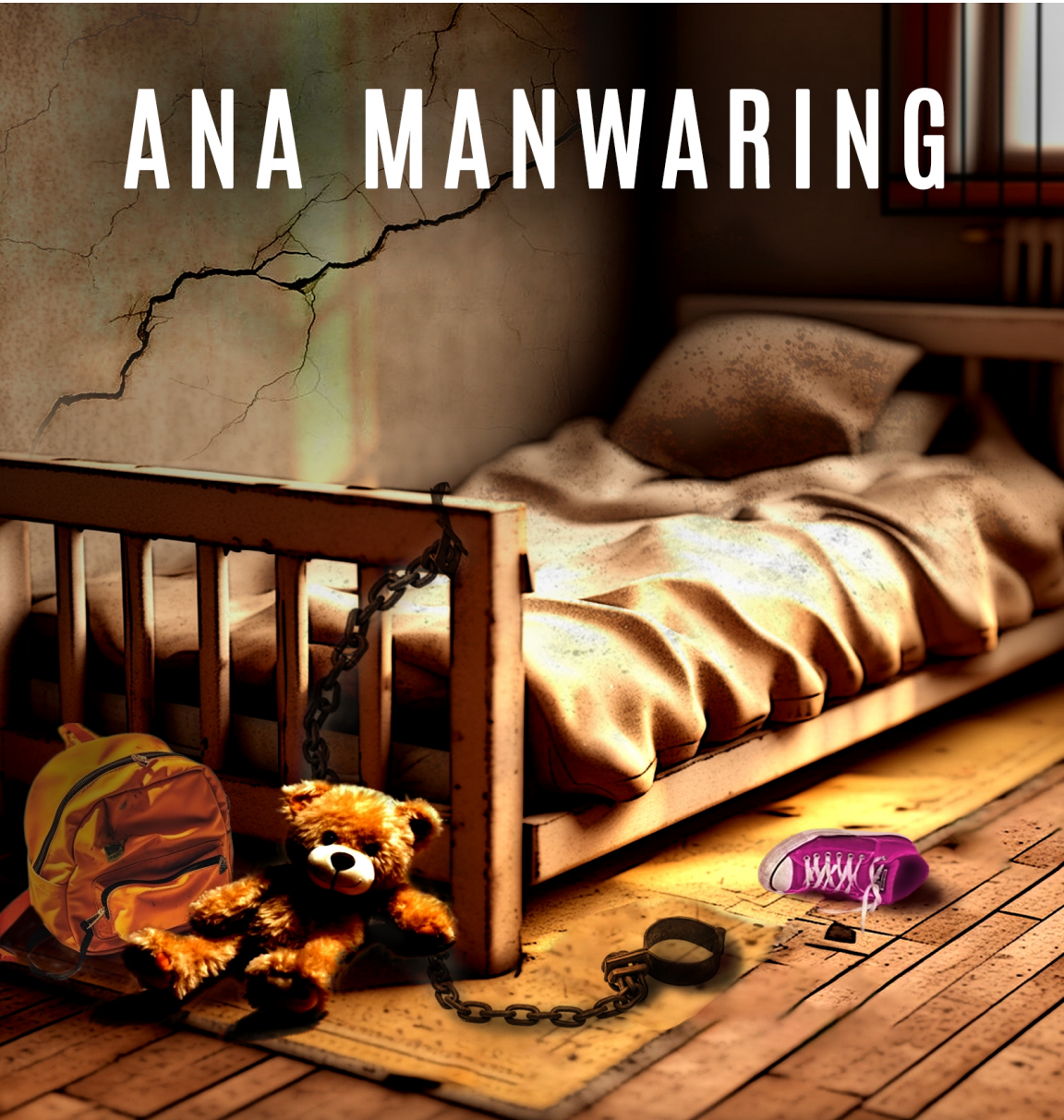


ANA MANWARING



KICKBACK

A DAFNE OLABARRIETA MEXICO MYSTERY BOOK 1

KICKBACK

Praise for the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures

Backlash Recipient of the Literary Titan Gold Award for Fiction 2023

Shortlisted for the CIBA Clue Award for Suspense/Thriller 2023

Midwest Book Review, Diane Donovan

Ana Manwaring does an outstanding job of crafting a story ... steeped in Mexican culture and mayhem, with the lingering effects of Vietnam relationships. The result is a vivid portrait of traitors and a dangerous man whose wrath and cleverness threaten everyone Quint has believed in and loved.”

