copy of the anthology.

What struck me first is just how damn nice he was. An eager goodness seemed to radiate from him, an interest in most things mystery and all things noir, and his face was kind and sweet and generous, and shone with a passion for what he was doing. He gave me his business card; I still have it. And from that day, I made it a goal of mine to get to Houston and Murder by the Book, because I knew I'd found a compatriot, someone I'd love to spend time with on a personal basis, sharing a margarita and talking about crime fiction.

I didn't get a chance to get to Houston in 2008. My funds were and still are very limited. I managed to get to Seattle and LA for my first book, but that was all.

2009 was a good year, but it didn't find me on a book tour. I sold *City of Dragons* in January, attended Left Coast Crime and Bouchercon and Thrillerfest. Thought to myself: "Now I can get to Houston, finally. 2010 will be the year of Houston."

Economics prevented that from happening yet again. I was able to go wider on the book tour, but not wide enough. And I thought, "Well, there's next year. Two books, two chances. I'll finally get to hang out with Dave." In the meantime, I heard from people that he was enthusiastic about the book, and the thought—as every thought associated with Dave did—warmed me.

In April, at the Edgars, I bumped into him at a party, and had the pleasure of meeting McKenna and sharing a drink with both of them. We had a few minutes to talk in all that strange hullabaloo, and I told them how excited I was to finally get out to the store, and thanked them for their support. We talked about getting together in 2011, and laughed, and I remember thinking: "If I have to hitchhike on part of the damn tour, I'm going to Houston."

That brings us to now. I've cried and cursed and railed at the razor cut pain of loss and the emptiness it leaves behind. But McKenna and *Murder by the Book* need our support, more than ever, and I will make my pilgrimage and toast Dave's memory. And whenever I look over at my bookshelf and see the titles from *Busted Flush* ... whenever I think about the brief times we shared and the lasting ache in my heart from losing someone who was so unexpectedly dear ... I'm going to email or call or text a friend.

And try to hold them close.

Thank you, Dave.

Greg Rucka

I'm thinking about theft, I'm thinking about how David has been stolen from us, how his departure from this world has robbed more people than will ever know or even realize. I'm not looking for motive or even understanding in the inexplicable. But the lack, the absence, is profound, and it resonates. Not because of his passing, but because of his life, because of the countless lives he touched and made better with that contact.

I wish I had known him better. I find myself jealous of those who did, who benefited from his friendship, wisdom, and wit. We are a small, strange community, and our champions are sadly few and far between. To lose any is tragic. To lose David is heartbreaking. But in that, there is his legacy, and it is a truly beautiful one, one that will live on.

Scott Montgomery

On September 13, we lost a good friend in David Thompson who suffered a heart attack at age 38. He was a bookstore manager, publisher, and a person to know in the mystery scene. All of these things were tied to the fact he was one of the best booksellers around.

He was synonymous with his store Murder By The Book in Houston, where he started as teenager with a salesperson's job and worked his way up to his assistant manager. He ran publicity, getting many of the world's crime fiction authors to come to the store. It is where he met a lovely coworker, McKenna Jordan, who married him not long after she bought the store. Talk about knowing how to get what you want.

It was his job at the store that led to Busted Flush Publishing. David became frustrated with not being able to sell books he loved because they were out of print. All booksellers agonize over this. What most of us don't do is create our own publishing company to take care of the problem. That, people, is a hand-seller.

Busted Flush republished many of the great authors that fell through the cracks. He took the DVD extras idea with many of the books, including forwards by prominent writers, afterward by the author, and sometimes a new short story. One of the biggest successes was Reed Farrel Coleman's Moe Prager series, about a sometime private eye in Koch era New York with a poetic match of a writer's style and character's voice that created books of true emotion. David got the attention of NPR, making the books sell out on Amazon and in bookstore's around the country. Before the movie version *Winter's Bone* was released, David was getting two Daniel Woodrell's earlier works, *Tomato Red* and *The Death Of Sweet Mister*, ready for the public.

