

# The Crime Cafe with Blaine Pardoe

Presented By:



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**Debbi** [00:02:13]: Hi everyone. Today's guest is an award-winning New York Times bestselling author of numerous books in a wide variety of genres, including true crime. He is also a historian, which I think is way cool. It's my great pleasure to introduce Blaine Pardoe. Hi, Blaine.

**Blaine** [00:02:33]: Thanks for having me on.

**Debbi** [00:02:35]: Sure thing. I'm glad you could be here. And let's see, you've had a really interesting career. I don't get to talk to many crime authors who are also nonfiction historian writers. So, how did you get into that?

**Blaine** [00:02:51]: Actually, you know, I tend to write the things I like to read. So, from my youth, I've been reading true crime and I've been reading military history, and when I became a writer, I was writing primarily science fiction and told my agent I wanted to get into writing some military history and he was like "that's crazy, you don't go that direction" and I said "well, I do". And so, I started going into that and I wrote a number of military history books, really enjoyed doing that. And you know, then I decided, well, you know what, I always like true crime, I'll go branch into that. I found that, really, the amount of research—there's a difference as to where you go to get the information, but the actual research methodologies are pretty similar between writing a historical nonfiction and writing true crime.

**Debbi** [00:03:49]: Mm-hmm. I was gonna say, you said you have a preference for cold cases and older cases, is it more difficult to write about recent or ongoing cases?

**Blaine** [00:04:03]: Yeah. You know, the problem is the wounds are all pretty new and you know, I'd love to do some current cases, especially some of them that are out there

now are absolutely fascinating. The problem is, you know, it's so new and it's so fresh and it's still so painful for the victims' families, etc. to deal with it. It's very hard for people to be objective in what they're saying. It's a lot easier with a cold case that might go back to the 1960s, '70s or '80s, to go back to an older cold case, you're able to really get some objectivity. Now, people's memories are worse, but they're able to talk about it a lot more because they've talked about it so many times. And I found that's been easier for us to get, you know, in terms of interviewing people, to be able to get them to open up about that.

**Debbi** [00:05:05]: Mm-hmm. I would think they would have more perspective on it at that point.

**Blaine** [00:05:09]: Sometimes.

**Debbi** [00:05:11]: Uh-huh. Sometimes, yeah. Huh. Well, there's also the aspect of police wanting to conduct an investigation without giving out too much information, I would assume.

**Blaine** [00:05:23]: Well, you know, when you're dealing with cold cases, it always helps to have law enforcement on your side and say, "yes, that'd be a help". But we've had situations where we've been able to work with law enforcement and open up the case files and go from there. We've also had cases where law enforcement said, "we will not cooperate", and those are harder to do. That's frustrating and you kind of pound your head a lot on those, but you know, there's ways around that and I find a lot of former investigators and they're more than willing to talk about it. When a case—you know, we just did a book on the Freeway Phantom which was a serial killing spree in Washington DC in the 1970s, and the police are still going, "it's an active investigation, we're following all leads". Well, look, it's 48 years old. If you haven't solved it, you're not going to at this point, or at best you're going to find that the perpetrator is dead, you know. But they still won't open the case files for us. But we found some former investigators who were able to share. They kept copies of things and that was helpful for us, and they were more than willing to share them.

**Debbi** [00:06:56]: That's good. Now, both this book and the one, *A Special Kind of Evil*, which you are giving away, were collaborations with your daughter, correct?

**Blaine** [00:07:09]: Yes, yes. I've done a number of books with my daughter.

**Debbi** [00:07:13]: Ah-ha. So, when did you start collaborating?

**Blaine** [00:07:16]: It was a few years ago. I got approached by a law enforcement officer about a cold case in my hometown. I had just written a book on a cold case in my hometown in Michigan and it was on the murder of Maggie Hume. And my daughter has always been a true crime fan and she loves to write, and I thought, well, what the heck. You know, I've never written with someone collaboratively, and I knew her writing style was pretty close to mine. So, I called her up and said "are you interested in doing this?" and she was all over it. So, we traveled up to Michigan on many trips, did the research,

split the book up, you know, edited each other's work, really kind of dove into it. And it's actually been kind of a fun—I wouldn't say father-daughter experience as much as it's just been fun writing with someone who's so much younger, whose perspective is so much different than an old fart like me, you know. I look at things a certain way and she offers kind of a different perspective, and that's very useful.

**Debbi** [00:08:32]: That's fantastic actually. It sounds wonderful. So, it sounds like you guys collaborate well together.

