

The Crime Cafe with Cathi Stoler

Presented By:



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Debbi: Hi everyone. Happy new year. It's 2020, or it will be by the time this goes up on the air or in the stream or whatever. My guest today is author of the three-volume Laurel and Helen New York Mystery series and the three-time finalist and winner of the 2015 Derringer Award for Best Short Story. Her latest novel is called *Out of Time: A Nick Donahue Adventure*. It's not just a mystery, it's an adventure. So it's my pleasure to introduce my guest, Cathi Stoler. Hi Cathi, how are you doing today?

Cathi: Hi Debbi. Thank you for having me.

Debbi: I'm in the midst of reading *Out of Time* and enjoying the heck out of it. Can you tell us a bit about Nick Donahue, who I understand started as a character in a short story?

Cathi: Yes. He is a professional blackjack player, and he travels all over the world. He lives in London with his partner, Marina DiPietro. And he's just, he's fun and he's

sophisticated, and he seems to find himself in a lot of trouble, even though he's pretty smart. When I came up with him, he was gambling in the casino in Venice, and Marina was undercover for MI6, but he didn't know that. He met her and he helped her with something, and then he got in trouble, and she rescued him. And then at the end of that... So this is sort of a three-part story, and at the end of it he wound up rescuing her from the mob who thought he owed them \$10 million.

Debbi: Very interesting.

Cathi: He got it back from them. They were doing money laundering. So and then I just thought I would... That was a novella. The short story morphed into a novella. And then I thought I would like to continue writing them, those two characters.

Debbi: What was it exactly that attracted you about those two characters?

Cathi: I just think that they're compatible but kind of opposite, and they're both pretty smart, and they both are good at their professions and their jobs. But there was just a little of this back-and-forth pull, and I thought that they would work well together to continue. Marina is really the detective, and he kind of, the private investigator, and he kind of helps her.

Debbi: Yeah, I was going to say that Marina is such a strong character, and technically she's the professional investigator. So it's kind of interesting to see the story told from the viewpoint of the helper character, kind of like Watson to Holmes sort of. Was there something that drew you toward writing to that point of view in particular?

Cathi: I just, I really was very drawn to the character of Nick Donahue, and I wanted the story to be from his perspective. And even though Marina is the private investigator, it's really him telling the story of how they are interacting. And he's just... I always liked spy stories when I was a kid. Now, he's not a spy, but it's sort of a little bit of a James Bond kind of character, like that.

Debbi: Exactly.

Cathi: [crosstalk 00:04:33], the essence of these difficulties. But he manages in his own fashion to extricate himself.

Debbi: Would you describe your writing as humorous?

Cathi: Not generally, but I think in those two books there's a little bit more of that. My other novels, I would say my characters are a little more snarky. For my first series of the detective was kind of a wise cracker, and then the series I'm writing now, the woman who owns the bar is, sort of in that vein. And I don't write funny things. I don't know that I could do that. If I consciously thought about it it would probably [inaudible 00:05:27].

Debbi: But it comes out.

Cathi: Yeah, it comes out. But there are some people who write very, very, very funny stories of funny characters where you laugh out loud kind of thing. But that's not what it's about.

Debbi: But I think you have a nice balance there. You have a nice balance of the spy stuff with the humorous asides from Nick.

Cathi: Yeah. Good. That's kind of...

Debbi: Yeah, do you plan to write a third book?

Cathi: Well, I have a new series that I'm working on, so if I do it won't be for a while. I might write another story. I was thinking about that, so I have to see how my time progresses. Not give them up entirely. I won't give them up entirely, because I enjoy writing this and writing about them, and we'll have to see how the timelines go.

Debbi: Yeah, will Nick and Marina's relationship be changing over the course of the books?

Cathi: I don't think it's going to be changing too much. I mean, they'll still be together, and they'll still, he'll still want to help her, and the ones who get into the most trouble... I have them sort of rescuing each other in stories. And their base is in London, so they travel. He travels a lot for the blackjack, and she travels a lot for her job as well. So we'll see where they go next.

Debbi: Yeah. How much research do you do to acquaint yourself with things like, say blackjack, or MI6, or the travel aspect of it?

Cathi: Blackjack, I play a little, but I'm certainly no professional. I had to write a scene in the first story where he had to lose, so he could owe the casino money, and he could do this favor for them. And you have to think about how he could really lose and not have him say, "What are you doing? Why are you playing your cards that way." So that was kind of fun to figure that out.

But the travel aspect I love a lot, because I like to travel. I did go to Dubai, and it's quite a different kind of city than New York. Every building is [inaudible 00:08:10] tall, and you go to the top of the Burj Khalifa, and all you see is the big giant city, and then desert and water. And it is huge. I didn't expect it to be that big, but [inaudible 00:08:24].

Debbi: Wow. So when people ask you what kind of books you write, what do you tell them?

