



Caption ↓

# Amanda Kyle Williams, best-selling crime writer, dies at 61

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By [Helena Oliviero](#)

Best-selling crime writer Amanda Kyle Williams of Decatur died early Friday after a long battle with cancer. She was 61.

AJC editor Ken Foskett [recounted her improbable journey to literary success in a Personal Journey, entitled, “True confessions of a crime writer.”](#)

Foskett met Williams in 2012 at a warm-up event for the AJC Decatur Book Festival. She spoke to the crowd of authors about what the book festival had done for her career, then made a startling revelation: Because of a learning disability she had not read her first book until age 23. She agreed to tell her story after she'd finished writing “Don't Talk to Strangers”



Amanda Kyle Williams prepares to go out to her backyard with her dog Brando in Decatur. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM

She started writing her first crime novel, literally, in her head, as she walked Decatur neighborhoods with her pets, turning over the plot, characters and action in her mind. She took a course in criminology to supplement her knowledge of crime scenes and forensic evidence.

The turning point came that Thanksgiving Day in 2004 when she could suddenly see, hear and feel Keye Street, her central character. She wrote the novel a scene at a time.

When she was done, she researched literary agents who'd had success with crime writers and found Victoria Sanders in New York, who represented Karin Slaughter, another Atlanta crime writer.

Sanders liked the book and told Amanda she thought it would sell. But did she want to write just one book, or did she want to make a living at it? With a little more work, Sanders said, she could help Amanda turn the book into a work that might fetch a six-figure contract.

The proposition was a no-brainer. She already had six years in the book. What was a few more?  [Subscribe for 99¢](#)

In fall 2009, her agent sent the finished manuscript to a half a dozen publishers in New York City.

Back in Decatur one afternoon in November, Amanda was just outside her house, preparing to walk her own dogs, when her agent called. Kate Miciak, the doyenne of crime fiction at Random House, loved the book and wanted to know: Would Amanda give up her dog-walking business and develop Key Street into three books of crime fiction? The contract promised more than \$1 million if she hit sales targets.

Amanda hung up the phone and crumpled onto her front porch, sobbing. A neighbor saw her and called out, Are you all right?

She looked up, the tears washing down her face. Yes, she said, yes, I'm fine.

In February 2014, Williams was diagnosed with stage 3 endometrial cancer. She was going into her fourth chemotherapy treatment when she reached out to photographer Kaylinn Gilstrap to team up to document Williams' cancer journey. Gilstrap was all in, and the BALD was the name of the project.

Williams was known for a love of animals, and her strong supporter of The Fugees Family, a non-profit that supports refugee children and their families .





Alice Murray, a close friend, said Williams would always have a packed house with standing room only when she presented at The AJC Decatur Book Festival.

“She was a good storyteller and built a strong fan base. She did a very good job of cultivating fans on Facebook,” Murray said.

Murray and others also commented on Williams’ “wickedly good sense of humor.”

There was a feral cat she’d try to feed, but every time she offered him food, he’d growl at her, Murray said.

“He was not nice, but she called the cat “Spike” and she made Spike famous by posting videos called, ‘Spike the angry neighbor cat.’”

Murray was part of a group of friends who has provided around the clock companionship for Williams, who was in in-home hospice since May. Williams was always a hard worker, and even after getting sick, continued working on another book. A whiteboard in her office is still covered in notes.

“She was such a fighter, and probably the grittiest person I have ever known,” she said.

In a Facebook post by [LifeLine Animal Project CEO Rebecca Guinn](#), Guinn said Williams worked to build LifeLine’s community cat assistance program.

“She cared for many, many cat colonies and provided support to many more colony caretakers, at all hours of the day and night. She was devoted to dogs as well, ran a flourishing dog-walking business for many years, and never hesitated to help an animal in need,” she said in the post.

“Her beloved Bella, a weak and anemic, flea-ridden puppy I had found, was an instant foster fail who became Amanda’s constant companion.”

Known for her kindness and generosity, Guinn also recalled how Williams’ e-mail signature contained the following quote: “One must think like a hero to behave like a merely decent

contained the following quote, "One must think like a hero to behave like a merely decent human being."



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A memorial service will be announced at a later date. F.L. Sims Funeral Home will be handling the arrangements.

[Read and sign the online guestbook for Amanda Kyle Williams](#)

- This article includes an excerpt from Foskett's personal journey about Williams.

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