



# Physical Education

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## **Physical Education** Maggie Barbieri

College English professor and sometime amateur sleuth Alison Bergeron would've been thrilled to hear that her husband, NYPD Detective Bobby Crawford, was leaving Homicide if that were the whole story, but it turns out that Bobby's next assignment is even worse---undercover. As if worrying about his involvement in a case he won't talk about at all wasn't bad enough, Alison is forced to take over the women's basketball team at St. Thomas after the coach dies of a heart attack during a game. She may not know much about basketball, but she's no stranger to sleuthing, and it isn't long before she suspects that the coach's death may be more than unexpected but premeditated as well.

With Bobby deep undercover and Alison always on her way to deep trouble, it's only a matter of time before they run smack into each other in *Physical Education*, the latest in Maggie Barbieri's charming Murder 101 mystery series.

## **Physical Education Details**

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Author : Maggie Barbieri

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## From Reader Review Physical Education for online ebook

### Shani says

I have savored reading the Murder 101 series because I love Alison Bergeron so much--and especially her relationship with hunky Crawford. Physical Education did not disappoint. I keep wondering how Alison could get herself into another mess but here we are again! Alison is snooping around where she doesn't belong--across her personal and professional life. Alison knows she isn't doing herself any favors: "I had this annoying habit of doing exactly the opposite when pressed."

I enjoy the college setting and Alison's many hats--in Physical Education we get to see her shot at being a basketball coach. The book twists in many directions, keeping the pace fast and the pages turning!

Favorite quotes:

"Two [emails] were from my boss, Sister Mary, who never met an exclamation point she didn't like."

"Don't jump to conclusions.' Have we met? I wanted to ask him. Conclusion jumping was practically an Olympic sport where I was concerned."

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### Julie Akeman says

Fun and funny and lots of things going on here. Some interesting developments in a character I was like irritated with and now feel sorry for.

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### Jane says

Professor Bergeron is already running late when the campus security guard stops her to tell her that her car's trunk is ajar ... and it's because of a dead body in the trunk. Great premise for the opening of a story, but the rest of the story didn't hold my attention because much of the nuance in the story is predicated on having read the other Murder 101 Mysteries. I believe either a recap or warning should have appeared before the first chapter, if the story is reliant on the others for context.

Here are just two of my problems with this book: why isn't the Professor considered more of a murder suspect; is it just because her husband is a cop? Why would a college make a random professor the basketball coach when the team's coach dies of a sudden heart attack? It's not as though she's exhibited basketball knowledge, talent or prowess. What kind of leap of faith (no pun intended) does one have to take to accept the tie between the basketball team and the Professor's priest friend's problems? Apparently a big leap.

That being said, some of the dialog is well written, as are some of the interactions between characters. However, neither were compelling enough for me to go back and read the first five Murder 101 Mysteries.

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## Linden says

*Physical Education: A Murder 101 Mystery* by Maggie Barbieri tells the story of Alison Bergeron, an English professor at St. Thomas, a small Catholic university in New York City. She is an amateur sleuth and is married to Bobby Crawford a NYPD homicide detective who she calls Crawford. *Physical Education* is about her taking on the job as interim coach of the St. Thomas Blue Jays, the girls basketball team, after the sudden death of their coach during one of their games and her related investigation of other suspicious events.

Protagonist Bergeron has past history with the mob, possibly in a previous story since there are half a dozen Murder 101 mysteries, and in an opening chapter she discovers the body of a new mail room employee in her car trunk, seemingly a hit similar to past events.

The book follows several plot lines: family life with Crawford and his two daughters, her life as a professor, her attempts to untangle the apparent framing of the priest who had served as campus chaplain, and her basketball coaching.

While I breezed through *Physical Education* in only a day, it frustrated me in that too much happened off stage. By that I mean that a very large proportion of the story was in the internal voice of the main character rather than of events themselves as they happened. Also far too much of the story was told in short retrospective summaries of what would have been interesting action (and interaction) with her students and the basketball team. Action itself was replaced by thought about an action remembered.