The imprint was also known for two great anthologies. The Duane Swiercynski edited *Damn Near Dead*, still one of my favorite collections, where writers had to tell a hard boiled tale with the over sixty set. He was also able to get the incredible Megan Abbott to oversee *Hell Of A Woman*, a dark beautiful look at the femme fatale. David had just finished work on the sequel to *Damn Near Dead*.

In all the tributes I've read about David, the word "enthusiasm" always comes up. I have an accumulated stack of books that David told me "This is the next thing you need to read!", many in the same conversation. He was a tireless promoter of authors who weren't getting the attention they deserved. Many of his deals were made at the bar next door after a book event, Kay's, over little more than a handshake. The drinks and dinners we'd have with our colleagues and idols were something I always looked forward to, with David holding quiet (okay, semi-quiet) court, making sure everyone got to know each other.

When I came to BookPeople, he told authors and publishers I was there and the store should be an important stop for them. He was one of those rare people that truly invested himself in everyone's success as well as his own. One of his mottos was "We're all in this together, we got your back."

Many of us in the mystery community have been struggling to deal with how such a great person who's drive and ambition was about to pay off could be cut down so early in his life. The only comfort I can find is to think about all he accomplished in his life and how he shared it in ours.

One website suggested to buy a book from the store or a Busted Flush imprint. While I couldn't agree more, I'd humbly suggest that you suggest a book you love to every single person you know. That's the guy I remember.

Lou Boxer

David Thompson = MAGIC

David's absence cannot be quantified nor qualified. He was a rare spirit with a contagious personality and an incredible passion. I could always count on several e-mails about new books and thoughts about NoirCon. How we could make it better. How we could get more people involved. The e-mails were followed up by many brief but valuable phone calls that were always interrupted by activities at MURDER BY THE BOOK. I was a noir neophyte sitting at the foot of the master. There was a religious fervor in these conversations. And now that has ended.

Or has it? David's love of the genre and the people that gravitate to it will live on. Although I am heartbroken at the loss of a young life, I know that David will continue to push me to read and beat the drums about something we shared an incredible passion for. He will live on in my mind and my heart.

Carolyn Hart

David will always be a special part of my memories of Murder by the Book. He was kind, funny, clever, passionate about mysteries, a wonderful husband to his cherished wife, and a friend who was there when he was needed. I will remember him smiling, enjoying life, and sharing that happiness with those around him. God Bless, dear David.

Steve Hockensmith

Sometimes, I feel like there are a lot of people in my corner in this crazy publishing biz. Sometimes, I don't feel that way. But one thing used to stay the same, no matter how I was feeling on a given day: I always knew that David Thompson was in my corner. He made his presence felt there again and again and again. His absence is going to be felt, too.

Chris Grabenstein

“Just sign and date,” says the soft, calm voice bringing me another stack of books all strapped together with a rubber band.

My wrist begins to hurt. I may have a carpal tunnel relapse. There were only about a dozen people at the reading that Sean Doolittle, Duane Swierczynski and I did at Murder By The Book that night a few years back but, man, I have never sign sold or even seen so many copies of my books before.

“Just sign and date.” Off comes another rubber band. “Would you like a beer?”

Yes I would. But I need my right hand (my beer drinking hand) to sign and date all these damn books stacked in front of me.

And so went my first event with David Thompson. I had first learned about David and Houston’s amazing mystery bookstore from fellow Texan Jeff Abbot who told me when my first few books had just come out, “You’re got to go there. It’s one of the top three mystery bookstores in the country.”

Really? I thought. In Texas?

Really, I learned.

And afterwards, there was amazing Mexican food. And beer.

When my first young adult ghost story came out, we did another event at his store. A handful of people turned out. “That’s how it was for Rick Riordan’s first Percy Jackson book, too,” he told me. And, yes, it did make me feel a whole lot better.

Like so many mystery writers who had been made to feel at home in Houston, I loved bumping into David at the Edgars or Bouchercon. He was always so enthusiastic. He was the kid. We were his candy shop.

David was one of the first Twitterers I ever met, too. I still remember his beaming, toothy smile when, moments before the Edgar Banquet was about to commence, McKenna said, “Okay, you can go tweet.”

