

The Crime Cafe with Chris Roy



Debbi: [00:00:13] Hi everyone. This is the Crime Cafe. Your podcasting source of great crime, suspense, and thriller writing. I'm your host Debbi Mack. Before I bring on my guest, I'll just remind you that the Crime Cafe has two e-books for sale: the nine-book box set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my website [debbimack\[dot\]com](http://debbimack[dot]com). Just click on the "Crime Cafe" link. You can also get a free copy of either book if you become a Patreon supporter. You'll get that and much more if you support the podcast on Patreon, along with our eternal gratitude for doing so.

[00:01:04] It's my pleasure to have my guest today crime fiction author Chris Roy. He's from South Mississippi and currently resides in the Mississippi Department of Corrections. So the audio might not be perfect. You'll probably hear a lot of background noise, but let's hope for the best. I would also like to mention that Chris has edited along with Andy Rausch *A Time For Violence*. This is his latest project. It is a love letter to the great anthologies of yesteryear. And the theme is violence. And I'll let Chris do the describing from here. Thanks for being here today, Chris. It's great to have you on.

Chris: [00:01:55] It's nice to be here today.

Debbi: [00:01:59] I'm glad you're able to be here and I think it goes without saying that your experiences have informed your fiction. Can you tell us a little bit about exactly how your experiences have inspired you to write?

Chris: [00:02:18] Oh, sure. Some of my earlier works of crime fiction were short stories that had two characters I created named Razor and Blondie. This was about 10 years ago. They were based on personal experiences selling drugs, stealing cars, identity theft, that sort of thing. And also a lot tough crimes preferred from criminals while incarcerated. And so I had just had all this knowledge about crimes and also I found that when I was started writing these stories I like to create crimes, create new crimes. So I had all of this this knowledge to draw on and experience to draw on and that is where my original stories came from.

Debbi: [00:03:16] Would you say to your genre is more geared toward noir or thriller?

Chris: [00:03:26] It's noir definitely. My earlier works were thriller. There were anti-heroes and they had all these difficulties and there was usually a happy ending. The

stuff I write now, terrible things happen to really good people and the endings are usually not very good. So it's definitely noir right now.

Debbi: [00:03:52] I was going to say, yeah, I read your story *Her Name is Mercie*. I think I'm saying that right. and I liked it very much and your other book *Shocking Circumstances*. I've just started. And I'm interested that you focused on female protagonists. Can you talk about what prompted that?

Chris: [00:04:19] Okay. When I was studying books on writing, when I started getting serious, the first story that I wrote after that was *Shocking Circumstances* and I was thinking you know I have a limited knowledge of skills that I can put into my characters you know. I was a mechanic on the street. And I'm a tattoo artist now. I studied engineering, metal fabrication. Boxing. I actually teach boxing and have for many years in here. You can hear in the background, there's a guy beating on his bag now. You hear that? That's one of my guys. I train. He's getting a warmed up for a workout. We're going to work out afterwards. After the podcast. So I had these skills, knowledge that I can put on my characters and so what's more impressive than a guy that can fix cars, do engineering, tattoo, and box? Well, a girl that can. A girl that can do all this stuff. I wanted to create a girl that could draw us and she's really a kick-ass chick. You know *Haywire*. The movie *Haywire* had just come out around a time, and so strong female protagonists were back in. There were some other movies with strong female protagonists. I had read *L.A. Outlaws* by T. Jefferson Parker and you got the schoolteacher in that story that had a double life where she was robbing stores, she was going around as a robber. And it was really cool. And it was first person female, too, and all that came together at a time where I was wanting to write, take on a huge project and write something. And so that's where *Shocking Circumstances* came from. That's where Clarice "Shocker" Ares came from.

Debbi: [00:06:11] Personally I think that's awesome. I just love it when you have a strong female protagonist. Having a protagonist who boxes and loves cars is really awesome. Tell us a little bit about *A Time For Violence*. Is that the latest thing you're working on?

