



## ***Written in Bone: Forensic Files of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Chesapeake Exhibition***

**February 7, 2009 – January 5, 2014**

**Curated by Douglas Owsley and Karin Bruwelheide**



Smithsonian  
National Museum of Natural History

**The *Written in Bone* exhibition has been a major success in every aspect: enthusiastic visitors, engaging educational programming, an instructive website featuring an award winning *Written in Bone* Webcomic, and creative, informative publications. Here are just some of the highlights:**

***Written in Bone: Forensic Files of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Chesapeake***

The exhibit's showcasing of skeletal biology has captured the interest of young and old alike. Visitors have loved the real CSI experience while learning about their bones, exploring the remains of past peoples, and asking the question, what stories will be told by their skeleton?

- Attracted over 9 million visitors
- Popularity produced an unprecedented five-year run for a temporary exhibition
- More than 550,000 participated in hands-on lab activities bone classes
- Must see resource for high school science programs
- Incorporated into undergraduate and graduate Anthropology, Archaeology and Museum Studies Programs
- Over 100 educational tours provided; a multitude of lectures given nationally and abroad
- Won the Secretary's 2010 Research Award for Exhibitions
- Brought together for the first time 340 objects, artifacts and human bones from the SI museum's collection and from more than 20 anatomical and archaeological repositories
- Aspects of the exhibition will have a continued life at Jamestown, Historic London Town & Gardens, Historic St. Mary's City, and the NMNH Q<sup>2</sup>rius learning center.

Visitor comments were enthusiastic.  
Here are only a few:

- "This is a fascinating and educational exhibit. I'm surprised at how much the 3 kids (two that are 8 years old, one that's only 5 years old) are interested in this stuff!" Rumi, Hyattsville, MD.
- They had two "must sees" in their visit to DC, the White House and the *Written in Bone* exhibition. Mother and daughter from the Netherlands



- For her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, an Alabama girl was given a choice of a car or a trip to DC to pursue her passion by visiting the *Written in Bone: Forensic Files of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Chesapeake* exhibition. She chose the trip!
- “Our favorite exhibit in a museum filled with amazing exhibits. Thank you to the researchers who worked in the exhibit.” (Visitor’s comment book)

**“Science in the News” special addition,**  
**Jane: Starvation, Cannibalism, and**  
**Endurance at Jamestown** updated the exhibition with new, ongoing research.



- Discovered bones of a 14-year-old girl in historic Jamestown from the deadly winter of 1609-1610 known as the “starving time”
- Remains confirmed the presence of survival cannibalism at the settlement
- Featured a scientific, facial reconstruction of the young woman, we call “Jane”
- Added to “Written in Bone” in May 2013
- Opening covered by media worldwide from BBC to Al-Jazeera
- Over 40 interviews provided for print and broadcast journalists
- The research process of her discovery, analysis, and reconstruction is available in a book and video of the same title

**The Forensic Anthropology Lab,** an educational space for visitors and students, attached to the exhibition.

- Over 500,000 visitors during open hours before closing on July 31, 2013
- Provided over 400 educational school programs
- Brought exhibit to life through hands-on, real bone investigations allowing visitors to discover the messages written in the bones.
- The knowledgeable staff and volunteers were dedicated. 1 volunteer traveled from NYC to volunteer monthly. Many served the entire span of the lab’s operation.
- Model for Natural History’s new learning center, Q?rius, where bone activities will continue



From the lab's comment books:

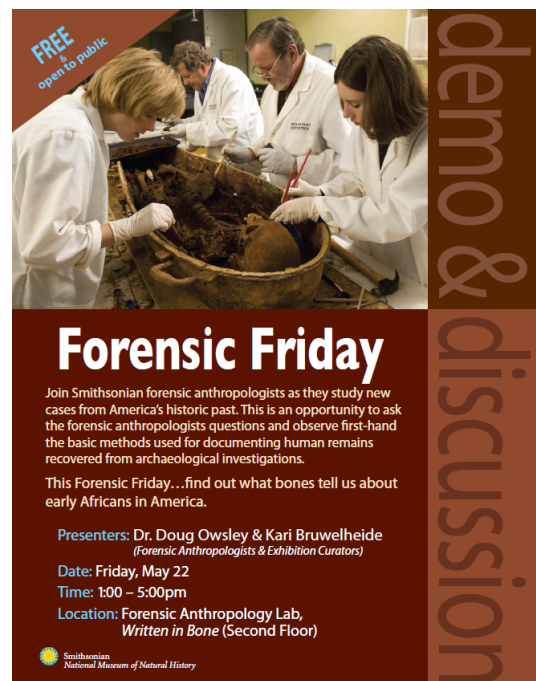
- "This lab is extremely cool. I wish that when I grow up I can work in one just like this doing hands-on work"- Mareena
- "Thank you for a truly FUN learning experience. We loved it! It is so great that you offer this." Erin and Devin- Woodbridge, VA/ Bonnie and Kurt- Woodland, CA
- "It's fantastic! I learned so much about bones. The body parts are amazing. Thank you for everything!" Tracy Zheng