Interestingly, David, I think, first became a fan of my two thrillers, SLAY RIDE and HELL FOR THE HOLIDAYS — two books so obscure not too many people other than David ever read them. I found out later that he had refused to read my first mystery TILT A WHIRL for quite some time because, well, it had a pink cover.

When he finally did read it, he told me how much he loved it and how many people he had hand sold it to. And then, a few weeks before he passed away, he sent me a quick e-mail. "Reading MAD MOUSE. Loving it."

And I could imagine him in that big chair in the store, flipping through a neon green book, and getting ready for the purple one that came after it.

I, of course, assumed David would be with us for many books to come. That he would keep cheering on us unknown authors and making us feel Known whenever we stepped into his store.

Now, whenever I go to a convention, and a savvy autograph seeker says "Just sign and date," I will remember David.

And I will smile.

Linda Brown

was on vacation, visiting family in Wisconsin when I got the news by way of Facebook -- just idly tooling along, looking for gossip and goofs about my crime-writing (and other) friends. It stunned me to come across the news of the sudden and unexpected death of David Thompson.

I cannot claim close friendship with David, and until the recent Bouchercon, I had not even met his wife McKenna. But I do know that I will miss the comrade David was to me -- the mentor even, as I've learned the ropes of bookselling these past several years at The Mystery Bookstore in Los Angeles.

David was, whether in person, over the phone, or via email, Twitter or Facebook, always kind, patient and generous. And he was encouraging by example: he worked hard, but always showed a smiling face.

Some folks might think it odd that another mystery bookstore manager/owner/publisher would take the time to share information and wisdom with "the competition." But those folks don't know the mystery bookstore world -- and they must not have known David. To David, there wasn't "competition." There was sharing great books and authors and insights with other like-minded people. I was so excited when he launched Busted Flush Press. And I thought, "Good for you, David! Can't wait to see what you bring to us!" And he brought us treasures, old and new, reprints and new discoveries.

I am so sorry about the loss of David Thompson. My heart goes out to McKenna and their families, to their friends and colleagues. David will be missed — but he leaves a lot of lovely memories and an amazing legacy in the mystery bookselling world. Thank you, David.

David Corbett

It's Not Right and Never Will Be

David passed away right at the moment when everything seemed to have clicked into place. Knowing him, I suspect good fortune made him anxious as hell, but I also suspect, in moments of weakness, he permitted himself to see his life as good and happy and pointed toward home.

His personal life had gelled, with McKenna finally getting him to realize how much she meant to him, and how empty his life would be without her. They had that gentle easiness only some couples have, and were a gas to be around.

Busted Flush had just locked its merger with Tyrus Books, a deal that had all the earmarks of the fabled win-win.

The economy was atrocious but the store was holding its own.

And he was not just respected but much loved, deservedly so. He was generous, witty, kind, smart, enthusiastic, supportive. Not to mention silly, goofy, warm and fun.

He'd reached a kind of plateau in his life, where he could take a moment, glance back on where he'd been, all that rocky distance, and take a deep breath.

I like to think he took that moment, embraced it, folded it deep into his heart, before death slipped through the door and reminded him—and us—that being young and happy and loved is no defense against bad luck.

If anyone would have embraced that message, with its noir overtones, it would have been David, but that's a bitchy little irony. He deserved better, deserved to enjoy his success and his home and McKenna's love more richly, for more years, in more ways.

In time the pain of losing him will diminish but nothing will ever make it feel right. Sure, nobody's promised anything, but David did too much for too many to get kicked this cruelly. Maybe Euripides was right, the gods aren't just absent or indifferent, they're petty and vindictive. It's the only sense I can make of this. And I've been through it before.

I will miss the warmth I felt from David, who I thought of as a kind of younger brother. We'd gotten to know each other better this past year, worked together, had a few more projects planned, and I was so looking forward to that, spending more time with him, if only via phone and email. He made me feel like I mattered, that my work deserved an audience, and he would do what he could to help. What more could I ask of anyone—and he gave it so happily, so selflessly.

But it was more than that. Excuse the clumsy locution, but he stuck his heart out for people. He did it for me.

