

**A Journalist in the Rough:
How Reporter Eve Diamond Blurs the Line Between
Professional Standards and Personal Life All in Pursuit of a Story**

By Amanda Pazornik

I would be the best reporter The Times had ever seen. I would break stories, get noticed and work my way up the ranks.¹

Eve Diamond's goals as a reporter reflect the three basic accomplishments that so many journalists strive for throughout their careers. Yet, Diamond's experiences as a female reporter covering the greater Los Angeles area are anything but ordinary. She discards the golden rules of journalism and allows her emotions to take over as she pries into the lives of her subjects, developing personal attachments toward them, and subsequently finds herself in danger because of her actions.

Diamond's role at the *Los Angeles Times* is one that has plagued female journalists for decades. In his essay, *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, author Joe Saltzman writes that the female journalist faces an ongoing dilemma of how to combine masculine traits (being aggressive, self-reliant, curious, tough and ambitious) with feminine traits (compassionate, caring, loving and maternal) so she can compete with male counterparts, but maintain the characteristics society expects from her.²

Denise Hamilton, former *Los Angeles Times* reporter and author of the five-part mystery series featuring Eve Diamond, says Eve is her wilder alter ego. "She dodges more bullets than I ever did as a reporter, collars more bad guys and alas, saves more innocent people than I ever did."³

Lois Lane and James Bond

*Jesus, Eve. I could stick you in an empty intersection and within five minutes, there'd be a five-car pile-up. It's like you've got a radar.*⁴

Though her colleagues find it comical to call her by these nicknames, Diamond's style of reporting suggests that she takes her comparisons to the fictional investigative greats very seriously.

"My hat is off to you, Lois Lane. Never a moment's hesitation."⁵ In Hamilton's novels, copy messenger Luke Vinograd thinks Eve Diamond is the best reporter at the *Los Angeles Times*. For the last 70 years, Lois Lane has been known as the best female reporter in popular culture.

Lane and Clark Kent teamed up at the *Daily Planet* to pursue truth and justice in the *Superman* series.⁶ Diamond accepts her role as the "Lois Lane" of reporters at *The Times* and will do anything in her power to solve the mystery by deadline.

Diamond's wild investigations materialize from either a tip off the newswires or more commonly, when she is following a lead for a different news story. In *Prisoner of Memory*, Hamilton's latest novel, John Trabuco, *The Times* assistant city editor, sends Eve to L.A.'s Griffith Park to investigate a mountain lion sighting. As she follows California Fish and Game tracker Jeff Knightsbridge through the park, they both make a grim discovery: the body of a teenage boy who was shot to death, execution style. "Notepad still in hand, I steeled myself away to look at the corpse. It's odd how the brain absorbs death in layers."⁷ Eve studies this boy's lifeless body like an artist surveying his own masterpiece, seeking out any details that she can use in her stories.

Hamilton's third mystery, *Last Lullaby*, starts with Diamond in a similar predicament. Eve spends her day shadowing U.S. Customs Supervisor William Maxwell, who has been

watching a suspicious incoming flight from Beijing. As the passengers pour out into the terminal, shots ring out, and three people are killed. Diamond just happens to be at the scene, but contemplates running for safety before jumping into the chaotic situation to get the story.

“I wanted to flee, to run out of this terminal, back to my car, and out of the airport. Part of me did run screaming out of that airport, shaking with fear and babbling incoherently. I let her go. Then I stepped forward. I had a job to do.”⁸

Surveying a dead body or thrusting herself into a volatile area only makes Eve more passionate about the story breaking in front of her. She has the “right place, right time” luck; however, there are times when Eve wants to put her profession second and her personal life first. Unfortunately, this never happens.

Eve is invited to attend the opening night of “*Our Lady of the Barrio*” in Hamilton’s fourth novel, *Savage Garden*. With her front-row ticket in hand, Diamond thinks the night will be perfect as she and her boyfriend Silvio Aguilar watch a play created by Alfonso Reventon, a former gang member and Silvio’s best friend.⁹ Yet, when the lead actress misses the curtain call, Eve’s potentially wonderful night quickly transforms into a missing person investigation.

“My vision of a romantic evening, a shared drink at the fountain, holding hands in the darkened theater, vanished.”¹⁰ Once again, Eve finds herself in the midst of a breaking story when all she really wants is to enjoy an evening as Silvio’s girlfriend and not as a reporter who has just been handed the lead to a possible front-page story.

