

The Crime Cafe with Lynn Hightower

Presented By:



Debbi (00:54): Hi everyone. Unfortunately, our planned guest was unable to make it this week. However, my guest today is filling in for him. She is the author of numerous thrillers, including the Sonora Blair and Lena Padget detective series. Along with writing bestselling and award-winning books, she teaches novel writing in the UCLA Extension Writing Program, and is a manuscript consultant and writing coach for novelists. Very, very good. It's my great pleasure to have here today, Lynn Hightower. Hi, Lynn. Thanks for coming on.

Lynn (01:33): Oh, thanks for having me, and thank you for a lovely introduction. I appreciate it.

Debbi (01:38): Oh, well, it's my pleasure. Believe me. I was fascinated by the description of your latest novel, *The Enlightenment Project*.

Lynn (01:47): Yeah.

Debbi (01:48): In fact, I bought a copy. I just went ahead and just bought a copy. It just seemed really interesting.

Lynn (01:56): I appreciate that very much.

Debbi (01:59): Sure thing. Tell us what the book is about.

Lynn (02:04): Have you ever known anybody who was possessed?

Debbi (02:08): Actually, no, <laugh>, not that I know of.

Lynn (02:10): Well, when you meet my hero Noah Archer, you will, He was possessed at the age of 11. He is now a neurosurgeon, very much a science guy, did not believe in supernatural things until he had no choice, and it haunted him and it inspired his career. He started a research project called The Enlightenment Project. Now, I researched a lot of neurologists and neurosurgeons, and the one thing they advise their patients to do is to meditate. And no one knows that patients have the same issues I do with being told to meditate because the minute you tell me think of nothing, Oh, please, that's not happening. And I really think the way people are told to meditate is ridiculous. I think it sets you up to wrestle with your brain. Alright? And so Noah decides that he is going to just put a hair net of electrodes, actually ceramic [sic] ones over your head, and we'll just do a very gentle electrical stimulation of all the spiritual parts of the brain, which is, surprised me to find that spiritual neurons are all over the brain. They're everywhere. Okay. It's not just one little place and that were really hardwired for spirituality. And he does that so that people can meditate, they can deal with depression or addiction, and so that they will have a protocol of a way to deal with the kind of dark entities that haunted him. Unfortunately, what he finds out is that while most of the patients in the study are thriving, some of them are in big trouble because the meditation stimulation opened a doorway to let the dark things in.

Debbi (04:14): Fascinating.

Lynn (04:15): Thank you.

Debbi (04:16): Yeah, I mean, neuroscience fascinates me.

Lynn (04:20): Me. Me too. I'm very much a brain person. <affirmative>. You don't have to make things up. If you study the research and you see what they're doing with their cutting edge technology, it's like, Wow, I had no idea. <laugh>.

Debbi (04:35): Yeah. It's just fascinating what's being done. And for somebody like myself, I have an actual chronic condition that's neurological.

Lynn (04:44): Okay.

Debbi (04:45): I'm always interested in anything that relates to neurology. <laugh>.

Lynn (04:51): I bet. Yeah, absolutely.

Debbi (04:53): The brain's just a very, very complex place, and it's just amazing what people are doing. What was it that made you choose this particular subject?

Lynn (05:05): Well, two things. One, I was absolutely riveted by *The Exorcist* when it came out, and I was pretty little, pretty young. And the night I went to see it at the movie theater, there were tornadoes all over the city in December, which was so odd. And the movie theater had a generator, so our power didn't go out. So while everybody else in the city is evacuating to safer places, we're all sitting eating popcorn and watching *The Exorcist* and being utterly terrified. And I come out of the theater and it's dark. There are no street lights, there's no traffic. And after a movie like *The Exorcist*, I've got to tell you, that scares you to death. But I always wondered what happened to the boy this movie was based on, his pseudonym was Rollin Doe, and it was based on a real case, and they did the final exorcism at a hospital in St. Louis. And after it was done, they sealed up the room. Both of the Jesuit priests that conducted the final exorcism died. And it was off limits after that. But I'm thinking, well, I mean, when you date, do you say, "Oh, by the way, I was possessed when I was a kid, but it's all good now." Right? I mean, I would never tell.

Debbi (06:37): <laugh>.

Lynn (06:38): And then I read a book by a neurosurgeon who said, who's talking about the experiences he had with patients when they were very near death on how peaceful they were, and they had such an enlightened insight, and he thought, What if I could stimulate that in the brain and give people this insight and peace all the time? Then he said, "But I was afraid to do it because I was afraid that I could bring dark things too." And that's when I thought, Okay, I gotta run with that. Yeah.

Debbi (07:18): <affirmative>. Now the book is fiction, of course, yes? But even though it's based on real things that you've read about.

Lynn (07:26): It's based on real things I've read about, and it's based on the science. In fact, the very thing that Noah is doing, they're just, they're very recently started doing as research at Stanford Medical Center, and they're using it to treat depression. And so far the results are fabulous.