Yes, a death like this reminds you to hold your loved ones near, cherish the time you have with them, because it's too damn short no matter what. But there's something else here too, the shadow we'd like to pretend isn't there, the sinister logic deep in the machine. Sometimes things are just fucked up beyond all reason. David's gone, there's no magic that can rip that around the right way, and I'm pissed about it—which just makes me feel ridiculous and feeble on top of bitterly sad. I should know better, but I don't.

Then again, maybe I've got it wrong. My late wife had an estate planning client named Charlie Gambino—merry little tank of a man, retired butcher. He lost his first wife when she was about David's age, and her death devastated Charlie. Seeing how inconsolable he was, his father—another old-school Italian: blunt, goodhearted, tough—took him aside one day and said: "When you go out into your garden to get a rose, which one do you pick? The nicest one. You think God's any different than you?"

Alafair Burke

David Thompson died Monday afternoon. To the best of my memory, we'd known each other for twenty years, first meeting in Missoula, Montana, when I was visiting my parents' home on break from college, and he was visiting a writer who happened to be my father. On that trip, he quickly became an honorary Burke, looked over like a son by my parents, and beloved like a brother by my sister and me.

More than a decade passed before David and I would have a professional connection in addition to our friendship. By the time my first novel was published in 2003, David made sure that my first road trip was to what I had already come to see as "his" store, Houston's Murder By the Book. He helped my then 96-year-old grandmother to her seat in the front row, and he of course hand sold the hell out of that novel. After the reading, we had drinks with a newer store employee, McKenna Jordan. I'd already heard enough about her to know they spent A LOT of time together. I could also tell they liked each other. "Like"-liked. Afterward, I gave him endless grief about his romantic foot-dragging, a subject that would eventually become the hook of an article about their storybook marriage.

By the next trip to Houston, David had manned up, and the inherent couple-ness of David and McKenna was complete. They became one of those couples that my husband and I assumed we'd grow old with. They'd visit my Grandmother with me when I came to Houston, and stay with us on trips to New York. We'd started vacationing together.

When I got an email early yesterday morning inquiring about a "rumor" that David Thompson had died, I wanted to believe it was precisely that. I wanted to call my friend and tease him that he'd joined Justin Bieber and Jeff Goldblum in the fake cyber death-rumor mill. But of course that conversation could never take place. Instead, I went to my computer and re-read the email message he sent me the previous afternoon, a photo of their dog, Jack Reacher, after his bath. I re-read a comment he'd posted on my Facebook wall, alluding to upcoming plans to visit us in New York. I found comfort in comments posted throughout the day about his kind soul, love for McKenna, and championship of writers. And I cried. A lot.

David had too many wonderful traits to describe here, but he never lost the childlike part of his heart. When my nephew was little, we used to love asking him to guess the ages of adults he met. Usually he'd estimate by comparing against his only benchmarks: babysitters, parents, and grandparents. He usually paused a long time before responding, and finally answered with utmost caution. But when we asked him how old (31-year-old) David was, my nephew didn't hesitate: "David? David's eleven!"

More than any person I've ever known, David Thompson embraced his inner kid and could help you find yours if you'd only let him. I'm forever grateful I did.

CJ Box

ALTHOUGH I'M pretty sure David Thompson (or McKenna) never even thought that much about it over the years, I always looked forward to asking a single question of them following a book signing at Murder By The Book. This was usually after a few drinks – David and I both liked margaritas on the rocks with salt on the rim and David never knew it was the only time I ever drank them – amidst rapid-fire-synapse-type conversations across the table between David, McKenna, John, Michelle, and Anne. The topics covered the gamut from sports to politics to books to authors to running a small business. One session was devoted to why I named a miniature horse rancher in one of my books "David Thompson."

The question I always asked David was, "So, what should I be reading?"

He was never shy with the answers. David was how I learned about Ken Bruen, Megan Abbott, Charlie Huston, Brad Thor (really), Ace Atkins, Daniel Woodrell... and a half-dozen other brilliant authors. And he was right every damned time.