Mark Pavlichek, author and reader

As a reader I felt relief for Quint to have found a community of his own with solid, honorable people. And despite the exceptions, car chases, and shootouts, this is at its core a very emotion driven book. These aren't Clint Eastwood, Arnold, or Sly automatons slaughtering their way to the closing credits, but real people with real problems, wants, and doubts.

Coyote Recipient of the Literary Titan Silver Award for Fiction 2022

Literary Titan Review

The author has sent her characters on a heart-pounding mission in the fourth installment in her series. The ensemble cast and suspenseful story remind me of the consistently entertaining *Fast and Furious* series... [*Coyote*] successfully brings together action and adventure in this explosive thriller set against the unique backdrop of Mexico.

US Review Kat Kennedy

This novel, with its backdrop of human trafficking, is a riveting read that puts one into the center of Mexican culture with its descriptive narrative of landmarks and cuisine.

Nothing Comes After Z Recipient of the Literary Titan Silver Award for Fiction 2022

Literary Titan Review

Nothing Comes After Z is a riveting crime thriller with a strong female protagonist. I appreciated the grounded nature of the crime and how it relates to some headlines we see in the news today. Before she can safely leave Mexico and return to her life, she has to uncover some hard truths and catch the perpetrators. I enjoyed how well the emotion is weaved into this action novel because it ensure we're invested in the protagonist and we're biting our nails when the action intensifies. Author Ana Manwaring knows how to create a storyline that easily sets up the hard-hitting action.

M.M. Chouinard, USA Today bestseller of the Jo Fournier Mystery series

“A well-written, engaging story with a bad-ass protagonist I loved spending time with. Bring on more JadeAnne!”

The Hydra Effect

Lisa Towles, Bestselling and multi-award-winning author of Terror Bay, Hot House, Ninety-Five, and Choke

“*The Hydra Effect* sizzles with action, tension, and peril. Great writing combined with regional flare and international intrigue make this sequel a delightful ride!”

Jan M Flynn, award winning author

“JadeAnne heads to Mexico City for a break from her partner and now ex-boyfriend. But her sharp intelligence, curiosity and inability to stay in her own lane land her in a snarl of trouble. In short order she’s evading cartel thugs, uncovering a human trafficking network and confronting high-level Mexican politicians with questionable connections, all in a lushly realized setting one can just about smell. And taste—JadeAnne might be in the middle of a gunfight, but she’s never immune to the temptation of a good plate of tacos al pastor. She and her loyal dog Pepper are a team you can’t but cheer for.”

Set Up

Heather Haven, multi-award-winning author of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries

“This is a blowout of a story. It starts on the backroads of Mexico in the middle of the night—just a woman, a dog, and Mexican Banditos—and escalates from there. If you are looking for a fast-paced, action-filled thriller about the adventures of a young PI and her lethal but well-trained dog, this will be your cup of tea. Or should I say Margarita? Jack Reacher step aside. You have met your match in JadeAnne Stone.

Judy Penz Sheluk, An international bestselling author

In her debut mystery novel, Author Ana Manwaring offers up more twists and turns than a Mexican rattlesnake. Fast paced, with well-crafted characters and a strong female lead, there’s plenty to like about this world of power, politics, and Mexican money laundering. I especially enjoyed the strong sense of place, which Manwaring uses to great effect. Well worth adding to your TBR pile.

Kirkus Reviews

“With a likeable duo and a vivid, appealing setting, this adventure series is off to a promising start”

Praise for Ana Manwaring’s Memoir of Living in Mexico

Saints and Skeletons

Recipient of the Literary Titan Gold Book Award 2023

Short-listed for the CIBA 2024 Journey Awards for Overcoming Adversity

Literary Titan Review

Saints and Skeletons is a captivating and introspective work that encourages readers to embrace life’s complexities. Ana Manwaring’s unflinching honesty and willingness to bare her soul are both brave and inspiring. This memoir stands as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling and the remarkable human capacity for growth and resilience.

