

10-1-2011

## Debut Mystery: Angela Gerst '75 Draws on A World of Campaign Intrigue

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum)

---

### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2011) "Debut Mystery: Angela Gerst '75 Draws on A World of Campaign Intrigue," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 24 : No. 1 , Article 29.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol24/iss1/29](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol24/iss1/29)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

# Debut mystery

*Angela Gerst '75 draws on a world of campaign intrigue*

**T**he rough-and-tumble world of Boston politics gets rougher than usual—a couple of murders, for starters—in *A Crack in Everything*, the debut mystery novel by Angela Gerst '75.

The book, just published by mainstream mystery publisher Poisoned Pen Press, centers around amateur sleuth Susan Callisto, a 30-year-old real estate lawyer turned political campaign consultant. When a mysterious biotech entrepreneur walks into her bare-bones office one day and asks her help in running for mayor, Susan is drawn into a web of intrigue. Then people around her start waking up dead, there's a suspicious real estate deal involving her oldest client, a romance with a handsome cop is rekindled—the publisher calls it “a sizzling tale of politics, passion, greed, and murder,” and all of those elements are in ample supply.

“Mysteries were always important to me,” says Gerst, who after law school worked for literary journals, as a *Boston Globe* correspondent and as press secretary for the French Library. “They are a world. They follow a pattern. There's something satisfying to me about creating a world where terrible things happen and where things don't get resolved fully in the old-fashioned way, but some things can be made right.”

Gerst had written a number of short stories, all mysteries, before tackling *A Crack in Everything*. (The title is from a Leonard Cohen song.) The book grows from her own work in organizing and running campaigns for alderman and mayor in Newton, Mass. She had always been impressed with the passion New Englanders brought to local politics, she says, and decided to set a mystery in that milieu, with its strong personalities and dramatic possibilities for betrayal and intrigue. The first draft of the book was massive; following an

agent's advice, she cut it in half (to 270 pages), beefed up the love interest—and when she sent it over the transom, found a willing publisher in Poisoned Pen.

Her young protagonist, Gerst acknowledges, is far from perfect, both as a person and as a lawyer. Susan Callisto has been unlucky in love, and she takes a legal action as power of attorney for an incapacitated client that makes the reader question her judgment. But, Gerst points out, Susan gets her comeuppance for that mistake and it becomes a major plot device.

One mark of distinction for the book, and especially rare for a first novel, is a series of high-profile promotional blurbs by well-known authors. John Barth, a lion of modern literary fiction, calls it “a street-smart, Italian-flavored, Boston-area debut: Gerst knows her turf and renders it entertainingly.”

Perennially best-selling thriller author Lisa Scottoline enthuses: “Welcome to Angela Gerst, who makes an impressive debut with *A Crack in Everything*.”

Looking back on her time at UB Law, Gerst says she recognizes that it developed in her some disciplines that serve a writer well. “I've always been a close reader of things,” she says, “and reading cases and studying them helped me to read carefully and think clearly. More importantly, it forced me to see something through to the end. It was a sea change in the way I began to behave in the world. I learned a little rigor at the Law School, and I did carry it with me.”

Time will tell whether there will be another Susan Callisto mystery. But Gerst says she has another novel—not a mystery—“almost done.” And as she enters this next chapter of the literary life, she has learned a lesson: “Don't give up. If you have the time and the ability and a story to tell, just keep plugging.”



## EXCERPT

The protagonist of *A Crack in Everything*, Susan Callisto, is a lawyer turned political consultant. One of her clients is running for mayor, and she's discussing him over dinner with her sometimes boyfriend, a cop.

“Nobody who is not a serious candidate would put in the energy it takes to collect three hundred signatures in twenty-four hours. It's almost impossible, even with an army of helpers.”

But something Michael had said raised the gray flag of doubt.

*A few pieces of paper.*

I opened the folder and scanned the names and addresses. Six sheets. Row after neat row, every line filled. No spaces, no glitches.

How had I missed it?

In two years of consulting, I had rarely seen a nominating paper with more than thirty signatures. Never ones as clean as these. Signatures were collected piecemeal. Mistakes were made, particularly toward deadline. There should've been a dozen messy sheets in the folder, not six pristine ones.

I slid out of the booth. “Back in a minute.” “Where're you going? Your pizza's turning to rubber.”

I held up the sheets. “Gotta make a few calls.”

