

The Real Temperance Brennan:

Kathy Reichs and the Rise of Forensic Anthropology In North America

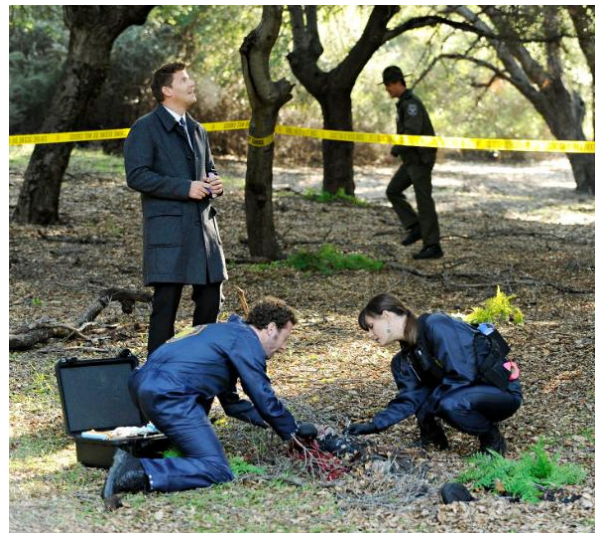
Through Her Fictional Counterpart

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Picture this: it's early morning; the sun is shining after days of rain, and you decide to take your dog out for a short run before work. You strap on your jogging shoes, grab a water bottle, leash up your Terrier mix, and head out to the park across the street. After a few minutes of running down your usual path, you trip on your shoelace and you stop to re-tie it. But the moment you stop, your dog starts sniffing around the bushes. Soon he's yapping and jumping around the nearby shrub. You find his distress odd, since you run this path at least once a week; you step over to the shrub, move the branches around a bit... and come face to face with a human skull, decomposed beyond recognition.

Scenes like the one you have just unwittingly stumbled upon call for a rare discipline of expertise: that of forensic anthropology. The discipline is small and relatively new, but forensic anthropology has become well known in the early 21st century through various pop culture media. Its popularity has been pioneered by a couple members of the field, specifically Dr. Kathy Reichs, a forensic anthropologist who is also a best selling crime novelist and the inspiration for the *Bones* TV series.



Dr. Temperance Brennan, Dr. Jack Hodgins, and FBI Special Agent Seeley Booth from the TV show *Bones* examining a murder victim.

Who is Kathy Reichs?

The Basics:



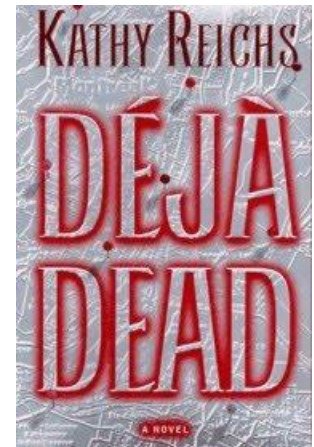
Kathy Reichs, the well-known forensic anthropologist and author.

Kathy Reichs is a native of Chicago and holds multiple degrees in Physical Anthropology. She now divides her time between teaching at the University of Charlotte North Carolina and writing her popular forensic crime novels in Montreal, Quebec. As of 2011, she is one of only 82 anthropologists to be certified by the American

Board of Forensic Anthropology (Kathyreichs.com). But originally Reichs wasn't involved in forensic science. Her first passion was bio-archaeology—that is, identifying and cataloguing people who have been dead for centuries. But, she states in an interview with *The Feminist Press*, she was occasionally contacted by police forces in both Canada and the US for consultation on unsolved murder investigations. Eventually she shifted her discipline to encompass the then rapidly developing field of forensics. But in the late 1970s to mid 1980s, when Reichs's career was branching out, forensic anthropology was hardly known at all. So what changed? In the early 1990s, Reichs began to toy with the idea of writing for a pop audience. It wasn't until '95, however, that she latched on to some real inspiration.

A Budding Author

In Ontario, Canada, 1995, a woman named Louise Ellis was murdered. Due to Canada's low violent crime rate the national news broadcast her story as it progressed over the course of several months.



Deja Dead (1997) was Kathy Reichs's first published novel. Her main character, Tempe Brennan, is heavily based on Louise Ellis.

