

Murder, mayhem, the IRA and an Irish pub

Guilford's Bill Black presents international thriller at Dudley Farm on Sunday

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By Lisa Reisman

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NORTH GUILFORD » We all have them, family stories passed down from generation to generation.

In an enterprise that took 17 years to complete, North Guilford's Bill Black has spun his own into "Bottom Line Murder," a page-turning cliff-hanger of murder, bribery, and international terrorism.

Black will read passages from his book and take questions at the Munger Barn of the Dudley Farm Museum on Sunday, January 17.

Take the story of his Uncle Anthony. "Anthony's mother could always tell when Anthony was let out of the brig from the clack of his hobnail boots on Dublin's stone pavements," said the keen-witted, bespectacled 66-year-old.

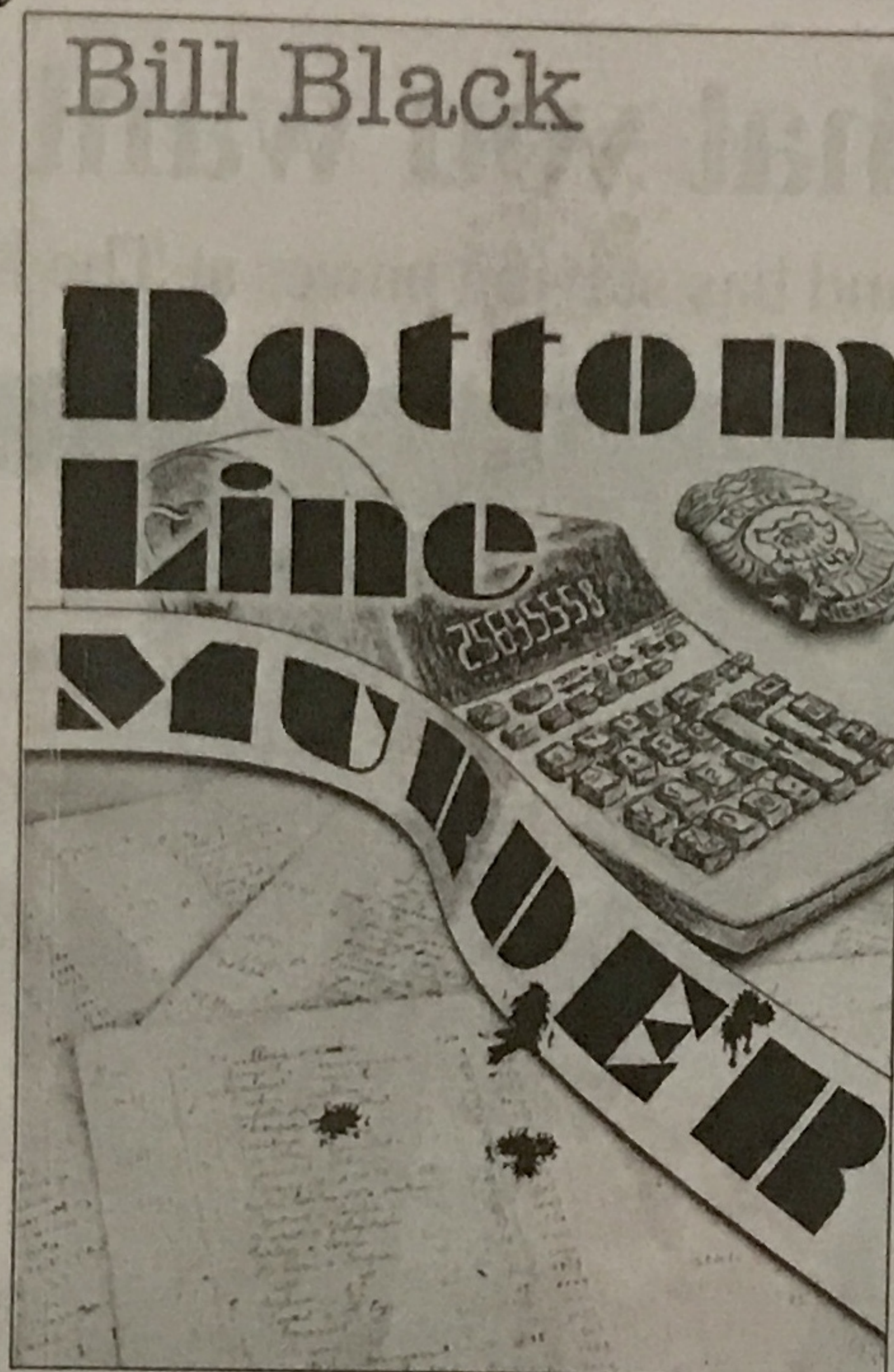
That piece of history comes from Black's father. The sound of the boots was the inspiration for the first page of "Bottom Line Murder."

