

# The Crime Cafe with Burl Barer

Presented By:



**Debbi:** [00:00:12] 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 eBooks for sale: The 9-Book boxed set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my website [DebbiMack.com](http://DebbiMack.com) under the "Crime Café" link. You can also get 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.

**Debbi:** [00:01:02] Hi everyone. Before I get started, I'd like to give a hale and hearty shout-out to my first Patreon contributor Ken MacClune, not to mention his awesome wife, Karen, and their amazing daughter, Ella. Okay, I suppose I should, in the interest of full disclosure, say that Ken is my brother. But having given support to my Patreon page, to this podcast, he has gotten his free copy of---well, not free, but for the support, he has gotten with that a copy of my fourth Sam McRae novel, which is coming out this month, *Deep Six*. And by taking advantage of a limited time special offer, he was able to get this. So more of those are coming. So keep your eye on that Patreon page. I'll try to keep you updated as fast as I can. And, on that note, I'd like to introduce a very special guest. Not only is this author an investigative journalist and true crime author, he is also an Edgar award-winning author of the Saint novels, which is really cool in my book. How many of you remember the episodes with Roger Moore? I know I do. It's my pleasure to have with me today Burl Barer. Hi Burl. How are you?

**Burl:** [00:02:26] Better and better every day, in every way.

**Debbi:** [00:02:28] That's great.

**Burl:** [00:02:30] There was a French psychologist named Emile Coue. And he believed that if you stood in front of the mirror and told yourself that like 20 times, that sooner or later you'd believe it. I've been trying it now for about 30, 40 years. I'm not convinced, but I'm giving it a shot.

**Debbi:** [00:02:49] Yeah, it's very interesting because I've heard about that. It's kind of like ... Hmmm? Really?

**Burl:** [00:02:54] Positive reinforcement.

**Debbi:** [00:02:58] I think there's something to that. I think there's a lot to this whole idea of visualization and so forth.

**Burl:** [00:03:04] I know. I've visualized a lot of really interesting things in my life that I'd probably be arrested for. But in the world of visualization, all things are okay.

**Debbi:** [00:03:14] There you go. I was looking over your bio and bibliography and I was deeply impressed by the range of your work. Did you start your career as a journalist, in journalism as a writer?

**Burl:** [00:03:31] Yeah, well, it's hard to say what we want to admit. I started my career as a small child. My mother was a newspaperwoman and my father smelled of elderberries. We have journalism and that sort of thing in the family history, family background. My mother was a newspaperwoman. Her brother Sid Copeland wrote for Life Magazine, Time magazine. He was later Vice President of Cold & Weber public relations. My sister was a gossip columnist, I mean, uh, society editor. That's what you want to call it. And she wrote books and my cousin Helen writes books. My cousin Shoshana Barer writes books. I mean, it's kind of, you know, if you grow up in a family of opera singers, being an opera singer is perfectly normal. You grow up in a family of writers, being a writer is perfectly normal. I can't fix a car. If you want me to do that, I'm terribly sorry. I don't know how. That's why I admire people who can, but I can't. And it's probably the other way around, too, that people who admire those of us who can write books, and we would say, "Gee, I wish I knew how to fix this car or how to repair this vacuum cleaner." But everybody has their gifts.

[00:04:53] So I started off doing a talk show on the radio. On KUJ in Walla Walla, Washington. Because they wouldn't let me on the high school radio show, because I was only a freshman or something. And they liked seniors.

[00:05:08] I'm a senior now. They could have me on a high school show. So then I did the high school radio show, one thing led to another, and the next thing I know, I was a rock and roll disc jockey. So I played the hits and wrote articles and I decided... hmm, I think I'll write books now. Might be a fun thing to do.

[00:05:31] I was kind of like king of all media. I wanted to be in all the different forms of media and I wanted to own them. I wanted to be comfortable enough or ignorant enough within their frameworks to do something new, do something different. Tweak it somehow, which is very nervy. It's the kind of thing you do when you don't know any better. You get away with it.