Reichs, who spends time in Quebec each year, noticed the story and was captivated by it.

In early 1995 the Canadian provincial police were notified by Ellis's sister and ex-husband that Ellis, an intelligent and independent writer, had disappeared. It didn't take long for the police to figure out that Ellis disappeared only two months after she married a convicted murderer named Brett Morgan. The police investigating the case were certain that Morgan killed Ellis, but there was no hard evidence to prove it. Eventually, the Provincial Police called Reichs in to help on the case; Reichs examined the body and helped put Morgan back behind bars.

In 2010, 15 years after her involvement with the case, Reichs stated in an interview with the TV show *Hardcover Mysteries* that the Ellis case heavily influenced her writing. Because Reichs's was involved with the Ellis case while she was writing her first novel *Deja Dead* (1997) Tempe Brennan of the novels is partly based on Ellis.

To date, Reichs has written and published 16 novels, all of which have made the New York Times Bestsellers list.

14 of these novels, more commonly known as the *Bones*

series, follow a character named Tempe Brennan who is, in essence, the fictional amalgam of Reichs and Ellis. Tempe is a bio-archaeologist-turned-forensic anthropologist and author who lives in Quebec, occasionally partners with the Canadian Provincial Police to identify victims of brutal homicides, and, in her down time, writes "fictional" crime novels about Kathy Reichs.

"I didn't want to do another journal article...I didn't want to do another textbook that would be read just by my colleagues. I'd made full professor, which meant I was pretty much free to do what I wanted; so, I thought it would be fun to write fiction – to try something different. And I would also be bringing my science to a broader audience."

~Kathy Reichs
kathyreichs.com

Reichs and Brennan

So how much of the *Bones* series is realistic? Reichs notes that many of her plots are based on cases she actually worked on. For example in *Deja Dead* (1997), Reichs drew on her own experiences when Tempe goes to Guatemala to identify victims of mass genocide. There are several notable differences in their characters, however, and Reichs makes it a point to keep Tempe distanced from herself. For example, Reichs laughingly mentions in a *Bones* featurette that unlike Tempe, she cannot shoot a gun and she “certainly” does not know martial arts. Reichs inserted those two elements of Tempe to add a sense of independence to her character.

Reichs also notes that other elements of Tempe belong to Ellis’s personality. For example, Reichs borrowed heavily from Ellis’s family life, giving Tempe’s ex-husband the same characteristics as Ellis’s. Also, Tempe is a bestselling author and, at the time she was working Ellis’s case, Reichs was not. Therefore Reichs points out that Tempe’s characteristics of the independent author come not from her own experiences but rather from how she imagined Ellis’s personality (*Hardcover*).

The novels are extremely popular, and they were Reichs’s first step toward popularizing the discipline of forensic anthropology with the masses. But in 2004, an even bigger opportunity presented itself.

***Bones* Meets TV**

In the early 2000s, the *Bones* novels caught executive producer Barry Josephson’s eye. He did some research on Reichs and Tempe Brennan and decided to make a TV show that was based on both Reichs and her fictional counterpart. Josephson teamed up with two other producers, Hart Hanson and Stephen Nathan, and created a concept for the show. Then they

“I don’t follow current events past the Industrial Revolution.”

~Temperance
Brennan
Bones

Season 5, Episode 7

presented it to Reichs in hoping to gain her support in their show as well as her permission to redesign the character of Temperance Brennan.

The proposition intrigued Reichs, and she agreed to lend her character and her expertise. The resulting product was *Bones*, the TV

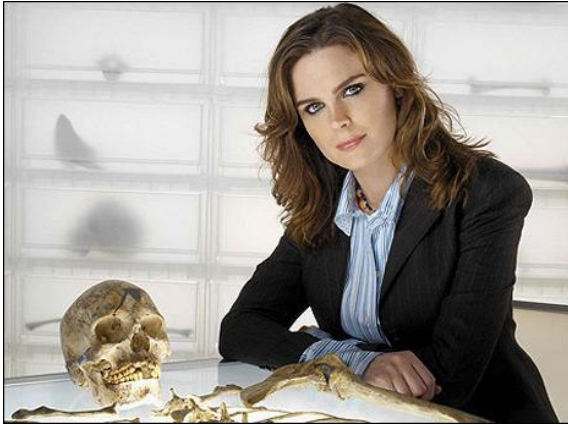
crime drama. The show, which first aired in the United States in Fall 2005, follows a Temperance Brennan who is very different from her literary counterpart, right down to her nickname; “Tempe” became “Brennan” or, to her partner, “Bones.” While Tempe works in Quebec, Brennan works in DC; Tempe consults with Provincial Police, and Brennan consults for the FBI. Tempe is 40-something and is divorced with a daughter, and Brennan is in her early 30s, doesn’t believe in the concept of marriage, and swears she will never have children (*TV Guide; Bones*).