It made me think how lucky his customers were. They'd simply ask who to read and he would tell them and he wouldn't steer them wrong. Because he knew.

And that was the thing about David . He knew. He wasn't geeky (well, maybe sort of), or pretentious, or arrogant about his incredible knowledge. He didn't disparage the customers who came in and asked for the latest James Patterson, either, because they were his people (readers) and he valued them and he liked them as much as he liked books and authors and as much as he loved McKenna and his store.

He never whined about Amazon or Barnes and Noble or his competition, because he knew MBTB was better at what they offered than anyone else.

David had a gift for making a first-time author – or customer -- feel like they were the only person in the world who mattered. I would marvel at the times I went to Houston to find out that at big-time star was there the night before. Not that David would ever mention the name, or say there had been 400 people to my forty. The only time David would ever disparage an author was when he or

she was rude or contemptuous to his customers, because that was unforgivable. I always admired that, and when he told me the tales he got very angry.

The news of his death hit me hard. I felt gutted in a way I can't explain. Maybe it was because David was such a truly nice and genuine guy. Maybe it was because he was so young. And maybe it was because he was one of the few out there who was willing to bestow genuine legitimacy and kindness to those who didn't expect it. He was comfortable in his own skin and he worked damned hard. He was ambitious and passionate. He loved his customers, his job, the books, the authors, and his life, it seemed. And if he didn't, I refuse to hear it.

In pieces like this, writers always conclude with, "He'll be missed."

But damn, I'll miss him. So will everyone else in this business, even if they never met him. Because he knew.

Ayo Onatade

Rather sadly I did not know David as well as many of you but once you met David you never forgot him! I was hoping to rectify this in St Louis. I first met David (and McKenna) face to face when I attended my first Bouchercon in Chicago in 2005. I had however heard about him long before then courtesy of the delightful Dean James. In fact I am fairly certain that on the odd occasion that I emailed MBTB David often replied. However, it was because of Jon Jordan that I was able to finally put a face to the name. David was a delight to talk to and when we met he was excited about Busted Flush Press and the forthcoming books that he intended to publish.

David and I did not see each other again until Left Coast Crime in 2006 when it was held in Bristol.

The final time we saw each other again was in Baltimore in 2008. I remember sitting in the room with him and Jon Jordan in Baltimore when the decision to award Bouchercon to Rae Helmsworth and San Francisco was announced. Shortly afterwards St Louis was awarded to David, McKenna and Jon. Literally the first thing David asked me afterwards was whether or not I would be attending! At the time I said I should hope so but it depended on work.

Since then David and I corresponded sporadically mainly by Facebook. However, earlier this year I started to make arrangements for St Louis with Jon. One evening I was on Facebook and David popped up. He had heard (I assume from Jon) that I would indeed be coming to St Louis. He had a request. Would I help them at St Louis? I was a bit confused, as I had already agreed with Jon that I would be more than willing to help out and I explained this to David. I remember that one of David's responses was that he did not want to take me for granted! David could never in my opinion do that.

Like many when I heard of David's death I was completely shocked and upset. In fact it has taken me ages to write this. Every time I started to type I got upset. I was really looking forward to seeing David and McKenna in St Louis. The fact that David will no longer be there has left a gaping hole. For me even though not only did David and I not really know each other very well, and we only

corresponded very infrequently he was a unique person. He was an author's best friend. He knew books, he knew authors and he was wonderful to talk to.

It was because of David that I read *Hell of a Woman and Damn Near Dead* (and I am looking forward to getting my hands on *Damn Near Dead 2*). It was because of David that I started to read Reed Farrell Coleman. David was the type of person that you wanted to spend a lot of time with. Not only because you wanted to pick his brains for all the information that he had stored in there but because he was that type of person and one knew that spending time with him would be a joy.

I am going to miss David and my thoughts and condolences go out to McKenna. David was a great and astonishing person. I don't know that many people who have that amount of depth when it came to knowledge of the genre and community. If we do one thing at Bouchercon at St Louis in 2011 let's make David proud. I am sad that you have gone David and the crime fiction community has lost one of its best ambassadors but I am proud to have known you.