"My uncle Anthony was involved in IRA activity in the early part of the 20th century," the long-time owner of Dragonfly Farm said. "He was targeted to be eliminated."

Which he was, in 1921, by English soldiers who cornered him in a Dublin pub and murdered him, as the Irish war of independence reached its violent peak.

At least a fictional version of him.

"I took the advice of seasoned authors and wrote what I knew and then added fiction to round it out," said the Queens, N.Y. native and retired accountant who, during his career, took on various as-



North Guilford is the setting for a shoot-out in "Bottom Line Murder."

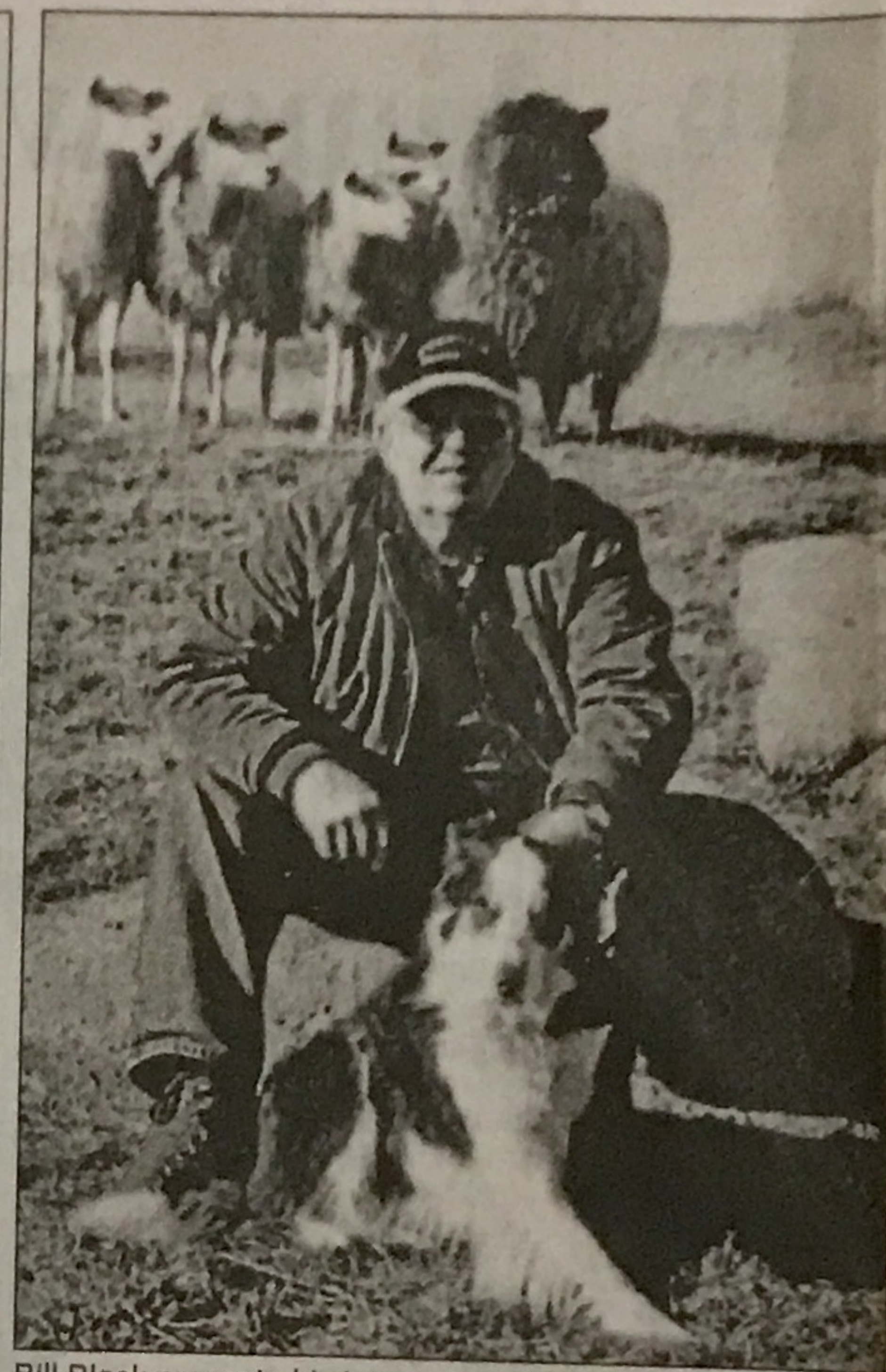
signments investigating white-collar crimes, otherwise known as forensic accounting.

