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## Avon lawyer David Miraldi pens book on murder trial of Casper Bennett



Sixty-four-year-old Avon native David Miraldi stands next to a photo he shot while vacationing in Moscow, Russia. The photo, featuring a young girl standing in the Garden of Fallen Monuments, and many other pieces of work by Miraldi, can be found along the hallway walls of the Lorain County Judges' chambers.

Eric Bonzar—The Morning Journal



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Map: 13 West College St., Oberlin

By **Keith Reynolds**, *The Morning Journal*

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David P. Miraldi and his brother Lorain County Common Pleas Court Judge James L. Miraldi were just boys when their family's phone rang in 1963.

The call was from the jailhouse and was intended for their father, Ray Miraldi, who had been a Lorain city prosecutor and now represented clients in civil matters as part of his private practice.

What followed the phone call is the basis of David Miraldi's historical novel "[The Edge of Innocence: The Trial of Casper Bennett](#)."

"It's based on the 1964 murder trial of Casper Bennett; a man accused of drowning his wife in a bathtub of scalding water," explained Miraldi, a 64-year-old Avon resident. "My father was one of the two defense attorneys that handled the case."

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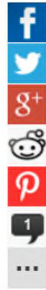
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Miraldi was interested in the case when he was 10 years old and took that jailhouse phone call, which he believes was Bennet himself. But, a discovery 40 years really started the ball rolling.

"Forty years after the trial and 20 years after my father died, I found parts of his file in my mother's closet," Miraldi said. "My dad had apparently taken this home



with him.”

Miraldi said it took another five years for him to get around to opening file, but when he did what he found was captivating.

“I was really hooked on the case, on the story,” he said. “It has a lot of twists and turns and I wanted to write a story that, perhaps, provided some new insights, some new information, and write it in a narrative form; more as a novel than as nonfiction.”

For help in writing the tale, Miraldi investigated the easiest place to find information about what happens at a Lorain County courthouse — the newspaper.

“The first place I went was to go to the microfiche and look at the (local newspapers),” he said. “Their reporting was actually terrific for the trial. It was very lengthy articles. There wasn’t a witness that didn’t get at least a sentence in their stories.”

Miraldi said he didn’t have a transcript of the court trial while writing his novel, but did have a transcript from a preliminary hearing and an article from True Police magazine.

“I sought to get the prosecutor’s file 50 years after the case, but it was destroyed,” he said. “But, through some searching, the Lorain police still had their file and with a public records request I got the complete police file which gave me a tremendous amount of background on the witnesses and theories and really helped to flesh out the case.”

Miraldi said this is his first real foray into writing for an audience. He’d written something as an exercise a decade ago, but never intended to publish it.

“It’s not very good,” he said with a laugh. “I’ve always loved to write. As a lawyer, you always write briefs and that was part of the practice of law that I enjoyed the most and took pride in.”

Miraldi said the Bennett case is a uniquely Lorain story.

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“The case and the story have appeal, particularly for people in Lorain, because it is set in Lorain in the mid-1960s when Lorain was this thriving manufacturing center and we had an excellent public school system,” he said. “It was a city with optimistic people and it is fun to go back and revisit the Lorain from that period.”

He said the story is also filled with lessons that can be useful today.

“Through the story you gain some knowledge of the criminal justice system and you see the limitations of the criminal justice system,” he said. “Almost everyone involved in this case were first generation children of immigrants and with immigration such a hot topic in this country, I think it’s valuable to see what great contributions these immigrants and their children made to our community and not forget that lesson.”

At the same time, Miraldi recognizes that the city, and subsequently its crimes, has changed.

“I don’t think there were many homicide or murder trials back in the mid-’60s,” he said. “This is in the era before Court TV and sensationalism. People would line up at the courthouse to witness the trial and experience it.

“Lorain was a far less violent place than it is today and that’s what made a murder trial so sensational back then,” he continued.

In addition to his novel, Miraldi’s creative side also finds outlet in his photography. His brightly colored exotic photos line the hallways leading to the county judges’ chambers at the Lorain County Justice Center.

Miraldi said he’s been taking photos since he was in his early teens and he got into it because of his lack of other visual arts skills.

“I do like to travel,” he said. “I like to photograph people and I like a photograph that engages the viewer. I’m fascinated by people from all parts of the world and all walks of life.

“I want the person that’s looking at the picture to think that perhaps there’s a story behind this or I engages the viewer by asking questions





about the person in the photo; what are they doing, what is their life like?"

"The Edge of Innocence: The Trial of Casper Bennett" is available at Nielsen's Jewelers, 753 Broadway Ave. in Lorain, and Jax Store for Men, 36840 Detroit Road in Avon, which are both mentioned in the book. It is also available on [Amazon](#) and at [Barnes and Noble](#) in Westlake.

Miraldi will also be holding a book signing at 2 p.m. on Dec. 2 at Ben Franklin, 13 West College St. in Oberlin.

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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