**Debbi:** [00:05:59] God, I know.

**Burl:** [00:06:00] Orson Welles used to talk about that, that you want to keep that feeling of you don't know how bad you are, really. You don't know what you're doing wrong, you know. So when you don't have that, oh, gee, I'm going to embarrass myself by writing another book. It'll be out there to shame me forever. Just go ahead. You try all sorts of things. I'll give an example. My first true crime book. *Man Overboard*, the counterfeit resurrection of Phil Champagne. Now, traditionally, the rules in true crime, which aren't observed anymore whatsoever, is just the facts. It's like you're Joe Friday. Just the facts, ma'am. It was rather dry stuff. You don't really read true crime books where the author has any [illegible] this could have been anybody.

[00:07:01] But, I decided, well, this my book. I'll write it the way I want. And so I break the fourth wall, I talk to the characters in the book, I talk to myself. I make smart-ass comments. I do all the things that true crime writers aren't supposed to do. And it was a difficult thing structuring the story, because if I told the story in actual order, it would become increasingly boring as it went on. I had to move things. Go back and forth in time in order to put a climactic chapter at the climax rather than three pages in.

[00:07:39] I went, well, who knows what's going to happen with this book? And the first attempt to publish it, they sent me the galleys and I noticed there were several chapters missing. And they said, well, can't we just publish it like that? Do we have to move a lot of chapters? I think so. So it came out and the wrong file was printed. The uncorrected version was printed, and this is a tragic story. E.W. Count, who is the Edgar award-winning author, I had sent the manuscript to her. I said, E.W. We're on a first initial basis. E, I said. Will you read this book and give me some hope because you are a true professional and what do I know? So she reads it and very astutely says the first 19 pages don't work. Got to redo the first 19 pages. And she graciously wrote out all the changes that she would make. Bless her heart. So I made those changes and that was not the file that was printed. They sent the wrong file to the publisher. And the book came out with all the typos and everything wrong in the first 19 pages. Poor E. Poor E. E no doubt felt that I had slighted her dreadfully. You know, that I did, well, "Here's your suggestions. I don't even deal with them."

[00:09:19] And the late great Jack Olsen, who was on the Edgar committee, violated protocol by taking me aside and saying, Burl, you were one vote away from an Edgar award nomination for *Man Overboard*. But there was one vote against you.

[00:09:35] I said, "I bet it was E, wasn't it?" About those first 19 pages, isn't it? He goes, "Yeah."

**Debbi:** [00:09:43] I am dying trying not to just keep laughing throughout this.

**Burl:** [00:09:46] Go ahead and laugh. It's all right.

**Debbi:** [00:09:48] Oh, my gosh.

**Burl:** [00:09:51] The book was nominated for Best True Crime Book of the Year at the World Mystery Convention. Didn't win, by the way, but I was nominated for it. So makes it sound really impressive. People think you won, if you were nominated. Ann Rule, bless your heart, was nominated. Get this. She was nominated the same award. Her book, *Dead by Sunset*, I think was the name of her book, was nominated. My book was nominated. She says, "Oh, Burl. I just know you're going to win." That was my Ann Rule impersonation. And I said, "No, Ann. You're going to win." And I think she won. I didn't. But the point being, if you read *Man Overboard*, guess who shows up as a character in the book? Ann Rule, because her daughter and Phil's Champagne's daughter were best friends. So Ann's in my book. Now, her book is about this woman who worked for a law firm, which has the name Barer in the title. That was with my brother's law firm, so my family is in her book. Her family is in my book. Almost incestuous.

**Debbi:** [00:11:07] I was just going to use that word.

**Burl:** [00:11:09] Good. So I'm not alone then. So that was kind of interesting. My family was in her book; her family was in my book. And we were both nominated for Best True Crime book. And she said I was going to win, but I didn't. But she did, I think, which is fine with me.

