

# The Crime Cafe with Bill Duncan

Presented By:



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**Debbi** [00:01:44]: Hi, everyone. I'm pleased to have with me today an author who writes private eye novels—my favorite sub-genre. Today's guest is the author of the Rafferty Private Eye series, and his name is Bill Duncan. Hi, Bill. It's good to have you on today. Thanks for being here.

**Bill** [00:02:06]: Hey, Debbi. It's great to be here.

**Debbi** [00:02:07]: Awesome. It's great to have you. And first, I just think it's wonderful that you've brought your father's books back onto the market through self-publishing. He must have been very proud of you.

**Bill** [00:02:20]: He was. It was a fantastic exercise to do and it was the sort of thing that finally gave him the ability to hear from the fans that he didn't get to hear from back during his trade pub days. So, as I think I alluded to a little bit in the guest blog post, back when he was publishing, the publishers asked for more books, sent royalty checks, that was about it. That was the sort of level of—and edits obviously, but that was the level of interaction that dad had with the funnel, I guess, where his books were going. So, he never really knew. And then to be able to hear, you know, 30 years later from people who had loved his books originally and then were loving them again now, was pretty special for him, yeah. And then for me too to be able to give that to him, yeah.

**Debbi** [00:03:24]: That's just so fantastic. So, your father's fan base was out there waiting for these books to be re-released pretty much. That must have provided a lot of help with the sales.

**Bill** [00:03:37]: Look, it did but there were some very influential people who had been fans of dad's and they were great in sort of getting the word out. The funny thing that I found, though, is that the original books were only released in the US and Canada. And so, while there were a lot of fans that came back and said "it's great to see Rafferty back", there were equally as many fans who never got a chance to meet the characters the first time around. So, they were reading Rafferty for the first time, and I had a number of emails from people saying, "I just wish I'd been able to get it the

first time around". So, people living in Europe and Canada and so on, who'd never met the character before. So, there was a fan base but then there was a new fan base that also picked up, which was great.

**Debbi** [00:04:36]: That's fantastic. These books, what year were they first written?

**Bill** [00:04:43]: *Rafferty's Rules*, the first in the series, was written in '85, I think from memory. I didn't study up on that question, Debbi. (chuckles)

**Debbi** [00:04:59]: (chuckles) No problem. But it was back in the 80's.

**Bill** [00:05:03]: It was. It was in the mid to late 80's. So, the first one came out in '86, then the second two, *Last Seen Alive* and *Poor Dead Cricket*, came out in, I believe it was '88. And then the last three came out in '89 and '90. So, it was within a period of about four years that they all hit the market but they were definitely written in the mid to late 80's.

**Debbi** [00:05:27]: So, I don't suppose you had to do a lot of updating in terms of making them more relatable or something for today's readers?

**Bill** [00:05:41]: It was interesting. I guess there's two parts to that question: there's the original books when I was redoing them; and then, there's my books that have come since. So, when I spoke to dad about carrying on the series, he said, "look, do whatever you want with him, you know. Move countries, take him to Australia. Move him into modern times. Do whatever you want". And that was never going to be a thing for me. I'm an unabashed child of the 80's, so he was going to stay stuck square in the middle of the 80's. And the thing that I loved about that is that because the time period is already set, to me the stories don't date as much as something written this year that then gets superseded by technology in two years or three years. The 80's is already a genre or a subset, if you like. So, to me it's quite freeing to write. In terms of updating, with dad's original six books, there were a couple of things that I did go through and tidy up to do—not politically correctness, but just a couple of things that might be considered a little bit beyond the pale as far as words being used.

**Debbi** [00:07:15]: A little sensitivity stuff in there, yeah.

**Bill** [00:07:17]: A little. It was not my intention. I did not whitewash it. I did not intend to and even in my books, I won't. In fact, I had a reasonably good argument with my editor on the latest book about to come out about a particular character, which she wanted to just completely PC right out of the window. And I said that it doesn't work—well, anyway, I won't get into the details, but the character is a caricature and she didn't get that. So, no, I didn't whitewash it, but there was one particular reference that I think was probably very, very common back in Texas in the mid-80's and I just deleted that one. That was all. (chuckles)

**Debbi** [00:08:05]: (chuckles) Oh, wow. I was gonna say you live in Australia but you write about Texas, or your dad did. So, how important is Texas to the stories and why Texas?