Here's an example of this from page 300:

". . . For the time being, all I needed to remember was how to make sure we beat the pants off the Roadrunners while not getting myself thrown out of the game.

"The Roadrunners proved to be worthy adversaries, but we pulled out a 56-54 win, with Kristy having her best game ever. She seemed to have channeled whatever stress she was under into her game, making her a scoring powerhouse. Meaghan had a good game as well, but seemed a little off to me, as if she were playing on autopilot. I worried if the events of the last several weeks. . . ."

Here the author takes Bergeron from thoughts about the game-to-come, gives us three sentences about the actual game, then takes us back to her thoughts again. While people do have a life in their heads, a truer picture about characters comes from reading about them in various situations, what they actually do, other than thinking, and then glean who they are from how they think about what has happened. Without the equivalent of, in essence, a control group as in a study, we have far too many events seen only through the filter of Bergeron's remembering. Indeed throughout the book, the story line regularly hastens away from written action to Bergeron's retrospective thoughts about the action.

From my own experience as a school librarian, I know our teachers encourage students in their writing to 'show not tell'. The idea is not a new one; the Bay Area Writing Project was founded in 1974 on that very principle among others. In *Physical Education*, were we to have less of Bergeron's thought, there would be plenty of room for us to have specific first hand accounting of events rather than generalizations about them. For example, we read about Bergeron grading tests, but on areas of potential interest to the reader, such as what goes on in her classes as professor, she is mute. We hear Bergeron's pep talks before a game, but on the sports action or coaching strategies, we have few examples.

When such silences occur in writing, it seems, to this reader at least, to suggest that the author doesn't know enough about what teachers do in university classes or what coaches do, to write about them. Or has not done

enough research to make these events real to the reader. Or perhaps the idea of the main characters' thoughts is a authorial choice. If so, such a prolonged, prevalent voice becomes like a television in another room that we can't turn off to pay attention to more interesting matters.

While the author wrote credible conversation between characters, there were proportionally few events that went past conversation or the travel between locations. When action finally occurred in the story, it was a shock as well as a pleasure. Here were some I really enjoyed: the introduction to characters and the opening basketball game during which Coach Kovacs died; a heckler during one of the basketball games in which Bergeron was thrown out; and last, an attempt at kidnapping Alison and her daughters. I was sorry the author didn't give us more of these. When she did they were greatly to her credit.

I have some other gripes; if you are tired of my grumbles, skip to the end. In books that disappoint from the beginning, I just don't continue reading. It is the story that is dissatisfactory in places that most frustrates me: the near hit, the almost ran that wouldn't let me put it aside. Here are those gripes:

1. While the title is *Physical Education*, the primary scenes of that activity, short ones at that, are mostly of Bergeron sinking shots from the center court. If physical education as title had to do with the educational perspective of coaching, there was all but none, save telling the team to 'run laps' or drills (unnamed) or brief descriptions of the 'punishing' activity (unspecified) her assistant assigned. And finally, if the title referred to the physicality of sleuthing, the action was largely mental, with two exceptions. One was getting a broken arm from being hit by a car; the other was the countless times she complained about either coaching in high heels or the seemingly countless times she ran in them. In the period of time the book covered wouldn't she'd eventually have remembered her shoe problem if the pain was as great as indicated each time?

2. The teaser on the front book flap says, "...and it isn't long before she suspects that the coach's death may be more than unexpected but premeditated as well." This promised thread in the story is not only *not* explored but is quashed as a plot element very soon after his death by citing his medical issues and his SUV backseat full of fast food wrappers.

Altogether, I'm not inclined to read more of Barbieri. Of mystery writers, I prefer Brad Meltzer (*The Inner Circle*), Michael Connolly (*The Drop*), Dick Francis (*Reflex*) Ariana Franklin (*Mistress of the Art of Death*) and John Lescroart (*Nothing But the Truth*). These authors balance thought and action, offer the richness of setting, a vocabulary of various sectors of society or history, conversation that does more than advance the story by revelation of character in action, and a mystery that is more than something simple made bigger and more complicated by assumptions and misunderstandings.