Cathi: Well, I tell them their mystery suspense stories. That's basically what they are. There's a mystery that needs to be solved, or a suspenseful type of mystery. I mean, this was finding this weapon of mass destruction and who was responsible for prompting that to happen, for the terrorists get their hands, try and get their hands on it. So I think that's how I think of them as mystery suspense, and maybe a little---and thrillers a little bit. For me, it's kind of the suspense thriller genre is similar.

Debbi: With a kind of dash of romance in there?

Cathi: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Debbi: Yeah, definitely. There's chemistry there with Nick and Marina, who I just love as a character. Both of them. I understand you're also, you're working on an urban thriller called *Bar None*? That's the one you just, yeah, talked about?

Cathi: Yeah, that one is the first book in the series. Now I'm working on the second one called *Last Call*. And the main character in those books is a woman named Jude Dillane, and she owns The Corner Lounge on 10th Street and Avenue B, lower Manhattan. And in the first book they find the body and... No, I'm sorry. I'm getting my second book mixed up with my first book.

In her first book she helps solve a crime at the food bank in the Bronx. I don't know if you've ever heard of the giant market there, the Hunts Point Market. And it's a week... It's a wholesale market for all kinds of vegetables and meats and things. And I placed the food bank, an imaginary food bank, in that area. So her landlord volunteers there and they're very good friends. So someone gets killed, a friend of his, so she helps him solve that case.

In *Last Call*, the book that should be coming out next year, that is about serial killers. [inaudible 00:10:56]. He's looking to find a serial killer. So, and then the third one, I'm not exactly sure where I'm going with that, but we'll see what happens.

Debbi: Okay, since you're writing about a New York City bartender, I have to ask, have you ever read Con Lehane's work?

Cathi: Yes, I know him. He's working—

Debbi: Yes, I was going to say, *Beware the Solitary Drinker*?

Cathi: He's writing about the New York Public Library now. I haven't read those. That's the theme.

Debbi: I have yet to read those books, too. I love his work. Very nice guy and good writer. What authors do you most enjoy reading?

Cathi: Let's see. Well, I used to like to read all the spy people, but now I read Alison Gaylin and Megan Abbott, and I read some historical fiction, Laura Joh Roland, and Mariah Fredericks are fun to read, too. It's a little bit different. I always liked John le Carre. Who else is contemporary? Susan Isaacs. I'm looking forward to her last book. I didn't even realize she had one, but a friend told me they had it. Of course, I read Agatha Christie and those people.

Debbi: All the classics, yes. What authors would you say have most inspired your own writing?

Cathi: Well, I think Sue Grafton. I liked her books a lot. And she just had that... She had that great protagonist, Kinsey, and she had a quirky sense of humor, Kinsey did, and she's one of them. Let me think. Who else? I should have thought about this before I spoke to you. I can't think who else right now. If it comes to me I'll come back to that.

But I read all the time. I just am reading something by Jonathan Kellerman, and I just read Jacqueline Winspear, which is historical. So I'm trying to alternate a little bit and get some new points of view. Oh, and Wendy Corsi Staub. I love her too. They're all good writers. Carol Goodman.

Debbi: Carol Goodman? Okay, awesome. Well, thank you for those suggestions. I'm going to do something new for the new year here. I'm going to do a little James Lipton from In the Actor's Studio, or From the Actor's Studio, whatever that show was. What's your favorite curse word?

Cathi: I don't think I can say it.

Debbi: Feel free to say it.

Cathi: The F-word.

Debbi: The F-word?

Cathi: [inaudible 00:14:00] that's when I go. Why is this happening, you know?

Debbi: Gotcha. Very good. Sort of WTF as it were.

Cathi: Yeah, exactly. That's actually better.

Debbi: All right, well, I thought it would give that a try. Anyway, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Cathi: No, I mean, I'm glad that you said you're enjoying my book, and I hope your podcast listeners will, and video watchers will enjoy it as well. It's just fun. I think it's fun, and I like those characters. It's not heart-wrenching, where are they going? I mean, there's suspense, of course, but—

Debbi: But there's a lot of suspense.

Cathi: Yeah, there is a lot of suspense, but it's kind of, I think I handle it in a more humorous, a little bit more humorous, but a fun way.

Debbi: Kind of a fun caper-like way.

Cathi: Yeah.

Debbi: Yeah. So, well, thank you very much for being here today, Cathi. I just want to thank you for your time and thank you for answering our questions. And your book is, as I said, getting very exciting, and I can't wait to sit down and read it tonight.

Before we go, let me just remind you that you can buy copies of *The Crime Cafe 9-Book Set*, and *Crime Cafe Short Story Anthology* by going to my website and clicking on "Crime Cafe", or on "Books". You'll find my novels and other writings there, too. However, if you become a podcast supporter on Patreon, you'll also get the advanced reader copy of all my upcoming books. So that's something I'm offering. And I also do weekly updates on where I'm at with my writing on Patreon. So if you would like to please leave a review for the podcast too, I'd really appreciate it. It helps with a lot. So next time our guests will be Blaine Pardoe, and in the meantime I'll see you in two weeks, and happy reading.

Cathi: Happy reading, and happy new year.

Debbi: Happy new year, too. Yes!