Nannette Rundle Carroll, Author of The Communication Problem Solver

“Your writing is so immediate! I feel like you brought me along on the trip.”

Lisa Towles, Bestselling and multi-award-winning author of Salt Island, Hot House, The Ridders, and Ninety-Five

“There are so many things I loved about this engrossing memoir. If I knew nothing of the author beforehand, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that she's a lifelong poet and an award-winning crime novelist. Too often, you find a book with beautiful language that plods forward slowly and deliberately, or a crime novel with lots of pace and adventure but lacking in soul. This book has it all - beautiful execution along with interesting peril that the author faced on this adventure of a lifetime. Love story, travelogue, and survival story, this book is an exciting chronicle of a gutsy woman's search and personal transformation across unfamiliar lands. But the best part is the fictional JadeAnne Stone series that evolved from this experience. Highly recommended for readers seeking meaningful adventure.”

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The JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures

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Coyote (2022)

Backlash (2023)

Other books

Saints and Skeletons

A Memoir of Living in Mexico (2023)

In memory of
Yessenia Mollinedo Falconi, Journalist for El Veraz
shot in Cosoleacaque, Veracruz May 9, 2022
Thanks for lending your name to my character
and
all the journalists worldwide cut down for reporting the truth

Acknowledgements

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And where would I be without my biggest fan, Jeannette Tomson? She read, critiqued, and soon will tell everyone on TikTok just how much she enjoyed Kickback.

Ofrezco mi gratitud, respeto, y amor a mi querido amigo Fernando Leon Torrens, quien dejó todo para pasar una semana en la Ciudad de México llevándome por todos lados en mi viaje de investigación de Kickback. Gracias por tu paciencia, protección, contactos, lecciones de español, y buen humor continuo. ¡Iluminaste mi viaje!

I’m in awe of my amazing editor, Cindy Davis, The Fiction Doctor. She’s improving my writing and invaluable for her insights and ideas. I couldn’t do it without Cindy or my publisher, Indies United Publishing House. Lisa Orban works tirelessly to produce the best books, great opportunities for us authors, and an upbeat, good, humored environment for us to thrive and publish.

As always, a big thank you goes to David Prothero and our family for their love and encouragement. And the kitties, Alfie and Beto, who keep me company while I late night write.

KICKBACK

A Dafne Olabarrieta
Mexico Mystery
Book One



Ana Manwaring



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

Chapter 1



Another Day in the Office

February 18, 2019

Dafne refilled Seeger's mug with steaming coffee and offered him the pitcher of half and half, distracting him from his iteration of the five reasons they needed to start their family. He smiled, checked his watch, and shoveled the last two bites of eggy tortilla into his mouth. She picked at her *huevos mexicanos* and went back to the newsfeed she was reading on her iPad.

"Listen to this, Seeg. 'An investigation launched by *LaVista Discurso Público* with the collaboration of journalists from The Guardian and a consortium convened by France-based Hidden Stories, traced at least fifty contracts with indications of embezzlement of public resources from state budgets.' *LaVista*—isn't that the outfit Alba works for?"

"Who?"

She tossed her blond curls from her eyes. "What do you mean, who? Alba Falconi? My pal from uni. You remember, the one who stole my boyfriend? Bloody hell, Seeg! We got back from England three days ago. You know the story. We talked about them when we visited my old rooms at Cambridge last week."

"The Irish guy." His voice sounded flat.

"Yeah, Oliver. Alba got her comeuppance. He was a tosser. I don't know what happened, but she moved back to Mexico—here, CDMX. I see her byline now and then."

"You should call her."

"Why?"

He exhaled, exasperated Dafne knew. Instead of answering he dribbled creamer into his cup, ringing the ceramic with the spoon as he stirred. He dropped the spoon onto his plate with a clatter. "For the same reason we should start family." His eyes glittered as he turned a seductive look her way. "Maybe we already did. I'm still thinking about our night at St. Gerard Majella's. Let's try it again tonight—pretend we're back in London—comped by your mother in an expensive hotel and without a care." He wagged his tongue and licked his lips then shot her a wicked grin.