**Bill** [00:08:20]: Well, I was actually born in Texas. So, I'm originally from the States. Mom and dad, our whole families, we moved over here when I was seven. Mum and dad decided to pick the family up and change countries. But prior to that, we'd been living in Texas and so I was born about an hour north of Dallas. And prior to mum and dad moving there, they had actually lived in Dallas. Dad was a radio newsman at the time when Kennedy was shot, actually. So, he was right in the thick of it all during the big evil time, I guess, in Dallas. Because of the work he was doing too, he got to know the city incredibly well. He actually uses the phrase, when he first got to the news station, they gave him a car and he could go anywhere he wanted and he said, "I was like a kid with a doughnut. It was just party time. I could do anything I wanted. I could talk to anyone I wanted." And he had some great stories about those days.

**Debbi** [00:09:38]: I'll bet that was something.

**Bill** [00:09:43]: So, Dallas was a really big thing for him. It was a formative city, I think, for him. He and mum were just married. They were in their late 20's, so it was a big time for them to be there as well. So, I think when he turned his hand to writing, although we were already in Australia, I think Dallas just came out. It was the thing he knew so well and it fit the character.

**Debbi** [00:10:15]: And not only did he know the city well but those incidents that he covered while he was in the news, that had to have an impact.

**Bill** [00:10:25]: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

**Debbi** [00:10:27]: Wow, that's something. Does Rafferty change at all from book to book? Does he have kind of a story arc over the course of the series?

**Bill** [00:10:37]: He does and one of the things that I've been interested to find out while I've been writing him is that he's much more nuanced than I gave him credit for when I was reading dad's stories, you know, as a teenager. He does have a story arc and I now know more of where that arc is bending towards. How long it takes him to get there, I don't know; that would be an interesting one to see. But look, it's a really interesting question. Dad aged him in accordance with the books. I have slowed that right down to give me some opportunities to continue the series on before it gets too —

**Debbi** [00:11:24]: To keep it in the 80's. (chuckles)

**Bill** [00:11:26]: Absolutely, absolutely, to keep it in the 80's. But also, you know, no one wants to read about a private eye chasing people in a Zimmer frame or an electric scooter. Someone was talking about that the other day—

**Debbi** [00:11:40]: It would make a good comedy. (chuckles)

**Bill** [00:11:42]: Oh, actually, it was your podcast. It was Robert Crais talking about it.

**Debbi** [00:11:46]: That's correct, yes. I was just thinking that. (chuckles)

**Bill** [00:11:51]: (chuckles) And I thought that was brilliant. So, I've slowed that down but at the same time there's definitely where we're going to learn more about him. Whether he learns more about himself is the age-old question.

**Debbi** [00:12:07]: Mm-hmm. Well, that's gonna be very interesting, I think. I just started your first and I'm enjoying it very much, by the way.

**Bill** [00:12:15]: Thank you.

**Debbi** [00:12:16]: Is there a particular trait or quality that defines Rafferty?

**Bill** [00:12:22]: Honor would be the word. He has his own set of rules as, you know, certainly as the title of the first book alludes to, and then as is apparent when reading the books. They may be quirky and at least half the time he uses them just as levity; to lighten the mood or to show how ridiculous the situation is or what have you. But he is a man of honor. He's a knight; he fights for those who can't fight for themselves, who are besieged by forces beyond them and he will always do what is right. 'Right' and 'Wrong', which happens to be the title of my next book coming out, can be gray questions but he will always land on the side of 'right'. So, that's probably the thing that defines him more than anything.

**Debbi** [00:13:36]: I always love that private eye sort of private code of honor concept. Kind of the—what do you call it?—themes, if you will.

**Bill** [00:13:52]: Yes. Even though it's not necessarily upfront. It's not necessarily something that they wear outwardly as a shield or as a persona. But when it comes to the nut-cutting, as dad used to say, they will step up.

**Debbi** [00:14:14]: Yeah, that kind of thing. That's always awesome. Let's see. So, *Rafferty's Rules*, what is that story about?

**Bill** [00:14:25]: That story is about: Rafferty gets hired by the parents of a girl he knew 15 years ago. Back in the day when he was a police officer, he saved a 10-year-old girl called Vivian Mollison from a restaurant hold-up that went wrong. She was in peril, he saved her and because of that, he actually got kicked off the force. Fifteen years later, he's a PI, Vivian's parents call him back to help her out. And what it is, the story is that she had been kidnapped and sold by a gang of outlaw bikers. She had been returned but she's not in a very good way. The parents, Vivian's parents, George and—I've completely forgot her mother's name, I'm sorry—Marge, now I've remembered, have very different opinions on how Rafferty should go about tracking down the outlaw bikers, and particularly what he should do once he finds them. That's really the setup. All sorts of mayhem rolls from there.