**Debbi:** [00:11:28] Well, nonetheless, you've had quite the career and is there a particular---?

**Burl:** [00:11:37] But no one buys that book, though.

**Debbi:** [00:11:39] No one buys it.

**Burl:** [00:11:40] No one buys it. Gets great reviews. People talk about it. Gets nominated for things, but you ever buy that one? I sold it as if I were a Vegemetic salesman at ... . the one where I got lost. Mid-Atlantic convention, which is in Philadelphia. Although I thought mid-Atlantic meant it was halfway between the East Coast and the West Coast, in other words midway towards the Atlantic. So I get to Philadelphia, I don't know where the hell I am. What's that body of water out there? It was the ocean.

**Debbi:** [00:12:17] Oh, dear.

**Burl:** [00:12:20] I had a hundred and five books, hardback, that first came out. I took them with me, and I sold them to everybody. All 105 books, browbeat people terribly to buy the book. And I used anything. A woman says, "Well, is that a true crime book?" And I said, "Yes, it is." She said, "It's non-fiction." I said, "That's right." She says, "I only read fiction." I said, "Well, good, because it's a pack of lies."

**Debbi:** [00:12:50] Well, these days, the line between fiction and non-fiction tends to be blurred quite a bit.

**Burl:** [00:12:58] Oh, yes, yes. Facts are pesky things, as Ronald Reagan once said.

**Debbi:** [00:13:02] Indeed. Indeed.

**Burl:** [00:13:04] In fact, I did a little clever sociological experiment. I would write in the dedication, the signed books, authors had to sign books for people who read them, except those that say, "Don't personalize it. It'll be worth more if you're dead if you don't put my name in it." Thank you so much. What I did is, say, if I was writing it you, Debbi, I'd say, "Dear Debbi, Thank you so much for your years of emotional and financial support. And I will always treasure the weekend we spent together in the Bahamas. And you'd get this and you read it and say you're married and got kids and you go, "Oh my God, if my husband sees this." Or that guy had an affair with his just terrible author and you hide the book. And then years later, after you passed away, people find this hidden book that you didn't destroy, but you hid. And they read it and go, "Oh, that's why our family's so damn dysfunctional. Mom was having an affair with that stupid author." And then that we'll have support groups for all the people whose kids or grandkids

found the book years later. Support groups like, you know, People Who Had Affairs with Burl Barer and Didn't Tell their Family Anonymous.

**Debbi:** [00:14:24] The secret life of Burl Barer.

**Burl:** [00:14:28] Yeah, I thought it was a great idea.

**Debbi:** [00:14:30] Think of all the jobs you're creating, and the books that will be created. You'll live forever in somebody's memory.

**Burl:** [00:14:38] That's right. That's why drugs are good for the economy. Look how many rehabs there are.

**Debbi:** [00:14:42] That's right. Keeps people employed. Keeps prisons operating.

**Burl:** [00:14:47] Oh, God, spare me.

**Debbi:** [00:14:48] Yeah. I know.

**Burl:** [00:14:48] Oh, don't get me started.

**Debbi:** [00:14:51] Oh, I know. I've been there. I know the feeling here. Okay, I've got to talk about the Saint. I love your posters.

**Burl:** [00:14:59] Can you see them back there? Those are real ones. Those aren't replicas. Those are actual Saint one-sheets from the days when George Sanders was playing the Saint.

**Debbi:** [00:15:11] Yes, yes. I've seen him in that.

**Burl:** [00:15:12] Louis Hayward. The Saint's Girl Friday. That's when blondes, bullets, and blackmail can't stop him.

**Debbi:** [00:15:24] Of course not.

**Burl:** [00:15:24] Of course not. When is a blonde ever going to stop the Saint or bullets or a blackmail.

**Debbi:** [00:15:32] What got you so interested in the Saint? How did you get involved with that whole franchise?

**Burl:** [00:15:38] I was 16 years old and my friend David Benefiel... this is a great story. He was reading Saint books. I had never read one. His sister was giving him the Saint books. And he said, Burl, read these, these are great fun. The first one he gave me was *The Saint in New York*, which, while that's one of the most popular Saint books of all time, it didn't quite hit me the way he wanted to. The next one he gave me was *Saint's Getaway*. I loved it.