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## Hmr28 says

I have had this series on auto buy since the first one and every on has gotten a 5 except this one. Not that it was bad but it just was not up to par. I think there were too many things going on in it and the ending was very abrupt. The characters were as interesting as ever and the wonderful inside jokes were just as good as usual, the plot just was not up to snuff.

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## Renee says

To begin: I think I read this the most quickly of any book I've read so far this year. On a few days I actually spent some time reading just to read -- not reading before going to sleep, which is the norm for me. That says something.

This book was a departure from Barbieri's prior Murder 101 books in a few ways. First, the dynamic between Alison and Crawford was markedly different than usual -- I won't give details because I don't want to spoil anything, but it was a difference done well. Second, Alison's punishment special assignment from Dean Etheridge was very different from his usual -- he made her interim girls' basketball coach (hey, she did play CYO ball in high school). She found help in the form of Crawford's partner, Fred, which means learning more about him along the way -- a third change. She also worked to help her longtime friend and St. Thomas chaplain, Kevin -- fourth. And, finally, there's the whole initial murder to solve. That was probably the least important plot in the entire book -- which perhaps makes it a fifth difference of itself.

At first I thought the change came from a large time gap between books, but apparently not. Whatever the reason, it's a change that I'm enjoying. I just wish that the next Murder 101 book, which I'm currently reading, wasn't the last in the series.

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## Nicole says

I was so disappointed with this book. I've read the previous 5 books in the series and, while they sometimes were just okay, most were good enough that I overlooked the constant fact that Barbieri has absolutely no idea what a college professor does. Granted, these are cozy-reads, BUT they are also academic mysteries. So getting at least some of the character's life to be accurately represented seems to be an important issue. In this book, I'd go so far as to say that Barbieri not only doesn't get it, but that she seems to dislike academia--or at least has an ax to grind with those in the university. (Full disclosure: I am an academic, in case that was unclear!)

But first let me get some other things off my chest.

The cover. What happened? It looks like something I could have photoshopped--in a very amateur fashion--myself. The other cover art was always cute--a drawing of Allison: tall, long dark hair, great high heels. This? Odd is one word. But also, the woman pictured on the front looks NOTHING like Allison. And no, the publisher didn't change. Who came up with this?

The inside cover blurb. Again, not Barbieri's fault. But who wrote this? My friend always chastises me for reading the inside or back cover before finishing a novel--somehow she has the will power NOT to do so when reading a book. (I can barely stop myself--and sometimes don't--from reading the last few pages.) Well, in the inside cover, the first couple of sentences tell us exactly what Allison's new husband is up to. That's a big problem because the better part of the book shows him, apparently, lying to her and acting strangely. The reader is supposed to identify with Allison as she suspects her husband of infidelity or worse. Granted, the hints are there as to what he's really doing, but, again, the purpose of the book is to figure this out with Allison and much of Barbieri's time is spent trying to build suspense. The inside blurb makes ALL that effort on Barbieri's part pointless as it tells the reader what's happening from the onset. So much for building suspense.

Okay, now back to the academia thing. And no, this can't be blamed on someone other than Barbieri. What is she trying to say about Allison? How are we to understand her? Yes, I get it--these are "fun" books. But if

you aren't going to use the academic setting to any degree in its proper form, why use it at all? I could give many, many examples but just a couple: Allison cancels class at whim and, at one point, says she'll cancel the "rest of the week" if her students aren't excited and active in that day's class; She makes the comment that her job is one she "can do in her sleep." Really? Well, that must be because she isn't doing her job at all. Where are the endless nights grading and lesson planning? Meeting with students day in and out? Committee work? Scholarship?; Speaking of scholarship, I know no academic who knows less about her field (supposedly Joyce) than this one. And she just teaches whatever she wants? Sometimes Shakespeare, sometimes the Beats. What?; Oh, and does she ever actually work? She goes in when she wants, she leaves when she wants, she plays hooky, she gets weeks off for being "sick," she RARELY works from home or on the weekends. Sheesh. I know--I don't need to go on. But really, I do wish Barbieri would do some minimal research to make this series work.