Kathryn Casey

David Thompson was an exceptional man, a true advocate for the books he loved, and his generosity was well known. In 2008, I signed my first mystery at Murder by the Book. Afterward, I admitted to David that I was struggling with how much of book one's plot to reveal in book two of the series.

"Be careful," he cautioned. "You don't want to ruin the first book for readers by revealing too much in the second!"

At the time, David was busy, closing the store, but he stopped and patiently pulled books off the shelves for me, enthusiastically talking about the authors and explaining that they'd done what I needed to do exceptionally well.

After he and McKenna got together, David always looked so happy. He smiled more, although he still invariably seemed in an incredible rush.

I emailed him the morning after he'd died. I didn't know yet, and I had good news. My main character is a woman Texas Ranger. David had suggested I invite one to join me at my upcoming signing. I did and she was coming, and the first person I wanted to tell was David, because I knew he'd be as excited as I was.

At David's memorial, the crowd snaked out the door for hours, and everyone I talked to recounted a memory of something thoughtful David had done. Although only 38-years-old, David Thompson touched so many lives. He'll be missed.

Christa Faust

Words fail me. What can I possibly say about David Thompson that hasn't already been said and said better. I'm much better at writing about make believe people.

But I will say this. David was passionate about crime fiction. The world is full of jaded hipsters who strive to appear utterly unimpressed with everything they experience but David had this genuine and infectious enthusiasm that inspired everyone who met him. He got me all fired up again over authors I'd nearly forgotten and interested in new guys I'd never heard of.

I hate the fact that I won't be getting any more recommendations from David, but his enthusiasm is still going strong in everyone that knew him. Pass it on.

Vicki Hendricks

An Email I Should Have Written

To: David

From: Vicki

Subject: Appreciation

Hi, David,

These thanks come late, but the memories are sweet. I remember when I first met you, on the phone, and you asked if I wanted to have *Miami Purity* published again. Youthful enthusiasm, along with the assurance and business sense of a much older man, was my instant impression. There was never a moment of doubt, and I never bothered to ask what you would pay, because it was obvious that you were as concerned for my benefit as your own. You wanted the novel to live on because you believed in it, and you made sure that it does. I thank you.

In connection—you might have been born to connect—you brought Megan Abbott into my life as a good friend, inviting her to do a foreword for the novel and to edit *Hell of a Woman*. I have wonderful memories of the first event at the bookstore, pure pleasure, with the interested crowd of noir lovers that you were always able to gather. Afterward, you and McKenna wined and dined, or rather Margarita'd and beered, Megan and me late into a typical night of your gracious hosting. It was like having dinner with newlyweds—though you weren't yet married—so happy with each other that your effervescence spilled over on Megan and me, as well as the servers. You made a party wherever you went. I can put myself back at that table instantly, hear you and McKenna laugh, a little giddy, exhausted by the schedule you made for yourselves, but determined to squeeze the last drop of playfulness out of that evening. It's sweet to remember that you lived many moments with that kind of intensity, and I thank you for creating those moments for me.

Even after that visit, I always had a difficult time matching your confident voice on the phone with your youth and exuberance. I had to keep flashing back to remind myself of the handsome young man you were in person. Now, it makes me wonder. I never understood what was meant by someone having an "old soul." I didn't believe in the possibility, or in any form of reincarnation, but since you left us so soon, I'm tempted to think that you are someone who came with a mission, an ancient guide filled with the wisdom of what's important in life:

honesty, dedication, and playfulness; for others, sincerity and kind consideration; above all, energy to expend on everyone. You did your job quickly, and now your energy can only have been converted, so that you can lighten the human spirit in another world or dimension. Your shining spirit must be palpable somewhere, besides in all of us whom you've touched.

I was lucky to see you and McKenna in June, for another lovely event at Murder by the Book. You brought in the crowd, as always. A montage of memories flashes from that night—your exasperated look at finding that Gary Philips and I had walked from the hotel in 90 degrees and 90 percent humidity—no worries; we had to explore. Your face in the audience, gleaming with fun, years of events not having dulled your enthusiasm. Then the dinner in the brightly lit seafood restaurant. You on my left, two seats down in our group of fifteen or twenty, commending my selection of the oyster po' boy, laughing. And afterward, you making room in the car to give rides, tired no doubt, but jovial, still squeezing out that last drop of fun, the final time I saw you.