Hence, his main character, Mark O'Connor. A former New York City detective shot in retaliation for bringing down a kingpin of the Irish Mafia, O'Connor spends his retirement working for a forensic accounting firm out of Hartford and working out his border collie on his farm in North Guilford.

As it happens, the Glastonbury fertilizer factory that O'Connor is hired to audit leads him to the

discovery of covert shipments by the company to Ireland. Suffice it to say that Black enlisted the help of a Madison librarian to research how to make fertilizer bombs—coincidentally, the homemade explosives of choice in a number of IRA attacks.

Black doesn't limit the mayhem ripping through the book to the other side of the pond. "The normal quiet atmosphere of North Guilford was ... shattered as two shots rang out simultaneously," he writes, in a shootout on Route 77 between O'Connor and a duo



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of Irish conspirators that culminates at a barn.

Even a seemingly idyllic sheepdog competition gets twisted into the plot. Featuring an appearance by Maggie, one of the purebred border collies trained by Black's late wife Ellen, the story also pulsates with a fledgling romance, a primer on the complexities of a dog trial, and a clandestine meeting between O'Connor and agents from the FBI and Interpol.

Yes, Interpol, the world's largest international police organization, with 190 member countries, includ-

ing Ireland, where the action shifts. There's the revival of a long-dormant terrorist organization, including one member disguised as a nun; a thwarted attempt to blow up the Dublin GPO, once the site of the 1916 Easter Rebellion to end British rule; and the frantic search for a ton and a half of fertilizer.

As fast-paced as it is, "Bottom Line Murder" is not without its, well, bubbly, moments, particularly in Black's deft celebration of Irish drinking holes. "A bar is a place to drink ... a pub is part of your roots,"

waxes O'Connor's bartender father. Hardened detectives at the pub wryly tell O'Connor they're on a stakeout. "So if something happens at this pub, we've got it covered."

And at Donnelly's Pub in Dublin, O'Connor observes "the time-honored tradition of drawing half a glass, letting it settle and then topping it off. His dad had always said that no matter how busy a pub was, you never rush the pouring of a Guinness."

No word on whether Guinness will be on tap at the Munger Barn on Sunday afternoon. What's certain is Black has succeeded in both honoring his family history and writing one spine-tingling book.

A reading and discussion of Bill Black's "Bottom Line Murder" will take place at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 17 on the lower level of the Munger Barn of the Dudley Farm Museum, 2351 Durham Road, Guilford. For directions, visit www.dudleyfarm.com. All proceeds will go to the Big Barn Project of the Dudley Farm Museum. For copies of the book, visit Breakwater Books in Guilford or call 203-457-1459.

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