**Debbi** [00:15:53]: Ah, mayhem, got to love it. And your eighth book is coming out March 9th, is that correct?

**Bill** [00:16:02]: Yes. I may have made a slight typo. It's March 9th or March 10th. It'll be one of those two. Correct.

**Debbi** [00:16:10]: Okay, so early March.

**Bill** [00:16:12]: Correct.

**Debbi** [00:16:13]: Look for that eighth book. And the ninth one later on this year?

**Bill** [00:16:18]: Look, fingers crossed. I did say that the 8th would be out last year, my editor had other ideas which involved three complete rewrites from fresh, so that's taken a bit longer than I expected (chuckles) but—

**Debbi** [00:16:33]: (chuckles) It usually does.

**Bill** [00:16:35]: Correct. Fingers crossed, the ninth, *London Calling*, will be out late this year.

**Debbi** [00:16:43]: Well, that's wonderful. Congratulations.

**Bill** [00:16:46]: Thank you.

**Debbi** [00:16:46]: Do you have a plan as to how many books you'd like to write in the series?

**Bill** [00:16:53]: You know, I really don't. I have probably 12 to 15 current what-ifs just jotted down as potential storylines or story starters, not really storylines but I don't know. Whenever I sit down to write the next book, I kind of pour through all my pages of notes and try to feel the one that jumps out, the one that wants to be written. And so, I really don't at this point. I know I've got a lot to be going on with, so there can be a few but at some point, it might be time to just either put it on ice or draw it to a close. So, yeah, I really don't have a "it'll be four trilogies" or anything like that.

**Debbi** [00:17:46]: (chuckles) No Lucas-like prequels, post-quels, sequels?

**Bill** [00:17:53]: Look, if Disney are listening and they want to throw the same sort of money at me that they did at George, I'd be more than happy to shoehorn it into a particular set. (chuckles)

**Debbi** [00:18:06]: (chuckles) Okay, then. What authors do you find most inspiring?

**Bill** [00:18:14]: Stephen King would be my number one. I've read him for a lot of years, I love what he does with characters. I just think he's incredible, I will read everything he has written. I have not yet, I just haven't got through it all. But he's also been a huge inspiration for me. I imagine you've read his book on writing?

**Debbi** [00:18:42]: Oh, yes, I've seen it.

**Bill** [00:18:44]: Yeah, yes. It is a book that, you know, almost saved my life. Back when I was starting to get writing, I was coming out of a very, very dark place in my life and I was giving myself the chance to try to write. And I read that book, and he has a little exercise in there which he sets up a particular scene and then says, "just write, don't think about it, just write". And I had tried to write many, many times before and I was a classic sort of two-pager and then stop, or a chapter and then stop. And I was in a place where I had nothing else left to lose, so I took his advice. I just sat down and I wrote. And within an hour, I had a short story that I don't know where it

came from. It was incredibly dark but it actually held together, it held together enough that gave me the confidence to have another go. And so, I think it was the next morning, I went to a café, sat down and said, “okay, all I'm going to do is just write”. And I did that for six months and at the end of the six months, I had two 100,000-word novels drafted, the second of those was *False Gods*, the seventh in the Rafferty series. So, Stephen has been an amazing inspiration to me.

**Debbi** [00:20:18]: That's the best endorsement for his book I've ever heard, honest to God. And I have to be honest with you, I know what it's like to be in a kind of a dark place and sometimes you have to write your way through it. It's almost as if you have to kind of push through this invisible barrier, you know, and once you've done that, it's like, “okay, I'm going to be okay”. (chuckles)

**Bill** [00:20:45]: Correct. And I wish I could remember who said it, but it's a famous quote of “I don't know what I think about a thing until I've written about it”. And I find that so true, I've done that on a number of occasions, that there's an issue, what's going on in the news, whatever it may be, just something that I need to sit down and let the fingers tell me what I actually think about this. So, it is an amazing process; I'm getting goosebumps just talking about this. (chuckles)

**Debbi** [00:21:18]: (chuckles) Well, it really is. I mean, the process is really something, and then using it to your advantage that way and to simply communicate how you feel, which is why I get confused when people talk about, you know, writing for a market. It's like, okay, I understand that part but you have to write what comes from in here, from inside, you know, (I'm pointing at myself for those who are listening).

