



today's DEALS

# Just Folks: Cleona author Gary Ludwig plumbs depths of controversial Berks County case



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Site



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Lebanon Daily News

Updated: 01/13/2013 08:57:34 PM EST



Author Gary Ludwig works in the office of his Cleona home. The Berks County native recently penned his fourth book, *The Death of Doctor Gilmore's Wife* about a celebrated Berks County murder case. (Earl Brightbill / Lebanon Daily News)

It's often said that if you are going to write a book you should write about what you know.

If that's the case, Cleona author Gary Ludwig has a wealth of material to draw from.

A native of Berks County, 68-year-old Ludwig has carved an interesting life for himself that included an eight-year stint in the U.S. Army followed by a freelance career in broadcast and print journalism.

Recently he completed his fourth book, "*The Death of Doctor Gilmore's Wife.*"

The nonfiction book tells a story familiar to longtime residents of Berks County about the mysterious death of Dr. Irvin Gilmore's beautiful young wife, Patricia, in 1980 and the subsequent trial of the beloved doctor.

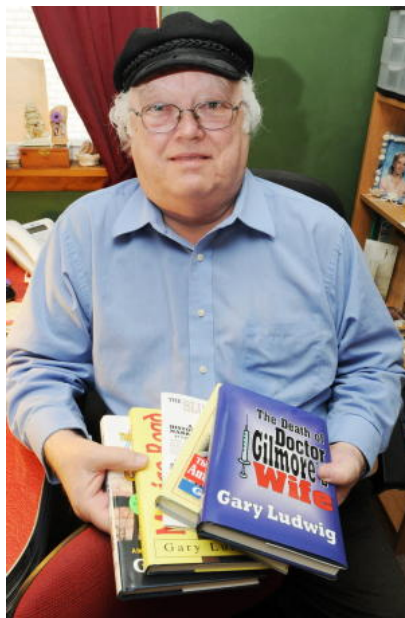
A fan of auto racing, before Ludwig began

writing books much of his career centered on writing for national publications like *Illustrated Speedway News* and doing regional pieces for the *Speedsport Commentary Radio Network*.

He also wrote the biography of local sprint-car racing legend Tommy Hinnershitz, who drove in the Indianapolis 500.

But residents of the Lebanon Valley may best recall Ludwig for his years on country radio station WVLV in Jackson Township. In addition to being the morning deejay, he developed a Pennsylvania Dutch comic persona, Reuben Stoltzfus, who performed at area fairs and events.

Ludwig also worked as WVLV's advertising director. Eventually he parlayed those skills into his own specialty print advertising business, which he and his wife of 32



Sitting in a chair in his office, Cleona author Gary Ludwig displays the four books he has written, including his latest, *The Death of Doctor Gilmore's Wife* about a celebrated Berks County murder case. (Earl Brightbill / Lebanon Daily News)

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years, Beth, still operate.

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It was a four-part story about "The Blue Eyed Six" that Ludwig wrote in 1979 for a small shopper's guide he published called The Community Advertiser that put his life solidly on a literary path.

"I'm still selling it to this day," Ludwig said recently over a cup of coffee at Schwalm's Restaurant in Cleona. "I sold three today in the mail. I sell one just about every day. We send them all over the place to people who left Lebanon 30, 40 years ago."

The story sparked the imagination of brothers Bruce and Brian Kreider, who wrote stage and screen adaptations of the true story about six blue-eyed men from Lebanon County who plotted the murder of another man in 1878 to collect his life insurance. The plot was uncovered and five of the sixth were eventually hanged. The sixth was acquitted.

Ludwig had a role in the Kreider's film documentary.

While he enjoys performing, writing is his true passion.

"I've always wanted to write books," he said. "I always had in the back of my mind, after years of being a journalist in the print and broadcast media. I always wanted to write books. But I never thought I'd have the opportunity."

Ludwig published his first book, "Mexico Road" in 2006. Set in Berks County after World War II, the romantic crime novel tells the story of an unlikely detective, a young brethren girl who uncovers a murder while becoming entangled in a forbidden relationship with a local boy.

He followed that up in 2008 with "The Angels and Demons of Hamlin" a science-fantasy novel set during the Civil War area in the small village near Fredericksburg.

An avid reader of American history, Ludwig confessed that novels are more fun to write but non-fiction and especially true crime stories are more lucrative.

Familiar with the Gilmore murder story and some of the personalities involved, Ludwig decided to make it the topic of his latest book after refreshing his memory by reading newspaper articles and some of the trial transcripts.

"I went to the courthouse," he recalled. "I started reading some of the transcripts. I spent about an hour on my first visit there and said, 'Yeah, there's a story there. This is a book.'"

The community was sharply divided over Gilmore's guilt in the death of his wife, Ludwig said. Twenty-two years his junior, the 36-year-old was found dead of an apparent injection of Demerol in her home on Thanksgiving morning in 1980.

Gilmore's adoring patients refused to believe he could have killed his young wife, while others judged him for his penchant for drinking and believed he killed her in a jealous rage, Ludwig said.

Because of the controversy, Ludwig said, he took a strictly journalistic approach in his presentation of the story, which has a surprising conclusion.

It took him over a year to painstakingly research all the documents and interview as many participants of the case as he could, including Judge Forrest Schaeffer.

"There is no speculation in this book," he said. "When I started the book I asked myself, 'Am I going to speculate? Am I going to say, 'He killed her.' Or, 'No, he didn't kill her.'" I decided I'm not going to write a book like that."

Although based locally, Ludwig said, the aspects of the story have universal appeal - something he looks for in all of his writing subjects.

"I'm looking to be a nationally recognized writer," he said. "By that I don't mean I want to be famous. I want my works to be nationally recognized. And I think the Gilmore book fits that criteria."

All four of Ludwig's books are published by Basket Road Press and are available on Amazon.

*Each Monday in the Lebanon Daily News, "Just Folks" tells the stories of ordinary people who live, work and play in the Lebanon Valley.*



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