Bones, like Tempe, is a character who is based off of Reichs, but not completely parallel to her. Although Bones is similar to Reichs in some ways, she is more an amalgam of Reichs, Ellis, Tempe, and a few developments from the producers’ imaginations. Producer Barry Josephson states in a featurette about the TV show that the *Bones* novels provided details like what Brennan is capable of, who she works with, different kinds of cases she consults on, and other basic character elements.

Ultimately, though, Reichs has the final say. She reads through each script and offers advice, adds insight into the science aspects of the show, answers questions about the realism of the cases, and helps brainstorm how Brennan’s character should be constructed. But the show’s construction and popularity is about more than the scientific realism. So what makes it so very different from other popular crime shows like *CSI* or *Law & Order*? Why, the lead heroine herself, of course.

Temperance “Bones” Brennan

Ever since she began writing for fiction, Kathy Reichs always had a specific image of



Emily Deschanel as Temperance “Bones” Brennan, the lead character of the TV series *Bones*, which is based off of Reichs’s novels and her career.

Tempe Brennan in her mind: a girl split loosely between herself and Louise Ellis (*Hardcover*). Tempe is independent, strong-willed, brilliant, resourceful, and more than a little stubborn. But more than anything, she has a passion for her work like Reichs which instilled in her a certain hard-nosed, maybe even cold, exterior of rationality (*TV Guide*). According to Reichs this rationality stems

from the necessary objectivity of a scientist: if you conclude before all the evidence is in you might miss something important (*Smithsonian*). While the cops have every right to be intuitive, the forensics must remain unbiased (*Hardcover*).

“She’s got issues she should be working on, but she’s so compassionate about her work that she just doesn’t pay attention to things going on in the world around her. She tends to be oblivious to popular culture, but a little more about her comes out in every episode.”

~Kathy Reichs

About TV Brennan

TV Guide Magazine, 2006

In the TV drama, Brennan’s rationality is built upon almost to a fault. As Tempe evolves into Brennan, she becomes cold and calculated. Objective rationalism transforms into empiricism and atheism. Brennan is every bit the calculating scientist, and she’s so wrapped up in her work she hardly ever steps out of the lab.

Josephson, Hanson, and Nathan created Brennan’s cold rationality and tied it together with elements from Reichs, Ellis, and Tempe. The result is a “real” character who Reichs

hopes will appeal to young people as a role model and encourage them to pursue the sciences.

Temperance's character is the most important fictional element of both the novels and the show, but Reichs is the one who truly pulls it all together.

The End Product

Kathy Reichs has helped create two major fictional universes based heavily on her own reality. The result is sixteen bestselling novels and a 6-season (and still continuing) crime show that has been praised as the most realistic on Television (Wikipedia). These two pop culture mediums have reached millions of people world-wide, and have helped spread a greater understanding and insight into the growing field of forensic anthropology.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Kathy Reichs was pursuing her multiple degrees, forensic anthropology wasn't even a college discipline. In 2005, when *Bones* first aired, the field was small, but known. Reichs was one of 32 certified forensic anthropologists (*Bones*). In 2011, that number has more than doubled; she is now one of 82 (Kathyreichs.com). And the field is still growing, mostly due to the popularization of the discipline through literature and television. Kathy Reichs is a major part of that development, and from the looks of it, the influence and inspiration of *Bones* will be around for many years to come.

Interested in Temperance Brennan?

Check Out Kathy Reichs's Novels:

The *Bones* Series:

Deja Dead (1997)

Death du Jour (1999)

Deadly Decisions (2000)

Fatal Voyage (2001)

Grave Secrets (2002)

Bare Bones (2003)

Monday Mourning (2004)

Cross Bones (2005)

Break No Bones (2006)

Bones to Ashes (2007)

Devil Bones (2008)

Interested in Fantasy?