Maternal Instinct

*Why was it that I was so drawn to teenagers in trouble? Was it because I had narrowly escaped their fate at that age? Because I had been unable to save others I had met through work? Christ, if I felt that strongly about it, why didn't I just quit journalism and open up Eve Diamond's Reform School for Troubled Teens?*¹¹

A common thread that ties Hamilton's five novels together is Eve's desire to protect and save children. Hamilton says this quality in Eve originates from her own reporting days. "Ah, that goes back to wish fulfillment, all the kids I wanted to save as a reporter, take home, feed and bathe, etc. and didn't."¹²

Hamilton's first novel, *The Jasmine Trade*, is based on a *Times* Column One article she wrote about parachute kids, Asian children who live a wealthy and lonely life in the United States while their parents run lucrative businesses overseas.¹³

When Eve hears about 17-year-old Marina Lu who has been carjacked and murdered in San Marino, Calif., she formulates an investigation and befriends some parachute kids to help her understand the reasons for the recent violence. Tony and Lily Hsu are two of her sources.

Eve wants to preserve Tony and Lily's innocence in regard to dealing with the media. She hopes to slowly gain their confidence so they will forget she was a reporter.¹⁴

As she attempts to coax information out of Tony, Eve also confides in him, describing moments in her own life that she has kept secret, including the death of her brother when they were teens.

"I had confessed my sins to a 17-year-old boy. It was a relief to let it out after more than a decade of pretending it didn't exist. I barely knew this kid. Yet I felt something for him, something I thought had died with Matthew."¹⁵

Eve pleads with 14-year-old Lily Hsu to help her solve Marina Lu's murder. She treats Lily like a junior reporter when she discovers Lily has Marina's diary, a gold mine of

information for Eve. At first, Lily is reluctant to let Eve read it, but she persuades Lily that releasing the diary is the right choice to make.

“Of course it wouldn’t be right. But it would be journalism...so I smiled into Lily’s eyes and seduced her with my word pictures into giving me that murdered girl’s diary. And in the end, it shamed me how easy it was to win her over.”¹⁶

Eve wants to save Tony and his sister Lily from a life of gangs, crime and murder. It becomes her personal mission even though being removed from her two teenaged sources is the ethical decision to make. She questions what void she tries to fill in her life by keeping Tony safe: “What *was* Tony to me? A symbol of an earlier loss? A link to a good story and possible promotion? A troubled youth I wanted to help? And why? Since when was I Lady Bountiful?”¹⁷

Diamond acts on impulse when it comes to helping children, then realizes the repercussions of her actions afterward. In *Last Lullaby*, Eve is almost killed when she tries to save a toddler who has been smuggled into the United States carrying a teddy bear stuffed with heroin. She initially focuses on the newsworthy aspect of the incident. “Missing and abandoned kids made for hot stories. Sure they were tragic, but they were also media catnip.”¹⁸

She later realizes the child, Serey Rath, needs an ally, and her search takes her into L.A.’s sleazy hotels, cyber cafés and into the high-powered milieu of trendy restaurants and high-powered human rights lawyers.¹⁹

At the end of *Last Lullaby*, Eve has Serey in her custody as she races to escape thugs who are sent to retrieve the toddler. Eve nestles Serey on the passenger side floor of her car and embarks on a car chase through the hills of Echo Park. Eve puts herself in danger this time, not to get the story, but to save a little girl’s life.

“I pressed on the gas and shot forward, only to see a second car bearing down on me from the right. I wrenched the steering wheel to left...barreling through the narrow street as it rose up into the hills. Behind me, I heard a screech of wheels. Someone was gaining on me.”²⁰

Just as Eve befriends parachute kids Tony and Lily Hsu in *The Jasmine Trade*, she offers another troubled teen support in Hamilton’s second mystery, *Sugar Skull*. She befriends Scout, a drug addict who wears Girl Scout uniforms so she can look more innocent than she really is. Scout knew Isabel, a girl who was stabbed multiple times and then wrapped in a futon and left to die.

Eve tempts Scout with fast food so she can gain her trust. “There’s plenty for both of us. Look, I just want to talk to you about Isabel. I’m not a social worker. I’m just a journalist.”²¹

Yet, Eve is a journalist who crosses the line between treating the kids she helps like sources or her own children. This thought pops into her mind when she rushes Scout to the hospital after the teenager becomes violently ill.

“I thought about how reporters weren’t supposed to get personally involved with sources, how it was the worst thing you could do. I thought about all that, then I gathered [Scout] in my arms and tried to stand up.”²²

Once again, Eve picks heroism over journalism as she tries to keep another troubled child alive and out of danger.