She gritted her teeth at the mention of her mother, although the fancy London hotel had been a sweet gesture. But not in her bedroom! She winked at

her husband. She couldn't be too upset about Seeger being hot for her, now could she?

"Seeg, I think reconnecting with a woman who lied to me for two years has *nada* to do with having children."

"Daf, you don't do anything but work. You need some friends. And something to do instead of rescuing people— Yes, I remember," he said, holding up his hands palms out. "Don't say it. We talked about kids and your avocation before we got married, but that was twelve years ago. It's time Daf."

"Ay. The real conversation. Please don't start. I haven't negotiated the release of a hostage in several years, Seeg."

"It's dangerous. What would I do if something happened to you?"

She sighed. "You mean, I need to have children, so I'll stay safe at home. Where's the fun in that?" she asked and laughed, making a silly face.

Seeger frowned. Lighten up, man, she wanted to say.

"Look at the time, Seeg. I've gotta run. First day back, and we have a meeting with the lawyers this morning. I have to prepare. Mother is going to fight like a wildcat to keep the status quo."

He, grinned. "Yeah, yeah. You had to sedate her just to install wi-fi."

Laughing, Dafne said, "Don't make fun of my mother, *amor*. She's old and set in her ways. It's just that if Inmobiliarias Aspectos Olabarrieta wants to stay on top of Mexico real estate, we need to enter the twenty-first century."

"I agree. It's no different with the restaurant chain. Those dinosaurs don't get it."

"Not at all." Dafne laughed again. Swigging the last slurp of coffee, she grabbed her phone and waggled her fingers between her ear and mouth. "Pick a place for dinner. See you later, *mi amor*." She bent over her husband and kissed his ear.



Dafne raced the candy apple red Porsche 356 C-class into her parking space behind the restored mansion housing Inmobiliarias Aspectos Olabarrieta, the family-owned company. Her alarm chirped as she locked the car. The parking lot was empty; no one else had arrived. *Good*. Dafne needed time to think. Seeger had a point about starting a family. *Pues*, about five of them she couldn't refute. The first being, she was turning thirty-seven in a couple of months. Her clock was running out. And so was her patience. If she was going to take over IAO, she had a lot of work to do. And what was wrong with just Seeger, her, and their furry baby, Sadie? But what if later she did want a child? Still, she had other things to think about right now.

For one, those *tontos* in the legal and planning departments didn't understand the modern world. People didn't write checks anymore; people didn't wait for an agent to show properties. It was all over the internet. And the trends in real estate development, how could the company continue to build in the least ecologically sound way? She unlocked the main office door.

Dafne crossed the thick pale, grey-flecked carpet of the reception area toward the stairs, her heels sinking into the pile. One more irritation. It was bad

enough having to wear heels with business attire every day, but catching those heels on outdated frieze carpeting? She'd almost twisted her ankle catching on the shag last week. Just another entry on her long list of outmoded *everything*.

She mounted the stairs and hurried down the hall to her office overlooking the manicured lawn and garden into the congested morning rush. She closed her door and stood in front of the window. But it was early. At 7:30 a.m. the traffic was moderate on Prado Sur. She slid behind her desk and booted up. While the computer, something from the Hadean period—bloody hellish at least—booted, she checked her messages on the blinking desk phone.

There were three: the first from Dorotea reminding her of the ten-a.m. meeting. “Thanks Mum,” she said to the clunky receiver; the second was a reply from her inquiry about a series of industrial properties on offer through another firm, confirming an appointment to meet with the listing agent next week. She made a note on her calendar, which had finally opened on the slow network. She and Alondra had done business before. Lunch at Quattro would be delicious and lively, between the excellent cocktails and Alondra’s wry humor. They’d negotiate a deal for that derelict property at the end of metro line 12 in Tláhuac for sure. All she had to do was convince the suits an ecologically sound, “green” work/live community on the semi-rural southeastern edge of Mexico City would pay-off, in the near future. She pulled a file from the stack in her basket. Her friend Alejandra Rangel had roughed out renderings of a modernistic community of residences, workspaces, retail shops, gardens, restaurants, and playgrounds. She’d even included a school, a pool, and community vegetable plots. All within a ten-minute *pesera* ride to the metro to anywhere *capitalinos* could wish to go. She jotted numbers 1 to 8 down her notepad and filled in all the plusses, including cheap land with water and access to supplies.

