# Actually, we do judge a book by its cover.

If you thought writing your book was the hard part, get ready for the development of the cover. Always exciting, and rarely straightforward, the cover design is one of the first and most important ways you advertise your book to a potential reader. In this session I'll talk about:

1. What makes an effective cover design?
   - Appeal to your target reader. Do you research into other titles in a similar category as your book.
   - Standout visually
   - Legible type (for instance, never put italics or scripts in all caps).
   - Does it look good as a thumbnail on a website? Not just visually, but can at least the main title be read easily.

   Some common mistakes to avoid include:
   - Trying to tell the whole story with the cover.
   - Using typefaces that don't go well together or that are hard to read.
   - Not planning the back cover copy early enough in the design process. If the front cover is like a poster, the back cover is like an advertorial.
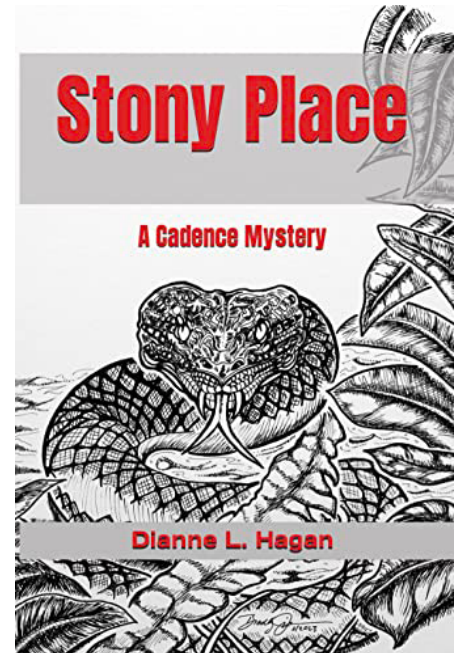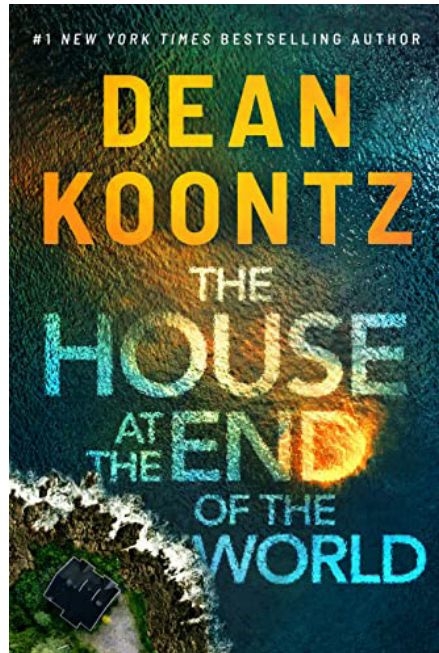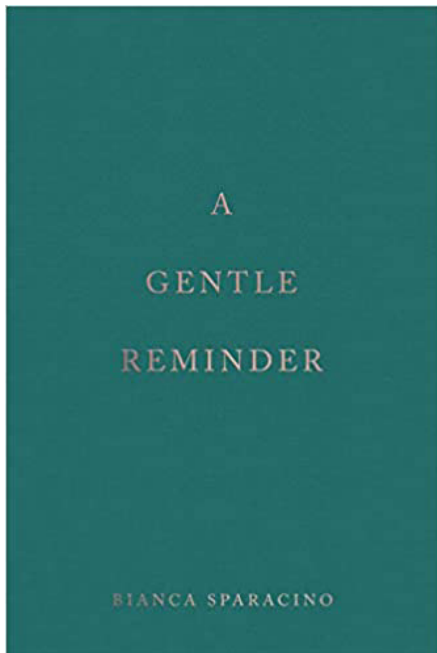
2. How to avoid having an amateur look on a self-published book, even if you can't afford to hire a graphic artist. Tips and tricks for keeping it simple and attractive on the DYI route.
   - Use a template if your printing platform provides one. You can personalize it to make your cover your own but it will at least give you some clear parameters to stay inside.
   - See the list of common mistakes on page 1 of this handout. It is tempting to attempt to symbolically sum up the book in some way with the cover. Every author I know has had this impulse and sometimes there is a simple image that can pull this off, but often there isn't.
   - Understanding trim sizes, paperback, hardcover with dust jacket, ebook options. Plan ahead and know what platforms you intend to produce your book in.

3. How to work with a designer if you are self-publishing.
   - You will want to have the manuscript complete before involving a cover designer. The same person may or may not design the interior and cover of the book. Some designers specialize.
   - The old adage, "You get what you pay for" is true here as well. While a cover design doesn't need to break the bank, if someone says they can design your book cover for $50 I'd take a pass.
   - Things your cover designer will need to know:
     - Your book's intended audience
     - Perhaps other titles in the genre that you find appealing or think are examples of successful covers for your type of book. I always appreciate a few ideas from a client at the beginning of the process so I feel that I know their taste and the books niche. REMEMBER: Your book design doesn't need, and should be required, to read your book in order to design it.
   - The front cover design can be developed before the entire book interior is completely designed (and sometimes this is helpful for pre-publication publicity) as long as you know what your trim size will be. The spine will need to be the last design element since it depends on page count and paper thickness to determine its size.
   - If you are going to get "blurbs" start now.

4. How to navigate the design process if you are <u>not</u> self-publishing.
   - Do not be surprised if you have very little control over the design process. In most publishing houses, this is the purview of the marketing department (hopefully in coordination with an editor). A small press might be more flexible, but they are the ones who will be selling the book and they are the ones who will decide how to present it.
   - Unless it is really an objectionable cover, try to let it go. You did the writing. Let the professionals do the design.

5. Important things to consider at the beginning of the design process
   - print vs. ebook vs. both platforms for instance
   - Make sure your manuscript is completely finished and edited before involving a designer. This is especially true for the interior but also a good plan for the cover design as well.
   - If you know you are going to want a particular visual image on the cover, be sure you have attained the rights to use it (if a photo or illustration that you did not create). Your designer will need the image in high resolution (300 dpi at the dimensions it will be use). If you give your designer an image that is the size of a snapshot but only 72 dpi you have tied their hands at the outset.
   - Do you have an author photo? If not and you want one get one done and provide it digitally (again, high resolution) for your designer.
   - It is common practice for a designer to provide up to 3 mockups of design ideas to choose from. It helps the process immensely if you can be as clear in your own mind and in what you communicate to your designer at the beginning of the process.
   - Once a design concept is chosen, go into detail with the designer about the things you want to keep and what you want to change or adjust. Do not then decide to go back and start over, unless of course, you want to pay twice for the project. I actually had a client do this once but they could afford it. Most of us can't!