The Los Angeles Times

*My city had been wrenched from the desert, willed into being by brute force and circus barkers who sold people on a mass hallucination that became a reality. And for generations, the loudest of those barkers had been my newspaper, the Los Angeles Times.*²³

Eve works with a variety of journalists at the *Los Angeles Times*. She covers the San Gabriel Valley beat in the first four novels and is promoted to the Metro section at downtown headquarters in *Prisoner of Memory*.

She develops a variety of relationships with other staff members who often provide commentary about Eve Diamond as a reporter and as a friend.

The journalists in Hamilton's newsroom reflect the role of the press when it began to attract a mass readership. In Howard Good's novel, *Acquainted with the Night*, a work that defined the image of the journalist in American fiction, he writes: "For the first time, [reporters] were actors in the drama of the newspaper world." Hamilton wanted to capture the excitement of journalists in the early 1900s in her fictional *Los Angeles Times*. She created a publication that "relied on large numbers of [reporters] to gather and write stories of sex, violence, scandal, tragedy and farce,"²⁴ which was like many of the first newspapers.

Hamilton introduces her readers to Luz Beltran, one of the few openly gay female journalists in the newsroom.²⁵ Eve and Luz are friendly with each other from the start of Eve's adventures because they share a common ground: they are both female journalists at a male-dominated newspaper. The two gossip about sources, including Eve's first source and romantic interest Mark Furukawa.

"This morning I found myself fantasizing about a 55-year-old guy I was interviewing, for God's sake...if he only knew what I was thinking."²⁶

Luz responds to Eve by saying that the Mark she knows gets around. "I've run into Mark on a few stories, and I have one word for you on that action. Player. He's a little too cool for his own good."²⁷

Eve appreciates Luz for being completely straight with her when other male journalists at the paper just want to show off. Trevor Fingerhaven is one of them.

Trevor, a former *New York Post* reporter, obsesses over scandals and lets his colleagues know this every time his phone rings. “Trevor saw conspiracies everywhere he looked and interrogated sources at full volume so none of us could concentrate on our own stories.”²⁸

Everyone knows Trevor as the notorious eavesdropper in the newsroom, gathering bits of information about his fellow staffers to stash for later use.²⁹

Eve seeks out a friendship with Luke Vinograd, the senior copy messenger at the *Times*. Vinograd, the second openly gay staff member, makes his first appearance in *Sugar Skull* as Eve’s confidant. Eve recognizes great potential in Vinograd at *The Times*, but he remains satisfied at his current job. “By now he should have been running the place, but something had stalled him...”³⁰

Eve depends on Luke when she is on the trail of a new lead. He always manages to have the upper hand when Eve requests information from *The Times*.

Jane Sims, the Metro editor at the San Gabriel Valley bureau where Eve works tirelessly, is the typical hard-nosed editor who thinks everyone’s work is mediocre compared with her own.

When Sims is in the office, she always bothers Eve about her tendency to get too involved with her sources, in between making fun of her state school education. “‘Well Eve,’ she said with a false heartiness, ‘have you ever considered taking classes at USC? It’s just that...they do such a fine job of teaching over there. It’s a first-rate school.’ I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.”³¹

Sims’ relentless nagging propels Eve to work that much harder at her job, even if she knows Jane thinks of her as a less qualified reporter.

Sims is not the only person who stands over Eve's shoulder, watching every key stroke. Josh Brandywine, a competitive reporter with an Ivy League education, is Eve's biggest competition.

Yet, competition leads to partnership as Eve and Josh start off as rivals, but soon discover they can work well together on investigative pieces. "Metro had paired me with Josh Brandywine on a double byline for the main bar. Josh was both my nemesis and my friend. We competed lustily for stories but once they were put to bed, we went out for drinks and dissected how we could have done it better."³²

Josh and Eve make a good reporting team even if Eve tells her editors otherwise: Eve lures sources with her charm and appearance while Josh fires questions, hoping to get the angle he knows his editor will want.

Josh and Eve work together in Hamilton's latest novel, *Prisoner of Memory*. When Eve's editor, John Trabuco, explains that there are "too many leads for one person to follow," he puts Josh on the story to help Eve with the intricate details of the case.³³

Bitter and frustrated, Eve must work with Josh, whom she calls "a second-generation journalistic aristocrat."³⁴ Brandywine comes from a long line of journalists; his father was a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*. But this does not impress Eve at all. Though she calls him a friend at times, Eve knows that working with Josh on this particular case could be ugly. "But putting us on the same story was like tossing two tigers into a compound that held only one scrawny goat trembling behind a bush. We'd tear each other apart to get to it first."³⁵

Yet as the story develops, Eve warms up to Josh and allows him to be actually worried for her safety. This is apparent when Eve and Josh confront a powerful figure in the Russian

community in Los Angeles. Eve is thrust into a potentially dangerous situation, and Josh wants to be with her, if only to be a male companion who stands by her side.