So that takes us to the actual story. This one was boring for me. Painful. almost. I wasn't crazy about book 5 either, but recall liking book 4 quite a bit. I just don't know if there will be a book 7 for me. I want to like this series so much, but this level of agitation seems to suggest I call it quits with the Murder 101 series.

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### **Jeannie and Louis Rigod says**

I read this book as Maggie Barbieri can not write anything but an excellent book, and she upheld my opinion with "Physical Education" the sixth novel in the "A Murder 101 Mystery" series.

College Professor Dr. Alison Bergeron is married to NYPD Homicide Detective Bobby Crawford after a long courtship. There is something wrong though. Bobby is carrying around some secrets and Alison is disturbed. To make the situation even more tense, her step-daughter, Meaghan is living with them and the older step-sister, Erin just plain hates her.

At work, Alison is facing the days without her BFF, Father Kevin McManus who was removed for allegations of improper attention to a female student. As Alison worries about solving that mystery, she goes to head home when the campus security officer tells her 'your trunk isn't latched.' It wasn't and once more Alison finds a body in her trunk.

To top it off, the head coach of the Blue Jay's Basketball team dies and Alison is appointed the interim Head Coach. Not a problem if she knew anything about basketball, which she doesn't. There are two sisters that are on the team and it is obvious that they do not belong.

Alison has to investigate and faces the fear that her new marriage is dissolving in front of her.

This was a very good solid murder mystery that reminds us of the first mystery. Are they connected? Well, with strong characters and funny one liners the trip to solving the crimes is entertaining.

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### **Vicki Gooding says**

Hmmm, did not realize this was book #6. I read number 5 so this is her 2nd novel for me to read. This author is hilariously funny. The mystery is good. It's consistent even with other story lines that do have some reaches into the past novel. This College professor finds a dead body in her trunk with all the marks of a mob hit. Her best friend (a priest) is being pushed out of his profession by an allegation against him. Her newly

wed husband is a police officer who is bringing cause for doubt and mistrust into their marriage and she's fighting not to believe. In some mysteries, it's enough to drive someone nuts how they cannot leave something well enough alone. With this story she had me right there with her thinking I would have done exactly the same thing. If you love a good mystery, and need a good laugh, this is a book you'll want to read.

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### **Susan says**

This is the second of the Dr. Allison Bergeron mysteries I have read. They are light and fairly meaty but this one was too enigmatic to be totally enjoyable. She spent too much time trying to figure out what her police-detective husband was doing, and Barberi didn't give the reader enough to chew on. If she had just stuck with Allison and her side of the story, all would have been terrific, but her wondering about Bobby and never giving us a clue was frustrating, to say the least. Allison is an English professor at St. Thomas, a small Catholic college at the edge of the Bronx, and in this novel, she crazily finds herself coaching the women's basketball team in addition to her other duties. Mix in a little bit of the Mob, an underhanded priest, a loveable blind elderly nun, and twin stepdaughters, and there really is a good book here. I plan to read the series just for fun - not for great literature, mind you. Love this type of book to clear the trouble of the day away.

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### **Rob Preece says**

College Professor Alison Bergeron is already running late when the campus security guard stops her to tell her that her car's trunk is ajar. Unfortunately, it's a dead body holding the trunk open... and this isn't the first dead body to turn up in Alison's trunk. Because Alison is involved, her cop-husband can't take the case, but Alison knows the other cops on the case and, for the most part, she's content to think she isn't a suspect. Alison doesn't mind doing a bit of amateur sleuthing, but she'd rather spend her time trying to track down who is destroying the reputation of her favorite priest than sorting out what looks like another mob murder.

Alison is still adjusting to life as a married woman, and one of the things she does is attend her step-daughter's basketball games. Which doesn't exactly make her a basketball expert, but when the team's coach dies of a sudden heart attack, Alison is tasked to take over coaching the basketball team. Alison figures it's just as well that she's super-busy, because her husband Bobby Crawford's schedule has suddenly taken a turn for the worse... and he's coming home smelling of another woman's perfume.