Chris: [00:06:37] Yes. I work for a publisher. I do PR for Close to the Bone, a small publisher based in the U.K. A buddy of mine hired me there. Craig Douglas is the chief

editor. And so we do a lot of grit fiction. Real gritty stuff. Crime and horror mostly, and we do novellas, short story collections, anthologies. And so I had a place to publish, he said. A friend of mine, Andy Rausch, who's the author of *Riding Shotgun: And Other American Cruelties*. Really, really great book. Fantastic. Very talented guy. He and I were about writing stuff all the time, and he was like, man, let's do an anthology. You know a lot of authors, I know a lot of authors, let's get them together. Let's get them to write something great. We can bridge this thing. And so I was like I don't know you know. OKay, let's try to give it a shot. And he jumped on it. He got some really big name authors. You've probably seen the list of their three of them have co-written with Stephen King recently. One of them is John Russo, who co-wrote "Night of the Living Dead". And one is Max Allan Collins. Collins wrote the Quarry series which is now a Cinemax series. So we have several other up-and-comers that are kind of a big deal now. And then we got some really the best out of the indie publishers. Tom Vater, Tony Knighton, Elka Ray, James Longmore. I mean, these writers are really under-published in my opinion. So people will see the names and recognize the names in the list, but I think they will enjoy the smaller-name writers, the unknowns, more I mean. But it's just a really great collection of stories.

Debbi: [00:08:49] I'm just looking at over for the first time and I'm floored by some of these names. You've got some great people on here. It's just great.

Chris: [00:08:59] Richard Chizmar, Joe Lansdale. Yeah. We have a bunch of them that are just really fantastic.

Debbi: [00:09:06] Yeah. This is wonderful. That's fantastic and congratulations on that.

Chris: [00:09:13] Thank you. It's coming out in February, by the way. This will be out in February. Released by Close to the Bone. Craig Douglas is going to do the editing and the cover. He's a really great graphic artist. We will be publishing this in February 2019.

Debbi: [00:09:30] Fantastic. Good to know. Let's see. I saw in an interview that you didn't become a reader until you were 18. What was it about your first reading that prompted you to write?

Chris: [00:09:48] Well, when I got locked up in the county jail when I was 18 for murder. And that's what I'm serving a life sentence for now. Yeah. So I didn't read novels on the street unless it was like a school project or something. You know, in literature class, whatever. And so I didn't really read for pleasure until I got locked up and there was nothing else to do. And then I realized, oh, no wonder my mom and my grandma had these big giant stacks of books next to their bed, because it's awesome. I love reading. You know, I realized that it's in me, too. Okay. I understand now. I mean, my mom reads like 200 bucks a year. She's ridiculous. So you know I got locked up. I started reading. *The Ninja* by Eric Van Lustbader was the first series I remember reading. I read some of the old Stephen King. Stories like *Rose Madder*. This is great. Better than TV, it's better than sitting around and talking and doing nothing like these other guys are doing. I'd rather be kicked back reading. So I started writing, too. Of course, when you're locked up, it's kind of a thing to do in prison or jail. Send our love to family and friends and stay in touch, so my writing was just horrible. And my handwriting is still horrible, but my writing improved initially from writing letters. Then years later from PenPal. I got on some PenPal websites for prisoners and met some really great people. And so I was writing letters all the time, nearly every day, and then reading. Over the years, I've read hundreds--I've read a thousand novels by now. I'm not sure. I've never kept count, but I've read so many books. Nineteen in a penitentiary. Oh, yeah. So I realized one day about 10 years ago, all this writing I've done, all this I've done, I have the skills, the ability to write my own stuff. I can do this. And so I started studying books and writing. I've several dictionaries. You know, I was a dictionary guy for a long time. Improving my vocabulary and stuff. I started with a friend, a couple of friends, actually on a high risk program. After I had two escapes in 2005, 2006, I was in high risk in Supermax. There were some other guys that were aspiring writers. Very intelligent, very well-read guys. They were also writing. So that's how I started it and the idea was you know maybe we can write something and a big contract, and we can buy our way out of prison. That was the initial motivation.

Debbi: [00:12:55] Well, I got to say that I am very impressed, because so many people will say, "I want to write a book." But you've done it. You've written the stories, You've written the books. And in my experience, writing is a craft that requires not only dedication, but focus. How do you achieve that focus where you are?