[00:16:15] But this is great fun. This is just great fun, because there's probably been entire books written about this sort of thing. Oh, I wrote one. That's right. And that is it's almost a satire of the genre. The Saint is a hero, and he was about to be killed in his book *The Saint Versus Scotland Yard* The bad guy has him. He says, "You can't kill me. There's two more stories in this book." I thought that was just great stuff.

**Debbi:** [00:16:48] Now I've got to read it.

**Burl:** [00:16:51] There is all this is bizarre. I could reach over to my bookshelf and give you an example. But the Saint was being featured in what was called Thriller Magazine, which is a pulp magazine in England that kids read. But the grown-ups were reading the Saint, also, because it was so funny to them, because he was doing. You know, both things. It was talking ... it had all the insane action and melodrama laid on with a trowel that kids like. And then, all of a sudden in the midst of some big action sequence, the author says ... well, it says for example. A giant black man in native garb comes out of the mist in England, on the moors, and attacks the Saint, which was unusual. And the Saint looks at this fellow. [Illegible] against this giant African guy in a loincloth. In the movie, it's a guy in a turtleneck. But in the movie, the book it's this black guy in a loincloth. And he says, "'Good morning,' said the Saint. And that was the last pleasant thing he had to say."

[00:18:07] And then it goes on, this digression about what type of napkins you use when dining with the Queen or something. And then the Saint kicks the guy in the solar plexus and that kind of solved that problem. But it goes off on all this, you know, hits different age groups, different

backgrounds. And sometimes the solution to a mystery will be incredibly stupid. But you don't care because it's on purpose, you know. The coincidences are just bizarre. As he says, the thing about coincidences is they're always coinciding. It's one of their peculiar characteristics. So naturally, I love this stuff. Or it just cracked me up.

**Debbi:** [00:18:59] My gosh, this sounds almost like the Douglas Adams of pulp writing.

**Burl:** [00:19:04] Yes.

**Debbi:** [00:19:04] It has a kind of whimsical ...

**Burl:** [00:19:05] Great fun, wonderful. What's that one with the Saint that's called *The Sporting Chance* where this woman is going to be kidnapped? And, get the extremity of this, the Saint wonders why women are always being kidnapped, held against their will, and submitted to offers that are like fate worse than death, meaning sexual abuse. Why is this always happening? Well, sure enough, in this episode, the woman is scheduled to provide sexual favors for an entire submarine full of Soviets.

**Debbi:** [00:19:45] Oh, lord.

**Burl:** [00:19:51] It's this extreme. Okay. All right. I always wondered about this. I still haven't got a good answer.

**Debbi:** [00:19:59] No wonder you're so fascinated with this character. I mean, seriously, now I have to read these books.

**Burl:** [00:20:05] Hysterically funny, to me anyway. And so it's almost like satire of the genre. Except it does it straight on. Does the genre beautifully.

**Debbi:** [00:20:19] With a straight face.

**Burl:** [00:20:21] Yeah. And then all of a sudden, we went, "What?" The Saint is being suspended by his hands like this from a pipe. How's he going to escape? Well, he does have a knife, you know, thingy on his wrist. So his legs come up like this. His toes go in and get the knife. And you're going, "What the hell?" That's probably physically impossible. He says, "I've

learned this at the Folies Bergère.” That's the climax of a perfectly straight-faced story until you get to there, and you're going, "Oh, what?"

**Debbi:** [00:21:07] Oh, my goodness. Well, that sounds fantastic.

**Burl:** [00:21:11] The Roger Moore, you see the Roger Moore. They made it into a movie for some markets. It's a two-part TV episode. *The Fiction Makers*, based on a book called *The Fiction Makers*, and the thing was Charteris was saying that if the movie had been played, everyone perfectly straight, except the Saint, it would probably be more effective. But it was always a little bit tongue-in-cheek to the whole production. But that's show business.