“‘Eve,’ Josh’s voice said in my ear, ‘where did you disappear to? They kept me cooling my jets outside for 40 minutes. I threatened to call the police but they said it was a private club...I’m at your car. Come on over.’ ‘I hung up, relieved to see Josh’s figure in the dark. I ran up and his arms enveloped me. It was so comforting...’”³⁶

For once, Eve puts her hard-nosed personality on the shelf, and allows herself to be comforted by a man who truly understands what she goes through every day.

The Journalist in Denise Hamilton

*Had I not been a journalist, I could never have written a journo character like Eve, at least not at the outset of my literary career.*³⁷

Denise Hamilton took every aspect of journalism she learned during her 10-year career at the *Los Angeles Times* and used it to create her Eve’s character. Hamilton wanted to take her readers back to the days when newsrooms were vibrant and alive. Now she says newspapers are more like insurance offices. “These days, newsrooms are more like insurance offices than wild unbridled freewheeling places that they used to be generations ago, when everyone had a bottle in their bottom drawer, made things up regularly, bribed sources, etc.”³⁸

Hamilton found the old style newsroom more exciting than today’s more sterile environment. She wanted to return to old-fashioned journalism, and creating a character like Eve was a wish fulfilled.

She compares journalism in the real world with her fictional portrayal. According to Hamilton, in the real world, the killers are rarely caught, and the journalist feels the need to

remain completely objective and not become personally involved. Eve Diamond breaks through these conventional ideals.

“In my books, Eve does get very personally involved and moves into some gray ethical areas. But by the end of my books, justice is always served, in either a neat or messy way. And we know that isn’t always the case in real life.”³⁹

Though Eve may be a flawed journalist in that respect, she is determined, tenacious and will risk her life to get a scoop for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Final Thoughts

*“If there was such a thing as a cosmic report card, mine would indubitably say: Does not play well with others.”*⁴⁰

Eve Diamond mimics the first female journalists of film, better known as Hollywood’s Sob Sisters. “From the beginning, women reporters were independent, hard-boiled dames ready and willing to do anything their male counterparts would do to get the story.”⁴¹ Eve swerves through the hills of Echo Park during a wild car chase, stares down the barrel of a gun on numerous accounts, receives ominous threats on her life and generally puts herself in grave danger just to get the story in by deadline.

Eve puts romance and family life at a distant second and third because reporting is number one. Boyfriends come and go, while her family life remains as much of a mystery as the cases she attempts to solve. Eve is the “independent, hardworking reporter who never lets her newspaper down.”⁴² Because Eve is often on the scene of a breaking story, she rarely has to

cover the “social news and women’s page features” like many of the budding female reporters on big city papers.⁴³

In a way, Diamond sheds the traditional Sob Sister image. She exudes a sense of independence and tenacity in and out of the newsroom, and would never be assigned to cover the emotional aspects of a story. Her editors know better. While the Sob Sisters of the 1930s worked as “women news reporters who appealed to readers’ sympathies with their accounts of pathetic happenings,”⁴⁴ Eve connects with her readers through her stellar reporting of the facts that so often unravel before her eyes.

Endnotes

¹ *The Jasmine Trade*, 63

² *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture* Web site www.ijpc.org

³ E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006

⁴ *Last Lullaby*, 17

⁵ *Sugar Skull*, 166

⁶ *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*

⁷ *Prisoner of Memory*, 4

⁸ *Last Lullaby*, 7

⁹ *Savage Garden*, 3

¹⁰ *Savage Garden*, 3

¹¹ *Sugar Skull*, 187

¹² E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006

¹³ E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006

¹⁴ *The Jasmine Trade*, 83

¹⁵ *The Jasmine Trade*, 165

¹⁶ *The Jasmine Trade*, 98

¹⁷ *The Jasmine Trade*, 184

¹⁸ *Last Lullaby*, 27

¹⁹ *Last Lullaby* Web site www.denisehamilton.com

²⁰ *Last Lullaby*, 297

²¹ *Sugar Skull*, 175

²² *Sugar Skull*, 179

²³ *Savage Garden*, 1-2

²⁴ *Acquainted with the Night: The Image of Journalists in American Fiction, 1890-1930*, 4