Chris: [00:13:18] Oh, it's difficult at times because there's so many distractions. Not necessarily the noise. There's always guys that to kill each other and assault each other, screaming non-stop where I'm at. That doesn't bother me really. And I have this tiny little table myself, just a steel plate welded to the wall and a stool. It's like a kindergarten desk in my cell, and that's where I write. I've been in so many cells, and basically have the same little table. I've written eight books at these tables. I'm in the middle of writing, I look up, and there's water coming in my door. Somebody is flooding or there's a fire and there's smoke and somebody's getting with pepper spray and [indecipherable] and stuff. And it's okay, just stand up, go to the door, make sure that they're not about to shake me down first, and then I'll go back and sit down and start writing again. I mean, long as nobody is about the chuck a carton full of shit good keep writing.

Debbi: [00:14:34] I love your attitude. Yeah.

Chris: [00:14:38] You know, I see like where you're sitting there now. I see these pictures online and even in magazines where people are like "This is my writing space." It's like this beautiful view of nature and like it's real quiet, but I'm like, I wonder if I could even write anything if I sat there. I would just be. I don't know if I could do it.

Debbi: [00:14:57] I mean, for me it's like being closed up in this small room. I mean not as small or as noisy as your room. Nonetheless I don't have a beautiful view. Believe me it's not that gorgeous. Nobody's going to throw shit in my room, unless, of course, my husband decides to throw some cat shit in my room. I wouldn't put it past him.
[laughs]

Chris: [00:15:36] [laughs] Oh, yeah. So, craziness there, too. I think that what you described is something that my writing space would be like if I was out there just like a closed craft room with like stuff everywhere.

Debbi: [00:15:50] You just described my room.

Chris: [00:15:51] Yeah, like closed-in spaces with a low ceiling. That's where you get your best creativity from. If you're in open spaces, it's to me, anyway, it's different.

Debbi: [00:16:09] Too many distractions in open spaces. I can't do things like go to a coffee shop and write, because that's too distracting. It's too everything. I need just a place to be whatever you know.

Chris: [00:16:24] I've never thought about trying that. I wonder what I would do if I was in a Starbucks and sat down with a laptop. First of all, I'd never use a laptop, so it'd take me forever to figure that out.

Debbi: [00:16:33] It probably wouldn't take you that long.

Chris: [00:16:36] I write all my stuff by hand.

Debbi: [00:16:38] Oh, okay.

Chris: [00:16:40] I write everything by hand and type it up. Yeah, I type it up on my phone on Google Docs.

Debbi: [00:16:44] I was a journalism major, so I was taught to compose at the typewriter, back in the days of typewriters. So everything was typewriter, typewriter, typewriter. But, be that it may, I also wanted to mention that you did a great podcast interview on "What RU Afraid Of". A podcast which everybody should listen to. It's really good.

Chris: [00:17:18] It's a good one.

Debbi: [00:17:19] I want to give them a shout out, because they did such a great job and I listened to the whole thing and I was just enthralled. And let's see. Oh yeah. You're a book illustrator. You've illustrated children's books.

Chris: [00:17:36] Yes, I have. I am an artist. I've been drawing since I was about ten years old. And so of course that really develops in a penitentiary, drawing cards, holiday cards, just all kinds of things for family and friends over years and even and even officers. I've drawn pieces for everybody really. I have stuff all over the world at this point. Not known as an artist than as a tattoo artist. I was published in *Rise Tattoo Magazine* last year, and it's a publication in France and tattoo is a really big deal. And

also on an app called ATC Tattoo Books which is on Google Play. My art is featured in there—a story by Tom Vater, a journalist covered my tattooing in French territory. But the books were published by Divine Word Missionaries. They were children's coloring and activity books. A friend of mine, Dennis Newton, was the director of Divine Word Missionaries, and he asked me to do artwork for charities that he hosted. Actually, a lot of times they would have someone that they were honoring like a business owner or whoever for a charity. I would draw a portrait of them.

[00:19:07] The first one was Mother Antonia. She was a Hollywood star that live in a prison in Mexico nun in a Mexican prison. She's very old now. I think she's still there, and it's a really great story. Dennis, my friend, hosted a charity with her and asked me to draw a portrait of her. I did that and she loved it. And so it's a big deal with them. And he asked me to draw one for a guy that owns Sunshine Food, just like a grocery store chain or whatever. They wanted him. And then it was like, we got these other charities that we're doing in India and the Philippines. The one in India was after radical Hindus attacked some Christians in a village in 2008 in India. And so the men were wiped out and it was all these widows and orphans. And so you had all t groups come in to help the widows. Thousands of them. I mean, tens of thousands of them. And my friend has this company that did that. And they started this charity called Kids for Kids and they were raising baby goats in Iowa and selling them and using the money to build a church and the school in its place there and help pay for foodstuff for the widows and orphans. And they made this coloring book, activity book for kids. Dennis wrote the text in the book and I did the illustrations and it turned out really well. They used it to promote the charity.