**Debbi:** [00:21:49] So I'm gonna have to wrap up pretty soon. But I want to get a couple more questions in before we finish.

**Burl:** [00:21:56] We're almost done already. Okay.

**Debbi:** [00:22:00] Time goes quickly. I just wanted to ask you. You said that you had met with the author, Leslie Charteris.

**Burl:** [00:22:08] Yes. I wrote a book called *The Saint: A Complete History in Print, Radio, Television and Film*, which is a complete history of the Saint in print, radio, blah, blah, blah. 1927 to 1992, I think. And he liked it. And I went to England for Action 93, a celebration of ITC television programs. And Leslie Charteris and his wife bought me lunch at a lovely coffee shop in Surrey two weeks to the day before he passed away. And he's very tall. And I can say his soul was on the surface. Sometimes when it's close to the end of someone's life, it's like their soul is on the surface, which I guess is the only way I can describe it. And he'd had some minor strokes and his voice was very soft, and I'm very deaf. And he leaned over and he said, "How can Bill MacDonald concentrate on my Saint movie with Sharon Stone in his bed?" The one which isn't in his bed anymore.

**Debbi:** [00:23:12] Oh, my gosh.

**Burl:** [00:23:15] That was a real treat to meet him. He wrote the most wonderful letter when you read the book and said he was left with the two most inadequate or whatever words he had in his vocabulary. Thank you.

**Debbi:** [00:23:31] That's so nice.

**Burl:** [00:23:31] Wasn't that sweet?

**Debbi:** [00:23:32] That's so very, very nice.

**Burl:** [00:23:35] So I wrote a Saint novel. That's a novel. That's why it's called a Saint novel, called *Camp for the Saint*. And a second one, which isn't out yet. We don't know if it will be or not. It's called *The Sign of the Saint*, in which I try to deconstruct the entire Saint mythology, which should be rather entertaining. Ian Dickerson's also written a Saint novel. So, we'll see what happens. Paramount's got the rights to the character and, fingers crossed, there will be more Saint projects.

**Debbi:** [00:24:04] Yeah. Fingers crossed. Here's hoping.

**Burl:** [00:24:07] And more true crime stuff.

**Debbi:** [00:24:10] More true crime, yes.

**Burl:** [00:24:10] My next big project. Do we have time to squeeze in a mention of it?

**Debbi:** [00:24:14] Sure. Yes, please do.

**Burl:** [00:24:15] It's a three-volume set called *The American Panther*. The first one is called *Stealing Manhattan*. It's a true story, never before told, of the greatest altruistic outlaws in the history of America. A family that stole billions of dollars in diamonds, jewels, precious gems from the Diamond District in New York, never got caught, never went to prison, and invited me to go fishing. He got away with everything. Mr. Stan they called him. He was a very high profile man in New York high society and a secret identity. He and his beautiful wife and their son were master jewel thieves. And it's an incredible true story. Over 1993, over a billion dollars. Everyone was in on it. That's what made it so fun. The safe companies teaching him how to open the safes. Security companies working for them, instead of being robbed, would be happy to be robbed. Everyone was celebrating, but that's why my next book coming out is *Stealing*

*Manhattan*. True story of Mr. Stan and Branka, his wife, and their beloved son, Punch, who was a frequent guest on my radio show.

**Debbi:** [00:25:38] Very interesting. And you have a radio show?

**Burl:** [00:25:41] Yes. It's called True Crime Uncensored. My co-hosts keep dying, however. So I wouldn't recommend taking a position. Don Woldman was my first co-host for five years. He suddenly died. Howard Lapides, my manager and co-host, passed away suddenly a few weeks ago. Frank Girardot, Jr., my co-author on many of my true crime books, he's joined me as my new co-author and, I mean, co-host. And I'm taking out a big insurance policy on him, first thing Monday morning.