**Bill** [00:21:52]: That's so true.

**Debbi** [00:21:53]: You know, it's the whole idea of connecting with other people with your thoughts, you know.

**Bill** [00:22:00]: Absolutely.

**Debbi** [00:22:02]: So, have you ever thought about writing any other books or series?

**Bill** [00:22:09]: Look, I have. And with those sort of 12 to 15 Rafferty what-ifs, I've got at least the same or more what-ifs that are either standalones or for other series. I think the other series that's bubbling away in the back of my mind is closely related to my lifestyle at the moment. So, again, I'll give answers to people who were wondering about the blog post, about the Three Truths and A Lie—

**Debbi** [00:22:45]: I was going to ask you about that. (chuckles)

**Bill** [00:22:49]: (chuckles) One of the truths is, that I'm actually homeless and wandering around Australia in a VW van, which is wonderful, you know. It's the sort of thing that I'm lucky enough to be able to do and I'm still at the age where I can enjoy it and it's not a chore. My wonderful partner, Katherine, who's also a writer, and I get to go to wonderful places and write and pursue our dreams. And that's given me the idea for a podcaster, a lady podcaster who travels around Australia in a van

researching true crime sites and podcasting about them, and then the things that can happen from there. So, I really like the character. She's definitely sitting on my shoulder, whispering "write me, write me, write me". So, it's just a matter of blocking out the time to do that.

**Debbi** [00:23:51]: Well, that sounds absolutely fascinating to me. Let's see. I had something I was going to ask you and it's suddenly out of my mind. Oh yeah, I was going to say that I have a guess as to which one is the Lie. Shall I go ahead and do that?

**Bill** [00:24:08]: Yeah, please do.

**Debbi** [00:24:09]: My guess was the second-floor crash with the car.

**Bill** [00:24:12]: No, absolutely true. (laughs)

**Debbi** [00:24:15]: Oh, my gosh. So, which one is the lie?

**Bill** [00:24:19]: The lie is, I'm not actually a member of MENSA. (laughs)

**Debbi** [00:24:22]: Oh, okay, I figured. Okay, that's conceivable. I can see him actually being a member of MENSA, but I can't see him crashing into the second-floor of a house. (laughs)

**Bill** [00:24:32]: I actually did, and worse.

**Debbi** [00:24:36]: How the heck do you do a thing like that? (laughs)

**Bill** [00:24:39]: It was the final year of high school and it was dad's car. (laughs)

**Debbi** [00:24:44]: Oh, my.

**Bill** [00:24:46]: So, my only advice is, if you're going to crash your father's car, make sure you almost die in the process and he can't be angry about the car.

**Debbi** [00:24:56]: Oh, my gosh, that's like *Risky Business* on steroids or something.

**Bill** [00:25:03]: Sort of. Look, it was pure luck. I walked away with virtually no injuries whatsoever. Pure luck and the car. But yeah, it was interesting.

**Debbi** [00:25:23]: (chuckles) That's quite a word for it. Interesting, yes.

**Bill** [00:25:29]: (chuckles) That covers a wide range of things.

**Debbi** [00:25:30]: Exactly, yes, exactly. So, is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about before we finish?

**Bill** [00:25:41]: No. Look, the only thing is that all your listeners can—just to make sure that all your listeners know they can get the first book free. So, that's *Rafferty's Rules*, they can get the first book in the series free. Just head to the website [www.raffertypi.com](http://www.raffertypi.com) and follow the link right at the top of the page. And people can

connect with me on Twitter and Facebook. Twitter is '@bill\_writes' and Facebook is 'BillDuncanWriter', and it's been great to be here.

**Debbi** [00:26:20]: Well, it's been great having you on. I really appreciate it, and thank you so much for being here. And with that, I will just add that you can sample the work of some of our guests from Season One if you buy the Crime Cafe 9-Book Set and Short Story Anthology. Each book has a variety of great crime and mystery stories, and you can find out more on my website [www.DebbiMack.com](http://www.DebbiMack.com) You can also help keep us afloat by becoming a Patreon supporter. In fact, I'm sort of thinking about maybe doing a live reading on Patreon at some point. It's just something I'm thinking about and I'll let you know if it happens. So, anyway, if you enjoyed the podcast, please leave a star review and if you want to add a line or two about why you liked it or whatever, go for it. Okay? Thanks. And with that, I'll just say our next guest here will be Michael Streed. So, I'll see you in two weeks and until then, happy reading.