

Retired educator writes under pen name

Q. Who is Helene Mitchell and what is her tie to the Magic Valley?

A. “Most people in the Magic Valley know me as Gail Cushman, which is my given/married name,” said Gail Cushman, author of 11 books. “I taught English and a variety of other subjects at Gooding High School, before becoming principal of Jerome High School. I wrote a column for the Times-News called ‘Academics Count’ for several years.”



KIMBERLY WILLIAMS-BRACKETT

Cushman is working on two more books. “Helene Mitchell is my pen name...Helene is my middle name, and Mitchell is my new husband’s last name,” Cushman said. “My first husband, Judge Thomas Cushman, passed away in 2021 of a plethora of complications from Agent Orange he received during the Vietnam conflict. He was the Magistrate Judge in Gooding from 1982 to 1996.

“Two years after he passed away, I married Robert Mitchell, a Montana rancher, and we live in Columbus, Mont. We met online and our love story has been documented in our book, *Loving Again: A Guide to Online Dating for Widows and Widowers*.”

She is an Idaho-born girl, born in Boise, graduated from Emmett High School, then went off to college, to Texas Woman’s University in Denton.

“Three years later I graduated



Cushman

and joined the Marine Corps, as an officer. Vietnam was raging and I wanted to do my part. My job was to pay the Marines as they returned from service in Vietnam. We paid in cash, and I would meet the Marines at the airport with suitcases of money. At that time credit cards were new and there was no such thing as a debit card. I served three years before getting married. My husband went to Vietnam, and I returned to Boise. When Tom came back, the Marines moved us to Pensacola, Fla., and he finished out his USMC commitment and we both returned to school. I earned a master’s degree and Tom received his law degree from the University of Florida.”

Cushman has two children: Cole, who lives in Nome, Alaska, and Elizabeth, who lives in Eagle.

“I began writing novels in 2021 after Tom died,” Cushman said. “Previously I had written grants for schools, and was quite successful at it, but one month in 2002, I sat down and wrote a book for fun (*Murder in the Diocese*). It laid on my thumb-drive shelf for nearly 20 years, until Robert encouraged me to publish it. I now have five books in the Maggie Monroe Series (mysteries): *Murder in the Parsonage*, *Murder Almost*, *Murder in the Brothel*, *Murder in the Diocese*, and my newest one, *Murder on the Rez*, about the missing and murdered Indigenous women,

mostly on the Crow Reservation in southwest Montana.”

“I wrote another series, the *Wrinkly Bits Series*, which are romantic comedies about people of certain age...the characters are senior citizens who live in rural Idaho, and decide to head out for adventure. They take me on a cruise, to Sun Valley, to Portland, and to Florida where they indulge in hijinks. Those books are *Cruise Time*, *Out of Time*, *Wasting Time*, and *Flash of Time*. They find themselves in hot water more than once,” Cushman said.

“I use Helene Mitchell for my mystery series and Gail Cushman for my Facebook blogs, newspaper columns (Stillwater County News in Columbus, Mont.), and my first book series, called *Wrinkly Bits*. I compiled my Facebook blogs into a book, called *Bits of Time*. My readers tell me they remind them of Erma Bombeck’s stories.

“Tom’s law career and my education career took us to several places, and I worked at a variety of schools: Emmett High School, Highland High School, Timberline High School, Gooding High School, Jerome High School, and finally to Bishop Kelly High School. I then went to prison... not as an inmate, rather as the Director of Education for the Department of Corrections and was instrumental in providing 3,500 GED diplomas for Idaho’s incarcerated.”

“My husband, Robert, is a cowboy poet, and has performed at the Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Lewistown, Mont., and in Elko, Nev.,” she said. “We

both write and we travel, cruising, boating in our own boat, and seeing things we haven’t seen before. We just returned from a trip to Greece, Istanbul, Venice, and Paris, which gives me lots of writing material.”

Cushman was asked how she writes her murder mysteries if they’re based on historical fiction.

“*Murder in the Diocese* and *Murder in the Parsonage* have quite a lot of reality in them. They deal with coverups in the Catholic Church which are widely known,” she said. “The academy award winner *Spotlight* [a thriller/crime movie] was about the same thing. I wrote *Diocese* long before that movie came out but didn’t get it published. *Murder on the Rez* is ongoing issues with missing and murdered indigenous women, a very hot topic in Montana and South Dakota. Hundreds disappear every year. *Murder Almost* is out of my brain about wrongfully incarcerated people. *Murder in the Brothel* is from a real case (sort of) with poetic license. The romantic comedies are just brainless stories.”

You can learn more about Gail/Helene at gailcushman.com. All of her books, soft cover or Kindle, are available on Amazon or through her website. Books are only autographed if ordered through her personal website.

Email your question to timesnewscuriousmind@gmail.com with “Curious Mind” in the subject line.