Check Out the New *Tori Brennan* Series:

Virals (2010)

Seizure (2011)

And be sure to check out *Bones* on FOX, which is entering its 7th season in November 2011, every Thursday at 9PM EST.

Interested in Kathy Reichs?

Check Out My Sources:

Kathyreichs.com. The Kathy Reichs Website, written by Kathy Reichs. Updated 2011.

This website has everything you ever wanted to know about Kathy Reichs and more. It has a brief autobiography, a list of her credentials, an in-depth look into all 16 of her novels, and her own look into *Bones*. Aside from this, there are links to her current appearances in media, recent news about her, and a blog about her recent activities. You can also link to her various social networking sites.

“Bones: Inspired by the Life of Forensic Anthropologist and Author Kathy Reichs.”

Bones, Season 1 DVD Extra, released by FOX Entertainment on Nov. 28, 2006. Run time is 6:43.

This is a brief featurette involving Barry Josephson (Exec. Producer of *Bones*), the lead cast, and Kathy Reichs as they discuss what it's like to work together on the show. The featurette is brief, but it covers a lot of ground and is quite interesting. It offers a lot of insight into Reichs's involvement with the scripts and also with creating and maintaining Brennan's character. For those who don't own the DVDs, the featurette can also be found on Youtube.

Hardcover Mysteries, Episode 7: “Kathy Reichs”

Produced by Robert Kirk and Rob Lihani and Filmed by *Investigation Discovery* as part of their *Hardcover Mysteries* show. Release date: Nov. 22, 2010. Run time: 44 minutes. *Hardcover Mysteries* is a new television series from the Discovery Channel that attempts to look into the minds of America’s most well-known authors. Episode 7 of their first season was based on Kathy Reichs, her involvement in the Louise Ellis case, and how it influenced her writing. Although the episode was overly dramatized and focused much more on the crime than on Reichs’s involvement, I still gained a good deal of insight into Reichs’s job and the Temperance Brennan character. Although the *Hardcover Mysteries* show is first and foremost a dramatization of past crimes, my research showed it to be a reliable, factual source. Parts of the episode can be viewed at hulu.com and investigationdiscovery.com. The full episode is available for purchase from Amazon On Demand.

“A Conversation With Kathy Reichs”

An interview conducted and transcribed by Alison Rhonemus on Monday, Dec. 14 2009 for *The Feminist Press*’s Q&A column “Under the Microscope.” No issue number available.

This is a brief interview with Kathy Reichs about her involvement in the sciences and her multiple careers. Since it is for a feminist publication, the questions focus on Reichs’s independence and her hopes for Temperance Brennan to inspire young women. The full text can be found at www.underthemicroscope.com.

“Kathy Reichs Talks About Bones’ Brennan Meeting Her Maker”

An interview conducted and transcribed by Angel Cohn on Nov. 8, 2006 for *TV Guide Magazine*.

This is another brief interview with Kathy Reichs, this time over Reichs’s appearance the *Bones* episode “Judas on a Pole” (season 2, episode 11). The interview is slightly dated when compared to the TV show (which is now about to start a 7th season). Regardless of its age, it offers a good perspective of Reichs’s involvement in the show and what she thinks of the changes made to Brennan’s character.

“On The Case: Kathy Reichs, the forensic expert who helped inspire the TV show “Bones,” talks about homicides, DNA, and her latest novel”

An interview conducted and transcribed by Cate Lineberry in Aug. 2007 for the *Smithsonian Magazine*.

Yet another brief interview with Kathy Reichs, this time talking about her involvement with criminal investigators, her careers, and the impact the *Bones* novels and show have had on the masses.

“Kathy Reichs”

Wikipedia article, last updated on Oct. 21, 2011 as of Oct. 25, 2011.

This article gives an in-detail account of Kathy Reichs’s life and careers, though I mostly used it for easy access to the titles and dates of her novels. Most of the other information is available directly through Reichs’s website.



Kathy Reichs at a book signing to promote her 10th novel, *Bones to Ashes* (2007)

“I don’t follow current
events past the
Industrial Revolution.”

~Temperance
Brennan

Bones,

Season 5, Episode 16