**Blaine** [00:08:39]: We do. You know, it's a little weird. You know, I would tell people I used to work with—you know, I'm taking my daughter out to some murder scenes this weekend, you know, and you always kind of get kind of a weird look from people anyway but yeah.

**Debbi** [00:08:53]: How touching (chuckles)

**Blaine** [00:08:56]: (chuckles) yeah, “what kind of a father are you?” We actually had a good time with a lot of it. And it's a time for us to talk, and I think my wife enjoys it from a perspective of she doesn't like hearing about some of these cases and how gruesome they are. My daughter's a nurse, so it's not a big deal if we start talking about, “well, did you see this in the autopsy photo?” and “oh my god, I couldn't believe they put their hands there”, and you know, things along those lines. You look at it now, you know, my wife kind of cringed at it but my daughter gets into it, so it makes it a little bit easier to work.

**Debbi** [00:09:33]: Mm-hmm. Yes, I can imagine. Your blog post was about the Kevin Bacon murder. Can you tell us a little bit more about that case and how you got involved with writing about it?

**Blaine** [00:09:46]: Well, it's really interesting. My son lives in Michigan, which is where I was raised—I was born in Virginia but raised there. And he was down for the holidays and started talking about somebody who had gone missing at that point on Christmas.

It's kind of interesting, he said, “this guy was going to come and shadow me at my salon”—my son owns a hair salon, Aesthetic Hair Company. He owns it in Ferndale, Michigan. He said, “this guy was gonna come and shadow us for a day”, you know, kind of sit in our salon and watch us work and he's gone missing. And over the holiday, they started finding his car with all his phone and wallet and clothing in the car and it's in Michigan, in the winter, you really know things are not going well for whoever the victim was and, in this case, it was Kevin Bacon.

And you know, we kind of followed it and it really impacted my son a great deal, because it was his first time somebody he knew or had any sort of association with, you know, was involved in such a crime. And as more and more facts are coming out—I was just reading a news report today about it that they've apprehended the man who's done it and he's planning on pleading guilty by reason of insanity, but he literally kidnapped Kevin Bacon, took him to his house, cut his throat, strung him up in the rafters and was

cannibalizing his body, and it's absolutely stunning. So, you never know where the next lead or tip comes in.

And I think what's really interesting about this case is, I didn't know a lot about the dating scene, and online dating. I'm 57 years old, I used to meet people by meeting people, (chuckles) you know. the old-fashioned way, we go to a bar or something. But you know, the whole scene with Grindr and how, you know, gay men and gay people use these applications, and straight people as well, to meet people and some of the risks that are involved with that, and where you meet the people, where you go, things on those lines.

So, my son's been able to explain quite a bit of it to me and it's worth noting. You know, there's a cautionary tale in there as well. You know, and unfortunately, I feel like the victim is being a little bit overlooked almost in this; because of the grisly nature of the crime itself, the focus has completely gone to the killer, not to the victim.

And we see that with all these cases as they unfold, you know, especially something as horrific as this. It tends to shift the focus. And so, I'm watching this case carefully because while it's garnered some national media coverage, it hasn't gotten a lot of what I would call mainstream coverage and I think it will be one of those cases that does.

**Debbi** [00:13:02]: Mm-hmm. That's very interesting. Now, the book you're giving away. *A Special Kind of Evil*. What's the subject of that book?

**Blaine** [00:13:12]: Well, that's about the Colonial Parkway murders that are a series of cold cases here in Virginia. They took place on the Colonial Parkway, which stretches between Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown and Yorktown. It's a stretch of road. It's a very narrow national park. And the killer in the 1980s operated in that area, and struck always killing a pair of victims. And the killer struck four times and two of the victims still haven't been located, and my daughter and I spent around a year and a half, two years doing research for this book, interviewing the victims' families as well as law enforcement to really kind of crawl into this case. It's still a very active case. Just last week, or kind of a couple weeks ago, I had some contact with the FBI agent who's on the case, who was asking me some questions of things we've come across or things we had experienced on this. So, you know, I think what's happened with a lot of these cold cases, especially these serial murder cases, the apprehension of the Golden State killer has revitalized an interest with cold serial cases, and I think law enforcement is taking a new and more penetrating perspective on those.