But it wasn't the last I heard from you. Remember? Somehow, I had paid for my own dinner when you wanted to treat, and you would have none of it. You sent a check. Silly, I told you not to!

It was a small thing, but beyond expectations, as always, significant to show the lovable David I know, always that David. Thank you for being.

Take care,
Vicki

Jen Forbus

I will forever remember the very first time I saw him in person. He was speaking to someone and I was just going to wait until he was finished so I could say "hi." He looked up and caught my eye and asked whoever he was speaking to to excuse him a minute; then he walked over and wrapped me in a big hug. He treated me as though we had known each other all our lives. That's the kind of person David was. He could make you feel as though your presence was the most important, your thoughts the most valued.

David introduced me to so many new books, and he'd let me run on and on about a book I was reading and it was never weird to him. He always had time. His enthusiasm fueled my enthusiasm; it was contagious. David loved connecting people with books, and he touched so many lives through his work both at Murder by the Book and his Busted Flush Press.

While my friendship with David was short, he left a monumental impression on me, on who I am. I'm a different and better person for having known him. As I continue to blog and weasel a place for myself in the crime fiction community, it's my hope that I can honor him and what he stood for by singing the praises of the hidden gems, by connecting people with books, and by being the best friend I can be.

Where ever my friend is now, he's talking up Reed Farrel Coleman, Daniel Woodrell, A.E. Maxwell, Don Winslow...Thank you, David. Thank you for your friendship. It is and always will be a priceless treasure.

Reed Coleman

Mannish Boy

By

Reed Farrel Coleman

“I didn’t know David as well as you did, but I feel a terrible loss today.”—
Judy Bobalik

Some wounds go unnoticed and heal quickly. Some wounds form scabs and heal in their time. Some wounds never heal, but we learn to live with them. Anyone who had the joy of being David Thompson’s friend knows his loss will be a wound we will have to learn to live with, but one that won’t heal. I’m not sure that I want it to heal. I’ve written that you can teach illusion, but you can’t teach magic. And David Thompson was magic, not illusion.

“I never met David, but I honestly feel like I lost a friend.” –Maureen Corrigan, NPR

I don’t know how he did it, but David managed to keep intact those qualities that aging erodes in the rest of us. Every love for David was a first love. I can remember how he would breathlessly tell me about this book by that author and how it was just the best book ever and how I had to read it. Inevitably, a package would show up on my doorstep two or three days later with that latest greatest book.

“It was a great relief and joy to come off the road and walk into Murder By The Book and see David and McKenna. They made you feel like you were coming home.”

–Shamus Award-winner Peter Spiegelman

David helped rescue my career, such as it is. As long as five years ago, he came to me and begged me to let him be the one to do new editions of the early Moe Prager books. Funny thing is, I never considered letting anyone else do them. You see, David shined his light on me. I was one of those authors whose books David loved and thought had been underappreciated. And when David Thompson felt that way about you and your books, watch out. He was a human tornado and nothing was going to stand in his way.

“I never met him, but I felt like I knew him. We only spoke a few times and sent emails back and forth, but I already miss him.”

–Sara J. Henry, author of Learning To Swim

I think the thing I will remember most about David was his unbridled enthusiasm for almost anything he liked. I often found myself envious of David’s ability to feel things the way I used to feel about things when I was a kid. I know I keep coming back to this, but I don’t think he ever appreciated what a gift he was blessed with. He spent way too much of his time admiring us for our talents. He was a unique character in a community populated by unique characters. He used to get such a big kick out of the silly Yiddish names I called him and when he found out they were names for part of the male anatomy, he got even a bigger kick out of it. That was David, though, wasn’t it? He was many things to me: my friend, my biggest fan, my publisher, my brother, my son. I don’t think I shall ever see his like again. Some wounds never heal.