Dafne closed her eyes and let her imagination loose on the idea. Work/live communities weren’t so new, but all-green construction, solar-generated electricity, native plants, nontoxic paint—you name it. High end but with mixed use and designated low-income housing. The way people were flocking into the city from more dangerous parts of the country, they’d make a killing. She planned to start the conversation at this morning’s meeting.

The door swung open, startling Dafne from her reverie.

“*Buenos días, niña*. You’re in early.”

“Wanted to get ready for the meeting. I have a project proposal to make. Something I’ve been working on for the last couple of months.”

“*Ay*, Dafne, don’t you already have enough to do? We have a department for that.”

“Mother, if we’re going to argue, let’s at least go make some coffee and sit down like civilized adults. Did you bring any pan dulces?”

“*Por supuesto*. And I’ve got the coffee started.”

Dafne unwound herself from the desk chair and files to stand up. “So how was your dinner last night?”

Dorotea slid her hand down the polished banister as she descended the stairs. “It was lovely darling. We dined at Quintonil over on Isaac Newton.”

“Polanco. Expensive,” Dafne muttered. “I’ve seen it. Never eaten there.”

“Your uncle paid for it.”

They clacked down the tiled hallway to the kitchen. The aroma of fresh coffee greeted them at the door. Dorotea had set two places at the table and plated the breakfast breads. She carried the pot over and poured two cups. This was the old-fashioned part Dafne was willing to keep. Especially when her mother took care of it. Cooking wasn’t Dafne’s thing. She sat down.

“Thanks, Mum,” she said, selecting a croissant. She swirled some cream into her cup and sipped. “What’s the food like?”

“I’ve never seen such elegant and creative plating.” Dorotea pulled her phone from the bone-colored satchel she was never without to scroll through some photos and handed it over to Dafne. “I had the striped bass, *barbacoa* in *adobo de chapulín*, grilled green beans and cauliflower cream with plankton, and charred avocado tartare with *escamoles*, Mexican herb chips. Your aunt and I shared the *mamey* panna cotta tartlet with pixel cream. Juan Carlos drank, as usual.”

Dafne tore off a flaky piece of bread and dunked it into her coffee then popped it into her mouth. “I don’t know how you stay so thin. You go out four nights a week.”

“Ay, Dafne, a *golandrina*, hummingbird, couldn’t survive on the portions at Quintonil. I was starving two hours later.”

Dafne giggled and dunked another piece of bread. “*Pues*, it looks delicious online, although a bit like modern art.” Coffee and crumbs dripped onto the starched tablecloth.

Dorotea pursed her lips, but said, “Surely your rich husband can take you for a special occasion? Your birthday is coming up.”

“Mum, don’t start. Seeger and I have already had this conversation today. And we’re hardly rich.”

“Darling, time is running out. You can’t ignore it any longer or you risk all kinds of terrible things. And do you really want to be retiring about the time your child starts university?”

“No mother, I want to be a success here at the business. I don’t have time to be a housewife. I hate cooking.”

“Ay, do what we all do. Hire a governess and a maid, or a cook. You don’t need to stop working. It’s just a few months of leave when my grandchild is born.”

“So my child can be raised by strangers like I was?” Dafne frowned at her mother. It was an old gripe. Dafne had a lonely childhood except for the summers and every other Christmas she spent with her father, stepmother, and her half-siblings, in their joyful and chaotic rambling home in London.

Dorotea’s voice rose. “Dafne, I won’t accept that. You were raised by your grandmother, God rest her soul,” she said crossing herself, “and Maria Luna. Your husband agrees with me and is ready to pitch in.”

“Mother, I’m sorry. But you were never there.” She stared into her cup for a moment composing herself. Even to her ears, she sounded whiney. She helped herself to another pan dulce and dipped it.

“I’m here right now, Dafne, and we have some important things to discuss.” Dorotea’s eyes bored into her daughter. “Now sit up straight and act like an adult businesswoman. Stop slopping your *pan dulces* all over the tablecloth!”

Dafne inwardly groaned, but she got up, retrieved the coffeepot, and poured each another cup before returning to her seat.