**Debbi** [00:14:44]: So, do you think true crime writing helps to spur interest on the part of the police or ...?

**Blaine** [00:14:53]: (chuckles) Yeah. I'll never get the police to admit that but (chuckles) yes, I do think it does help. You know, it keeps it in the public attention and I think what happens with a lot of these cases is, especially as detectives retire and move on and cases get shuffled around, and they become frigid cold, they don't get the attention that they should. And because they don't get that level of attention, when a book comes out

about it, it changes the entire nature of that, and it makes it a very public thing again and they're forced to respond to that in some way, shape or form. And you know, from that perspective, I think writing about the true-crime cold cases really does kind of give a shot to, you know, law enforcement and prods them along into, you know, looking at these cases, responding to the press—because the press, when they talk about the book, they inevitably reach out to the police for a comment and every time they get a call, it pushes them a little bit further. So, I think it's a very positive thing.

**Debbi** [00:16:10]: Yes, I tend to agree with that. You're really serving the public interest there. Are you still writing any of your other types of books?

**Blaine** [00:16:21]: Absolutely. I've got—

**Debbi** [00:16:24]: You have so many interests.

**Blaine** [00:16:26]: I'm doing a lot at with BattleTech, which is a science-fiction series right now. I've got a number of novels and novellas I have to do in the next year or so that I have to get done. So, I'm actively working on those, I was working on it this afternoon, so it's great fun to do that. And my daughter and I are looking at two true-crime cases: one is a cold case; the other one is just a very different case and it involved a deathbed confession. And we always hear about things like deathbed confessions but there's darn few of them. And this one caught my attention years ago, and we got a copy of the case files and I've got a binder four and a half inches thick that I'm kind of wading through, trying to make heads or tails of, you know, a 60-year-old cold case. But it's real interesting to read through it and to piece together whether this confession was really tangible or not.

**Debbi** [00:17:33]: Hmm. What's the general ratio of research time to writing time on these books?

**Blaine** [00:17:41]: (laughter)

**Debbi** [00:17:42]: (chuckles) If there is one.

**Blaine** [00:17:44]: I always tell people; I would make more money if I worked per hour at McDonald's.

**Debbi** [00:17:50]: Just kind of how much time do you put into research?

**Blaine** [00:17:53]: I would say it's three or four hours of research for every hour that you're actually writing.

**Debbi** [00:17:59]: That sounds about right for this.

**Blaine** [00:18:02]: I mean, and I will say, in some cases, it can be significantly more. And there's a lot of research that goes to dead ends, where you go, "okay, I'm gonna go look for this information". You may spend six or seven hours looking for it and not get it. I live outside Washington, DC, so I've got access to the Library of Congress, I've got

access to the National Archives, you know, but you can go spend a day there looking for something that might end up being two sentences in a book or nothing at all. And yeah, it can be frustrating but I think a lot of it is I enjoy—I think if you're gonna write true crime, you're gonna enjoy the research as much as you enjoy the writing. If you dread the research, you're never gonna get the writing done, you know, it's all about the research.

**Debbi** [00:18:56]: Absolutely. I mean, you have to be a good journalist, basically, and get the facts right.

**Blaine** [00:19:02]: You do. And it's very hard. We started a podcast recently and her last book on the Freeway Phantom cases, because when you write the book, you present strictly the facts. You can't talk about what do you think about it. And with a podcast, you can go okay, “well, this is the facts and here's what we think about it”, and it's a little bit different.

**Debbi** [00:19:26]: What's the name of your podcast?

**Blaine** [00:19:28]: We called it *Tantamount*, same title as the book. And it's been a lot of fun, we're about halfway through doing our episodes on it. That's become a writing experience all on its own, as I'm sure you're aware.

**Debbi** [00:19:40]: Oh yeah. It's focused specifically on the book, *Tantamount*?

**Blaine** [00:19:45]: That's going to be the first season.

**Debbi** [00:19:49]: Oh, okay. Wow.

**Blaine** [00:19:51]: We're gonna have some fun. Victoria and I have enjoyed doing it. She makes sure I delete all the outtakes between us (chuckles) as we do these things. But it's a lot of fun to actually read through that.

**Debbi** [00:20:05]: Make sure you keep those because they're great behind-the-scenes looks (chuckles).

**Blaine** [00:20:10]: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure they are.

**Debbi** [00:20:12]: We have extras in there. Bloopers.

**Blaine** [00:20:17]: (chuckles) Yeah, it's funny you mention journalism around this because I never thought of it much as journalism, but more and more it has come up where people are like, “oh, you're an investigative journalist”, I'm like “well, no I'm writing a book”. But you really are an investigative journalist and it does change your perspective on how some other journalists operate and do their thing. You become much more critical, I've found.

**Debbi** [00:20:44]: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Is there an author or authors who you find particularly inspiring?

