

# Obituaries

## Douglas Anne Munson, 54; Her Novels Took a Raw Look at L.A.

By JON THURBER  
Times Staff Writer

Douglas Anne Munson, the author of three well-regarded novels that explored the hard edges of Los Angeles at the turn of the 21st century, has died. She was 54.

Munson died of cancer Dec. 22 at a hospital in Norwalk, Conn., according to Lucas Crown, a writer and friend.

"El Nino," her stark first novel, explored the underworld of child abuse and abusers in the criminal court system in Los Angeles, which Munson knew well after working more than a decade as an attorney in dependency court.

Published in 1990, the book was generally well-regarded by critics, including novelist Kate Braverman, who wrote in a Times review that Munson's work "burns with radiance and intensity. It speaks in tongues, as all visionary art does."

A notice in Publishers Weekly called that first novel "a raw, sometimes ugly book that will distress but not fail to move."

Munson's two other novels, "Dogtown" and "Soul-town," written under the pseudonym Mercedes Lambert, introduced two female detectives — attorney Whitney Logan and former prostitute Lupe Ramos — to mystery fans.

Carolyn See, writing of "Dogtown" for The Times, called it "an excellent, fresh, indigenous thriller."

Named Douglas for an uncle who had been killed in World War II, Munson was born in Crossville, Tenn., the only child of a newspaperman.

Her childhood was less than idyllic: The family moved from town to town across the country as her fa-

ther shifted from paper to paper.

"I can't remember a single friend I had as a child," Munson told a Times reporter in 1990. "Someone once told me I seemed to be a person raised by wolves."

Her father eventually took a job with the Disney studios, writing industrial films, and the family moved to Los Angeles.

Munson's early efforts to write were not encouraged at home.

"Dad always told me that I couldn't write, that I shouldn't write," she told The Times. "He told me it's a tough gig; he didn't think I could cut it."

Munson went off to the University of New Mexico, as much to escape her family as for an education. She majored in Latin American studies and lived for a year in

Ecuador.

On returning to the United States, she went to law school at UCLA.

But as she told The Times years ago, the daily assault on innocence that she witnessed in dependency court finally got to her.

To confront her pain, she turned to writing. She worked on her novels at night while taking private workshops with writer and teacher John Rechy.

In an interview with The Times on Thursday, Rechy remembered Munson's writing as "intensely passionate and very sensitive."

"Her books were very tough but also vulnerable," he added. "She had an astonishing vulnerability."

Munson quit the law after her second book was published.

She taught a creative writ-

ing course at UCLA and later learned to teach English as a second language.

She taught briefly in San Francisco before taking a teaching post in the Czech Republic.

Munson, who had successfully fought breast cancer while writing "El Nino" in the late 1980s, was diagnosed again with cancer while living in Prague. She returned to the United States, settling in Westport, Conn., and seeking treatment.

Crown, her literary executor, said that she had completed a fourth novel, "Ghost-town," and that efforts will be made to have it published posthumously.

Information on survivors was not immediately available.

A memorial service to be held in Los Angeles is being planned, Crown said.



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### DOUGLAS ANNE MUNSON

*The author was also an attorney and taught creative writing at UCLA. She studied with writer John Rechy, who called her work "intensely passionate."*