**Forensic Fridays in the Forensic Anthropology Lab**, a unique way to explore the diversity of the field and bring real research and scientists face to face with the public.

- 37 all day Forensic Fridays
- Featured scientists from the museum, archaeological sites, battlefields and government agencies
- Over 20,000 visitors engaged the scientists and learned about current research projects
- Covered modern forensics, historical unknowns, FBI evidence analysis, airplane bird strike ID's and much more

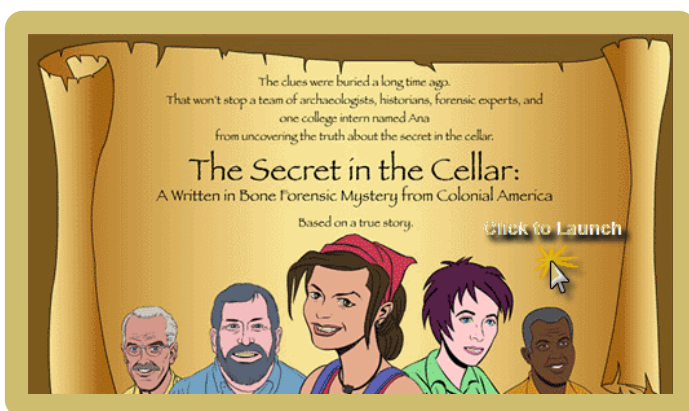
### The *Written in Bone* Website

(<http://anthropology.si.edu/writteninbone>) has been the go-to site for visitors and educators. It introduces the content and prepares them for their visit. The website will be modified and



enhanced with exhibition videos when *Written in Bone* closes. It will continue to be a forensic educational site for the public and educators.

A major feature for all has been, "**The Secret in the Cellar**" interactive **Webcomic, A Written in Bone Forensic Mystery from Colonial America** which lets users solve an authentic, colonial



forensic case of recently discovered 17th-century remains.



## **“The Secret in the Cellar” interactive Webcomic, A Written in Bone Forensic Mystery from Colonial America**

- Winner of 3 national, educational awards
- Widely copied model
- Robert Costello, Educational Web Designer for the museum, has given numerous presentations to museum and educational associations.
- Engages a hard to reach population, teens to young adults
- Most importantly, most museum websites peak and then decline. THIS ONE CONTINUES TO HAVE INCREASING VIEWERSHIP!

## **Publications**

### ***Written in Bone: Bone Biographer's Casebook* by Douglas Owsley and Karin Bruwelheide**

This book offers a unique view of the study of human skeletons—one part science and art, one part research and history covering over 20 years of bone studies.

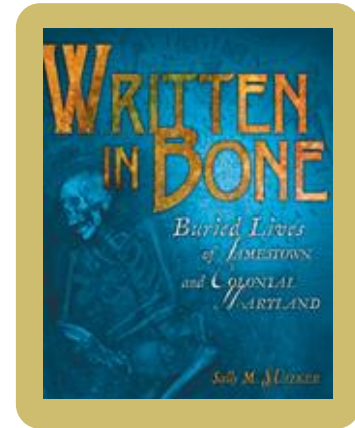
- Features over 150 archival photographs never before released from the forensic files of the Smithsonian Institution Division of Physical Anthropology
- Most companion books peak at the opening of an exhibition; this book maintained a non-traditional pattern of steady sales throughout the span of the exhibition.



***Written in Bone: Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland* by Sally M. Walker**

A book written for middle and high school readers and created with assistance of Douglas Owsley and Karin Bruwelheide

- Winner of 19 awards and honors
- Located in school libraries throughout the United States



In conclusion, there are even more aspects related to *Written in Bone, Forensic Files of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Chesapeake* that have occurred during the years of preparation and during its 5 year run, but this is enough. It has excelled beyond our expectations through the efforts of all our supporters within and outside the museum. To all, we say THANK YOU!