

## Inspiration becomes reality

# Novelist just needed a nudge

By LAUREN COMSTOCK  
LIVING SECTION EDITOR

**I**T WASN'T the baklava at the Greek Festival in Santa Cruz two years ago that sent Jeanne Schragger home "absolutely high."

It was the inspiration that hit her as she and her two women friends were leaving the fair. That day, the would-be novelist got the nudge she needed to start her first book.

"We were kidding around," Schragger recalled, "saying that what we needed was an escort and that we should advertise for one and share him."

"I said, 'That would be a wonderful beginning to a mystery, but I always get tangled up in plot.'

"My friends said, 'Oh do it, do it — we'll help you.'

"I went home absolutely high. I thought, 'Well, if I get stuck, they'll help me.'"

Today, the inspiration becomes reality with the release of "Fetish," a mystery by Schragger written under her maiden name, Jeanne Hart.

Although the official publication date is Aug. 18, the book reached local bookstores at the end of July.

It's a dream-come-true for Schragger.

"If you'll look around," she said, sitting at the kitchen table of her Santa Cruz home, "you'll notice almost every wall has books on it.

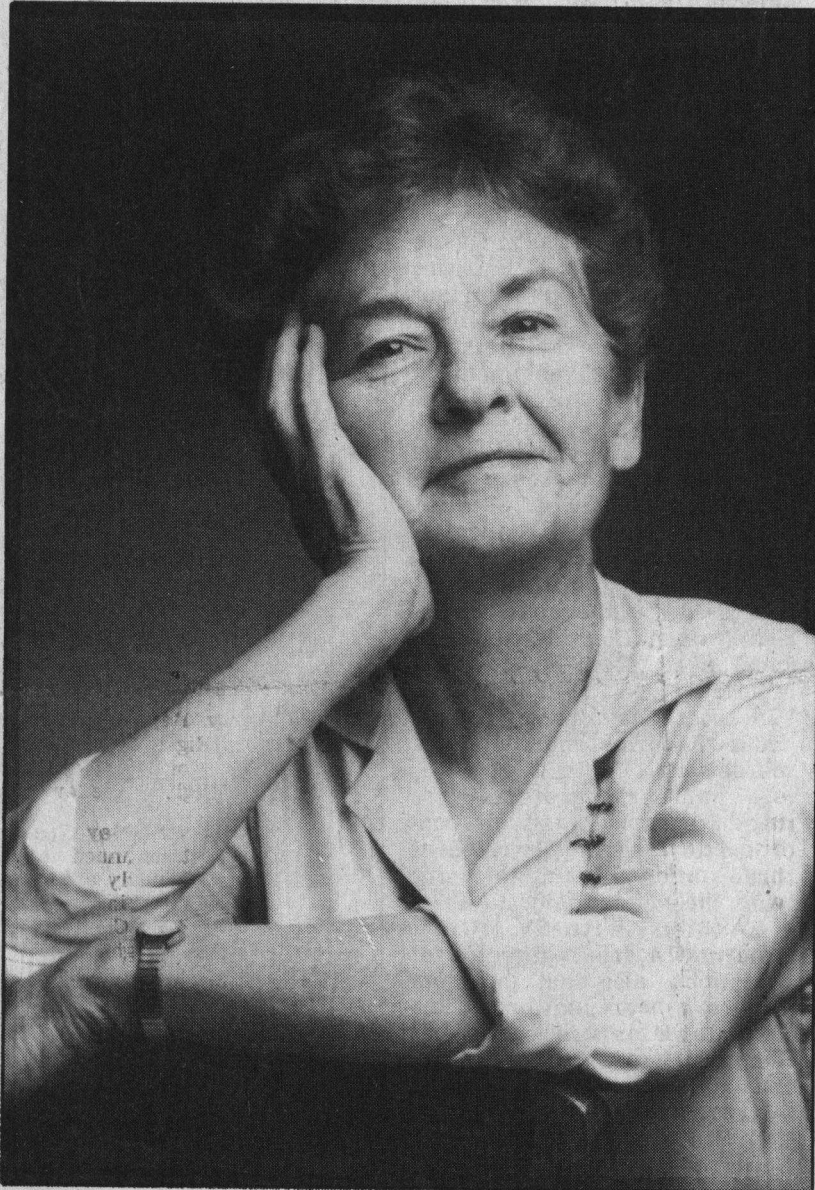
"I used to think, 'It would be so nice if just one of those books had my picture on the back cover.'"

She added, laughing, "Of course, now, I want a whole row."

That might not be long in coming. St. Martin's Press, publishers of "Fetish," have the option on her next book, another novel featuring Detective Sgt. Carl Pedersen.

"What I would like, of course, is to establish my detective so firmly that people will come looking for him," Schragger said.

The new author modeled Pedersen, whom she describes as "reflective,



Paul Schraub

**Jeanne Hart Schragger saw a dream come true with the publishing of her novel, 'Fetish.'**

intelligent and compassionate," after the detectives in mysteries by British writers W.J. Burley, Ruth Rendell and June Thomson.

She was also influenced by authors Patricia Moyes and Margaret Millar. And, of course, P.D. James, whom Schragger refers to as "queen of the mystery novelists."

In relating her passion for mysteries (which make up only a part of her substantial reading), Schragger referred to comments James made in a television interview.

Schragger quoted James as saying: "Mysteries appeal to

intelligent people. They affirm the basic moral law that men are responsible for their deeds."

Schragger, a high school English teacher for 15 years, said she has always found mysteries to be "relaxing and orderly — and they always have a pleasant resolution."

In "Fetish," Schragger's resolution is more than pleasant. The story unfolds enticingly, picking up speed toward the exciting and beautifully crafted climax. She weaves detail and develops characters masterfully — achieving her aim in leaving

the reader wanting more of Pedersen.

For Santa Cruz county residents, the book holds special appeal. Schragger makes no secret that "Bay Cove," the small Northern California coastal town where the action takes place, is Santa Cruz. Local readers will enjoy deciphering Schragger's fictitious names for local landmarks, including the Cooper House, the Dream Inn and Kelly's bakery.

Schragger is setting her next novel in the UC-Santa Cruz neighborhood where she lives amid other artists and writers.

She just hopes her "luck" lasts.

Although Joan Kahn, her editor at St. Martin's Press, has the option to buy her book, she's not obligated.

Before Schragger submitted her manuscript to Kahn, she attended a one-day seminar on mystery writing and publishing. She mailed off a query letter and synopsis of her novel to Kahn — an accomplished editor whose name, Schragger said, "works magic" in mystery-book circles.

By the end of the next week, Kahn requested the manuscript. In another week, she accepted Schragger's book for publication.

"I couldn't find anyone to tell," Schragger said, recalling her excitement. "My kids weren't home. My friends weren't home."

They all found out soon enough.

"My kids are so pleased, they just don't know what to do with me," she said. Schragger, a widow since 1980, has two daughters and a son, all grown.

"It feels very good, of course," she said of her accomplishment. "I feel very focused in a way I hadn't since my husband's death. Writing gives my life a center."

"Fetish," by Jeanne Hart Schragger, published by St. Martin's Press, is available in local bookstores for \$12.95.