²⁵ *The Jasmine Trade*, 34

²⁶ *The Jasmine Trade*, 34

²⁷ *The Jasmine Trade*, 35

²⁸ *The Jasmine Trade*, 35

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- ²⁹ *The Jasmine Trade*, 36
³⁰ *Sugar Skull*, 8
³¹ *Sugar Skull*, 28-29
³² *Last Lullaby*, 37
³³ *Prisoner of Memory*, 34
³⁴ *Prisoner of Memory*, 34
³⁵ *Prisoner of Memory*, 34
³⁶ *Prisoner of Memory*, 290-91
³⁷ E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006
³⁸ E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006
³⁹ E-mail from Denise Hamilton, March 30, 2006.
⁴⁰ *Sugar Skull*, 50
⁴¹ *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 54
⁴² *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 54
⁴³ *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 55
⁴⁴ *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 55

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Good, Howard. 1986. *Acquainted with the Night: The Image of Journalists in American Fiction, 1890-1930*. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Hamilton, Denise. *Home Page*. www.denisehamilton.com (accessed March 24, 2006).

Hamilton, Denise. 2006. *Last Lullaby*. New York: Scribner.

While shadowing a customs official at LAX, Eve Diamond becomes a witness as gunfire breaks out in a nearby terminal. An Asian woman is killed, and her toddler is taken away by INS. Eve suspects the toddler is being used by smugglers who trade human lives for drugs.

As Eve searches for the killers, her investigation turns to protecting the missing girl from armed men who want to kill Eve as well.

Hamilton, Denise. 2006. *Prisoner of Memory*. New York: Scribner.

While investigating a mountain lion sighting in the hills of the San Gabriel Valley, Eve discovers the body of a teenage boy who has been shot to death in what looks like an execution. She later learns he was the son of a Russian scientist, and had no ties to gangs or drugs.

Eve tackles this story with Josh Brandywine, a rival police reporter. Together, they sift through all the details of the boy's murder, which leads them on a wild and dangerous chase with Russian mobsters and questionable FBI agents.

Eve and Josh must hurry to complete their investigation before they both end up like the Russian teen: dead.

Hamilton, Denise. 2005. *Savage Garden*. New York: Scribner.

Eve Diamond has been looking forward to a romantic date with her new boyfriend, Silvio Aguilar. She dreams of the perfect night at the theater, and then a wonderful evening after to celebrate their new romance.

But when the play's leading actress does not show up for her curtain call, Eve quickly learns that Silvio and the missing woman once knew each other in the past. And Silvio's best friend, Alfonso Reventon, may know more than he lets on when he tells Silvio to go look for the missing star, Catarina Velosi.

Sensing an exciting story in the works, Eve again becomes involved in the intricate details of the case. She tracks every potential suspect, which includes her own boyfriend, en route to finding out what happened to Catarina.

Hamilton, Denise. 2003. *Sugar Skull*. New York: Scribner.

It was a quiet morning at the San Gabriel Valley bureau of the *Los Angeles Times*, when a distraught father runs past security to beg for Eve Diamond's help. Of course, Eve cannot refuse following this stranger who mysteriously appears in her office.

His teenage daughter, stuck in the rough "squatter" lifestyle, goes missing, and Eve wants to know why a privileged teen from Pasadena would want to spend time with other low-life teens in Hollywood.

Yet, when the girl is found dead, Eve suspects there's more to the story than just the tragic death of a rebellious teenager.

Once again, Eve starts an investigation, which takes her to the street world of drugs and sex, but also to the elitist world in Los Angeles. Eve wrestles with the wealthy and the poor as she tries to unmask the killer who could strike again at any moment.

Hamilton, Denise. 2001. *The Jasmine Trade*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp.

When a victim is found dead in an upscale shopping center parking lot with her pricey engagement ring still around her finger, it looks like one of the many carjackings that have been occurring throughout the San Gabriel Valley. But *Los Angeles Times* reporter Eve Diamond knows there must be more to the story.

As Eve uncovers more and more details about the victim, 17-year-old Marina Lu, she finds herself immersed in sex slavery rings, drugged by Asian gang members and all the while, searching for any more clues that can lead her to the killer.

But when Eve learns that someone wants to keep the illegal activity a secret, she becomes a target, running from enemies who were once her prime sources.

Pazornik, Amanda, e-mail to Denise Hamilton. (March 30, 2006).

Saltzman, Joe. 2002. *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*.
Los Angeles: Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, Norman Lear Center.

Saltzman, Joe. *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Pop Culture*.
www.ijpc.org (accessed March 25, 2006).