**Blaine** [00:20:53]: That is a great question. Obviously, I enjoy Ann Rule's work. You know, Ann really set the bar for a lot of us. Truman Capote did a wonderful job with *In Cold Blood* and you know, there's a mechanic there that he employed that I'd love to be able to kind of capture at some point, where you don't really tell what the crime is and what went down until the end of the book. You know, he baited you through the whole book on that. And I think that was fascinating. And for me, some of my earlier works that I enjoyed was, I read *The Michigan Murders* and *Helter Skelter*. And you know, after all these years I still flip through *Helter Skelter* and it's really hard to top Vince Bugliosi's work, you know, in terms of the crispness of detail and taking a very complex story with tons of characters, all very diverse, capturing all the elements and making it readable was—to me, that's just an excellent book to read, period, if you write nonfiction. Because how he did that and how he organized it and made it palatable, not just for the reader but for a jury is incredible.

**Debbi** [00:22:18]: That's amazing. It's amazing the writers who are out there writing about this stuff and making it almost like fiction, even though it's real.

**Blaine** [00:22:28]: Oh yeah, oh definitely.

**Debbi** [00:22:31]: Truth really is stranger than fiction and sometimes way more interesting.

**Blaine** [00:22:35]: Well, you know, if I had told you I was looking into doing a fiction book about a young gay man who went on a Grindr date and was kidnapped and strung up and cannibalized, I don't think publishers would even go, "I don't want to read a book about that if it's fiction". If you turn around and say "by the way, all of that is true", bingo, they're all over it. And it's interesting how that works.

**Debbi** [00:23:02]: Mm-hmm. There's definitely a psychology there that's quite fascinating. Where can people find you and your books online?

**Blaine** [00:23:14]: Yeah. I always tell people, "go to your local bookstore, you can order all of our books, you know, locally". God, the local bookstores are getting harder to find though (chuckles). Yeah, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) carries everything that I do. I have a blog on WordPress, [www.BlainePardo.wordpress.com](http://www.BlainePardo.wordpress.com) You're welcome to follow me there because I post up stuff all the time. And to me, that's a great place to do it. And obviously, our podcast, *Tantamount*, is out there and I recommend it's worth listening to. If you don't want to buy the book, it's the short version, although it's gonna be like 11 or 12 episodes, I don't think that's short. But we're not reading from the book, we're telling you stuff that, in some cases, wasn't in the book and it's kind of fun to hear some of that. There's a lot of places to find me (chuckles).

**Debbi** [00:24:09]: Well, that sounds fantastic, your true-crime Podcast there. Lots of information people can pick up there. So, is there anything else that you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

**Blaine** [00:24:23]: No, no. I've enjoyed this. I really appreciate the offer to come on and talk. I think it's—you know, true crime has finally hit its stride. I can remember, even five years ago, when you told somebody you wrote true crime, they kind of looked at you a little bit strange, you know, and they were like, "what's that? What is it? I'm not sure I've heard of it". Now, when I go to a social event, they say "what kind of books you write?" and I'd say "science fiction", they don't care. I tell them "well, I write true crime", "Oh, true crime. I watch ID Discovery, I watch Netflix, I watch..." You know, I've seen all this stuff and you get pulled into conversations that are fantastic and it's good that it's become a little bit mainstream. It's good that people are comfortable talking about this. It was always a dirty little obsession, I think, people had and they didn't tell people that they enjoyed it. Now, it's become socially acceptable and I think that's great and I think it's good for our genre and I think it's good for readers, it's definitely good for writers. You know, I've got publishers who are like, "you tell us what you're working on, we'll pick that up". And so, it makes it so we get to be a little more selective and have to be more selective on what we look at.

**Debbi** [00:25:58]: Well, that's fantastic. That's a good position to be in.

**Blaine** [00:26:02]: Oh, it's a lot of fun.

**Debbi** [00:26:05]: Absolutely. Well, I want to thank you again for being here today, Blaine. It was a pleasure talking to you.

**Blaine** [00:26:11]: Oh, it's great talking to you too. It's always good talking to somebody who's in the business.

**Debbi** [00:26:15]: Thank you. Thank you so much. And I would like to remind everyone that the Crime Cafe nine-book set and short story anthology are available for sale from all major online retailers. You can find the links on my website [www.DebbiMack.com](http://www.DebbiMack.com). You can also get a free copy of each book when you support the podcast on Patreon, along with other perks like early access to the podcast and advanced looks at my latest fiction—what I'm working on now. So, please leave a review for the podcast on iTunes or wherever you listen to it. And thanks for joining us, I'll see you in two weeks when our guest will be Bill Duncan. In the meantime, happy reading everyone.