[00:20:52] We did another one not long after that. Yeah, they had a toy shop. They started a toy shop called Joy Makers and they had all these these volunteers create these toys. They are homemade stuff. They were really well put together, though, and they sent these toys to Jamaica, Philippines, India. I'm not sure where else. All over the world. And so we we made this coloring book, Joy Makers' coloring book, and I did illustrations for that too. It was very cool.

Debbi: [00:21:24] That's really cool. And I would love to be able to draw like that. I've been sort of noodling around with cartooning a little bit. My skills are so rudimentary it's ridiculous. But have you ever thought, just out of curiosity, of doing graphic novels

Chris: [00:21:45] Yes. I've thought about that idea a little bit, several times actually. My talent isn't really like creating a character and repeating the same character in different scenes. I can draw something really great in one scene, and in the next scene I'll try to copy the same character doing like a different, in a different motion and it's difficult. I just haven't put the practice in. Yes. So even those children's books I did, the ideas like, the first time I had the same characters in different scenes and it was two goats. It was a male goat named Bob, and he was an American farmer. He had overalls and a John Deere hat. He had like a little gut on him. And there was a female goat. She's an Indian goat, and she's in Indian attire. Yeah. Bob and Banu were their names, Bob and Banu. So I put them in different scenes and that was like the first time that I was able to do the same characters in different scenes. Tackling a graphic novel is on a different level than illustrating a children's book, I think.

Debbi: [00:23:03] I suppose you're right about that. Yeah. Who are your very favorite authors?

Chris: [00:23:12] Wow. David Gemmell, believe or not. A fantasy writer. He died I think in 2006. Jim Butcher, Stephen King, Tom Vater, and Andy Rausch. God, he's good. He's really good. *Riding Shotgun: And Other American Cruelties*. It's Tarantino style. Man, it's the best book I've read in years.

Debbi: [00:23:46] Wow. Now I feel like I have to get his books, because I love Tarantino. Oh, my goodness. And where can readers find your books?

Chris: [00:23:59] I'm on Amazon. Also, you could look at *Close to the Bone*. I'm on Twitter @AuthorChrisRoy. My latest book *Her Name is Mercie*, which you've read. There's a Facebook page--a *Her Name is Mercie* Facebook page. I did a blog for it back in May. And there's a lot of both the views and information about that on Facebook. Mainly people could just look me up on Amazon or on Twitter.

Debbi: [00:24:29] Okay. Awesome. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we finish up?

Chris: [00:24:36] Yes. We've talked about my writing and everybody else's. I think that you deserve a mention. I've seen your books around and I regret I have not read them yet and I'm going to because I see I've seen and I've heard that they're fantastic.

Debbi: [00:24:53] Oh, well, thank you.

Chris: [00:24:54] The Sam McRae mysteries. Is that it?

Debbi: [00:24:57] That's it. Yeah. The Sam McRae mysteries. Slowly rolling them back out.

Chris: [00:25:03] Great.

Debbi: [00:25:04] So yeah. The next one's going to be coming out Sunday actually. [It came out on December 16, 2018].

Chris: [00:25:13] I'm going to look for it. I'm going to share and tell people about it.

Debbi: [00:25:19] Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And I really appreciate your being here today. It was great meeting you and talking to you.

Chris: [00:25:29] Thank you for having me.

Debbi: [00:25:30] Sure thing. It was my pleasure. I truly admire your dedication to the craft and your achievements despite everything. I'll just add that if you want to read more about Chris's background, check at his Web site.

Www[dot]unjustelement[dot]com. It's a very good website and he has a blog there, and I'll remind you that we have the Crime Cafe boxed set and anthology for sale online. You can get copies of both if you support the podcast on Patreon. Just visit my website, debbimack[dot]com and click on "Crime Cafe" to learn more about that. Also, please leave a review of the podcast, if you enjoyed it. And with that I will just say thanks so much for listening. Happy reading and I'll see you in two weeks.