Their meeting lasted another twenty minutes, time enough to complete the job of setting Dafne on edge and finishing their coffees. Dorotea had come with a twelve-point criticism of everything her daughter was doing at IAO, opening with, “I don’t know what you learned from that expensive education I paid for.” As if her mother couldn’t afford it. She proceeded through every advancement Dafne had instituted in her eighteen months as *Directora de Operaciones*. No matter she’d cut costs by 18% and increased revenues by 23%, Dorotea was sore because Dafne was doing a better job than she did. Dorotea detested the wi-fi and fought tooth and nail to not upgrade the computers.

“Mum, we can get you some lessons on how to use your iPhone and the cloud. It’s no biggie.”

“The board and I feel you are wasting our reserves on technology toys, Dafne.” A murky ray of sun cut across the floor.

“Because you and all the stuffed shirts are computer illiterate and stuck in the 20th century. The world operates differently now. We must upgrade our systems if we’re to maintain our position in the market. And, Mother, we need to develop new, environmentally safe projects. We are no longer building with old-style concrete. I don’t care if Cemex gives us a good rate—”

Dorotea raised her hand to stop the conversation. Dafne ignored her.

“Unless they can give us an environmentally safe building block, we’re looking for something else. Maybe that wood-chip cement I read about. It’s what people want now, Mum.”

Dorotea nibbled at the last of her scone. “Dafne, my last point. You are a poor team player. Please dismount your high horse for our management meeting today. Listen. Evaluate. Offer your opinion when it is asked for. Now, get ready and make me proud.”

Her smokey eyes pinned Dafne. She hung her head, guilt washing through her. It was like childhood all over again—every day.

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Laboratorios Salud Integral, S.A. de C.V.'s top salesman, Alejandro "Alex" Garza knows his medicines and their value to improve people's lives. He's helped thousands, so why isn't he happy? An outsider, he has always fought to be accepted into his own family. Now his mother isn't answering her phone, and the family is lying to him. When he arrives in Veracruz, his mother is dying, his brother Lucas is ill, and his sister-in-law Ana, refuses to take care of them. After the funeral, Alex finds Ana in his mother's house helping herself to the credit cards and financial information. Why? Lucas, the trustee of her will, can't settle the estate from his bed. Alex confronts Ana and discovers discrepancies in Lucas's medications. The combination will kill him. He contacts Ana's brother, the doctor heading up Lucas's care team, who assures him everything is okay. Soon, Lucas is dead under suspicious circumstances. Alex opens a malpractice lawsuit and within days is run down by a speeding car running without lights. Someone wants him dead. But Alex is determined to avenge his family. As Alex follows the clues, he's drawn into a deadly web of retribution, greed, and lies. Will the killers stop him before he learns the truth?

About Ana Manwaring



Ana Manwaring is the award-winning author of the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures, the 2023 Literary Titan Gold Book Award winner of *Saints and Skeletons*, a memoir of living in Mexico, three volumes of poetry as well as many essays, short stories and flash memoirs.

Ana teaches creative writing in California's wine country. Founder of JAM Manuscript Consulting, she coaches writers, assists in developing projects and copyedits. When Ana isn't helping other writers, she posts book reviews and tips on writing craft and the business of writing at www.anamanwaring.com/blogs/Building a Better Story, and produces the North Bay Poetics, <https://northbaypoetics.net>, a free monthly poetry event.

She's branded cattle in Hollister, lived on houseboats, consulted brujos, visited every California mission, worked for a PI, swum with dolphins, and out-run gun totin' maniacs on lonely Mexican highways —the inspiration for *The JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures*. Read about her transformative experiences living in Mexico on *Sopa de Caracol*, a collection of stories and photos at www.anamanwaring.com.

With a B.A. in English and Education and an M.A. in Linguistics, Ana is finally able to answer her mother's question, "What are you planning to do with that expensive education?" Be a paperback writer.

If you had as much fun reading *Kickback* as I did researching and writing it, please consider going to your favorite online bookseller and leaving a review. Reviews help other readers find our books and help us continue to write for your enjoyment. As the adage goes, a book is not finished until a reader reads it. Thank you.

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