

# MARYN MCKENNA

Maryn McKenna is a science and medical writer for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, where she has covered the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 1997. In October 2001, she was the only journalist allowed to go inside one of the CDC teams investigating the anthrax-tainted letters sent to members of Congress and the media, the first fatal bioterrorist attack in American history on American soil.

The team McKenna joined in Washington, D.C. was composed in part of members of the Epidemic Intelligence Service, the CDC's little-known rapid-reaction force. Becoming curious about the group, in July 2002 she began to follow the first class of disease detectives to come to the CDC following the September 11 attacks — the first cohort who took their jobs knowing that bioterrorism might be one of the outbreaks they would face. McKenna accompanied the 89 members of the 2002 EIS class through the first bioterrorism-response training offered to the force. She shadowed them through routine work and emergency investigations at CDC headquarters in Atlanta and in several states, Africa and Southeast Asia. And she became the only journalist routinely allowed to attend the weekly off-the-record briefings in which EIS members present results of their investigations to their classmates and mentors. Her time spent with the 2002 EIS class would become the backbone of her first book, *BEATING BACK THE DEVIL: On The Front Lines with the Disease Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service* (Free Press; publication date: September 13, 2004).

At the same time, she sought out past members of the EIS, ranging from the first class trained at the CDC in 1951, when the country was overshadowed by fears that soldiers fighting in the Korean War would be attacked with biological weapons, to the group she had met during the 2001 anthrax attacks, the largest single deployment of EIS members ever sent to the field. Using old records, diaries and photographs as well as medical journal articles and CDC records, she reconstructed the labors of the EIS as its members confronted polio, smallpox, AIDS and SARS.

McKenna has an AB cum laude from Georgetown University and an MSJ with highest honors from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, and has won state and national journalism awards. Previously, she worked at the *Boston Herald*, where stories she co-wrote on puzzling illnesses affecting Army veterans triggered the first Congressional hearings on Gulf War Syndrome, and at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, where she helped expose health problems linked to environmental contamination from a federal nuclear-weapons plant.

She has attended the Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families at the University of Maryland and received a CASE Fellowship in genomics at Harvard Medical School. She spent the 1998-1999 academic year at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor as a Knight-Wallace Fellow, studying the social history of epidemics. She lives in Atlanta.