**Debbi:** [00:26:11] Maybe I should take out some insurance. I'm wondering now. Okay. Well, it's been nice knowing you, Burl. No, kidding. So is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

**Burl:** [00:26:24] If anyone would like to send me large amounts of negotiable currency, I'm perfectly comfortable with that. I take PayPal, Venmo, Cash App. The name is spelled B-U-R-L B-A-R-E-R. And I'm easy. I wouldn't say I'm cheap. I'd just say I'm affordable.

**Debbi:** [00:26:49] My soul can be bought, but not for cheap.

**Burl:** [00:26:51] Yeah. Oh, I had a friend, a vendor who did that. A friend of mine tried to sell her soul on eBay. They said if it's a body part, you can't sell it. This isn't. And it's, you know. I was [illegible] to give their money back.

**Debbi:** [00:27:13] Well, that all sounds very interesting.

**Burl:** [00:27:15] Now, I have to ask you a question before you go. You booked me two years in advance. How did you do that?

**Debbi:** [00:27:23] I'm sorry?

**Burl:** [00:27:24] Two years in advance.

**Debbi:** [00:27:25] How did I do it?

**Burl:** [00:27:27] I mean, are you really booked up for a full two years?

**Debbi:** [00:27:30] Yeah, literally. Yeah. Literally, yes.

**Burl:** [00:27:33] It has to be literally, because we write books. I mean, aside from that. How do you keep track?

**Debbi:** [00:27:41] Well, I just keep a list.

**Burl:** [00:27:41] Amazing. I mean, I'm booking my guests, you know, Friday at 3:00 a.m. in the morning for Saturday. "Will you do my show?"

**Debbi:** [00:27:54] Yeah. I'm sure at some point, I'll probably be scrambling again, because for a while, I mean at the very beginning. But, yeah, it's pretty amazing.

**Burl:** [00:28:03] Yeah, it's amazing. Amazing, but true. Hey, you know, folks, when you buy those books, the ones that say Burl Barer on them, make sure you buy them new, not used. Because people call up and say, "Hey, Burl. You'll be happy. I bought three of your books at a yard sale. You'll get a check in the mail, right?" Oh, yeah. Mrs. Pibnick is going to send me ten cents.

[00:28:27] You'll have to buy the book new in order for your favorite author to get any money at all. We just don't make the money we used to. It's a tragic story. No. Those of you who want to be authors, want to be famous authors? Don't quit your day job. Unfortunately, I didn't have a day job, so I just got stuck doing it all the time.

**Debbi:** [00:28:50] Well, Burl, thank you so much for being with us today and sharing your thoughts.

**Burl:** [00:28:56] My pleasure. It's been just a delight.

**Debbi:** [00:28:59] Same here. I've had a great time.

**Burl:** [00:28:59] Maybe two or three years, you'll have me back on again.

**Debbi:** [00:29:03] That'd be great. Yeah, please.

**Burl:** [00:29:06] Fingers crossed. Fingers crossed.

**Debbi:** [00:29:07] So, in any case, now I have to read the Saint books for sure.

**Burl:** [00:29:13] Yes, I suggest *The Saint's Getaway*, because the latest edition has a foreword by Burl Barer. That's good.

**Debbi:** [00:29:23] Well, there you go. So you've got the Saint and he's awesome and the guy who writes him is awesome. And, in any case, don't forget that the Crime Cafe also has two e-books for sale. The nine-book box set and short story anthology. So you get a wide variety of different types of stories in the crime genre. Check it out. And, as I mentioned, you can support the podcast through Patreon and get some awesome perks for doing so. Just look for the link to the Patreon page on my website, [DebbiMack.com](http://DebbiMack.com). There's something for everyone at every level of support. And with that, I'll just add that our next guest on the show will be Andy Caldwell. Thanks to my guest and to you out there listening. And on that note, I'll see you in two weeks. In the meantime, happy reading.