Author Maggie Barbieri deals with complicated situations (e.g., the Catholic Church's swing toward anti-woman and anti-gay) in a breezy and enjoyable style. Watching Alison try to figure out how to coach a basketball team is also fun and I would have liked to see more of this side of the story. While there is a lot to like about PHYSICAL EDUCATION, for me the plot didn't quite pull together. There is a connection between the murder setting the story into motion and Alison's investigations, but the connection isn't close and Alison's work never really leads anywhere. Likewise, the basketball angle was not really convincing (surely the university could have found someone with a bit of basketball experience to take over the coaching), and the coincidence of the team being connected to her investigation of the priest was a bit hard to swallow.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION held my interest and kept me reading, but I really thought the story could have been improved by some judicious editing.

## Teena in Toronto says

Alison and Crawford are married, his ex-wife is in London, one of his daughters likes Alison and the other daughter is being a bratty bitch to Alison because her parents have moved on.

For some reason, Alison is made the coach of the basketball team when the the coach dies on the court (she has zero experience coaching a basketball team).

Then she has everything else going on ... Crawford is being secretive and lying; her friend, Father Kevin, is still on suspension with the church and the university; and the body of the mail guy is found in the trunk of her car.

I found this book hard to get into. It was so serious in the beginning and not the usual funny sarcastic style. About halfway, when things start to be revealed, it picks up and get better.

Alison's friend, Max, isn't in the book much (yay!) but when she is, she is her usual annoying self. The mystery of what was happening to Father Kevin which started in the last book is resolved (yay!).

There are quite a few plots going on that came together at the end. It was the first book in the series that I really bought the ending.

Blog review: <http://www.teenaintoronto.com/2011/12...>

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## Jeanette says

I so enjoyed reading this book. I have read this series from the first book, and I like the main characters.

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## Cheryl A says

In this 6th installment of the Murder 101 mystery series, we find college English Professor Alison Bergeron finally married to her long time beau, NYPD Detective Bobby Crawford. But married life isn't all she thought it would be - Crawford's keeping strange hours, even for a cop, and she's trying to navigate her career, Crawford's job and her stepdaughters Erin and Meaghan. Meaghan is attending St Thomas, where Alison teaches and is on the basketball team, adding one more committment to juggle.

But wait, it gets better! The campus mail man turns up dead in the trunk of her car - her second trunk corpse - and the basketball coach dies of a heart attack after a game and Allison is appointed interim coach, based on her CYO experience and playing for St Thomas during her college years. Allison is also still trying to prove her BFF, Father Kevin McManus, innocent of charges of inappropriate conduct while serving as school Chaplain. And there's the really terrible basketball team, a bench warmer with no skills and overzealous parents. How does she manage it all?

The answer is she doesn't. Allison stumbles and fumbles her way through the pitfalls of her life, inadvertently discovering the truth to all of the puzzles plaguing her life. The good hearted ineptitude of the

character is what makes this series a delight. I look forward to seeing what Allison gets up to next.

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### **Mary Sanchez says**

Dr. Alison Bergeron is an English professor at a Catholic College, newly married to NYPD Homicide Detective Bobby Crawford and looking forward to spending a quiet evening with him when a mailroom clerk is found dead in the trunk of her car--the second time a murder victim has been dumped in Alison's trunk. Is the murder related to a crime family like before? Perhaps, but hubby Crawford isn't talking and goes undercover, which takes a toll on their relationship.

Alison also can't confide in her friend and colleague, Father Kevin McManus, the college chaplain who has been accused by a student of "inappropriate conduct" and is on the way to being defrocked, but Alison takes determined and dangerous steps to try and prove his innocence. As if there isn't enough drama in Alison's life, the school's basketball coach suddenly dies and Alison is asked to coach the team, with one of the members being Alison's stepdaughter. There are also two sisters on the team, one of whom stinks, but the girls' father insists she be allowed to play. But why? And then, Crawford's other daughter disappears so amateur sleuth Alison tries to sort all these problems, including the possibility that her marriage may be in trouble too.

Great one-liners and characters, beside the mystery aspect, make this a page turner.

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