Debbi (07:47): That's amazing.

Lynn (07:48): That is amazing. I know you can't keep a step ahead in fiction. The science is running ahead of you so fast.

Debbi (07:53): I know. It's hard to tell where the fiction ends and the reality begins sometimes.

Lynn (07:59): But I think that's actually the way we're going. I really think that it's high time for the science and the spiritual and the physical issues of the body to come together, and that's what really people need when they feel under spiritual attack. They don't just need a psychiatrist to drug 'em up. They don't need a doctor to cure what the physical symptoms are. They don't need someone to just give them spiritual advice. They need all of it. They need all of it.

Debbi (08:36): I agree 100%. Yeah, I was just gonna say that I saw *The Exorcist* when it came out three times.

Lynn (08:47): I know. The book was awesome, too.

Debbi (08:50): I mean, I went back twice. I was just so kind of captivated and by it, and I was young at the time. I was in my teens, but still.

Lynn (09:01): Yeah, and I think this issue of dark entities hits all of us on a very visceral, instinctual level, and it's a fear we have, and maybe an intuition that there's something out there, I don't know. But I think a lot of people I talked to were really captured and hit pretty hard by that movie and by the book

Debbi (09:26): I, and I lived near DC so I would go, Actually, there were times when we would drive by those steps and I would look at them and go, Oh, wow, there are those steps. <laugh>

Lynn (09:39): Wow, I would be ...

Debbi (09:40): It would give me the eeriest feeling.

Lynn (09:42): It does give you an eerie feeling. I know. I love that you did that.

Debbi (09:47): <laugh>. It was a long time ago too, but boy, I remember that. We used to drive by them going to a theater in Georgetown, actually, to see other movies. <laugh>. I was a movie kid. <laugh>.

Lynn (10:01): Yeah. We have an movie here, just an old fashioned movie theater downtown called The Kentucky, and that's where you're gonna get *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* every Halloween, and you're gonna get *The Exorcist*, and you're gonna get all the classic movies and all the indie movies. And it's like a local tradition.

Debbi (10:25): Oh, yeah. In DC it's The Uptown. The Uptown was the place to go, big screen. That's where I saw Star Wars, that's where I saw Star Wars, and I was just blown away.

Lynn (10:39): I love old movie theaters.

Debbi (10:42): Me too.

Lynn ([10:42](#)): They are so cool. Yeah.

Debbi ([10:44](#)): Absolutely. And then of course, there's The Silver, which is in Silver Spring, which is owned by AFI. Fantastic. They did a fantastic job at that place. Wow. Let's see. Do you write other science-based type thrillers or what are your other thrillers like? Are they like this one or different?

Lynn ([11:07](#)): They run. Everything I write is deeply researched and science-based, and then I run with it. But I wrote and I go, anything from crime novels with police detectives to paranormal. I wrote a novel several years ago called *The Piper*, and it's about a phenomena that I found rambling around the internet where people receive phone calls from the dead. And as soon as I read that, I was hooked. I'm like--

Debbi ([11:44](#)): Oh, my God,

Lynn ([11:44](#)): This cannot be true. But it sounds so fascinating, and oh, yeah, there are a lot of very well documented events. There was the incredible, horrible train wreck in California years ago, and a man on the train who was on the train, his family got calls from him for like 24 hours. His wife, his ex-wife, his children his stepchildren, everyone he loved, got constant calls. They'd hear his voice, they'd hear static it would do out, and they were calling the rescue people and saying, Please find him. He's trying to communicate. He's in trouble. He's trying to get in touch. And when they found where he was on the train, he was in the first car, he was pulverized, his phone was pulverized on impact.

Debbi ([12:41](#)): Wow.

Lynn ([12:43](#)): <affirmative> And the condo collapse in Florida fairly recently. There was a family that kept getting calls from the landline of their grandparents for hours, same thing, voices, static and then cut off. And they were going to the rescuers, please, they're alive, You've gotta find them. And then as it turned out, they'd been dead the whole time.

Debbi ([13:14](#)): It's really something. Things that can't be really explained. I mean, I've heard of other situations in which things can't be explained.

Lynn ([13:23](#)): I'm a sucker for the mysterious intrigue of things that can't be explained, and of course, I've gotta go try and figure 'em out.

Debbi ([13:31](#)): <laugh>. Oh boy. Let's see. How do you manage your time in terms of dividing the writing time from the coaching time and the teaching time and the marketing part too?

Lynn ([13:47](#)): Yeah, that's a really good question. So I am on what my friends call Greenwich Lynn Time, which kind of straddles the East Coast and the EU. And I have quit worrying about what everybody else is doing at various times of the day. And if my schedule and energies change, I will change it. But right now, as we speak, I'm waking up between 3:00 or 4:00 AM and it's quiet out and it's dark out, and I just feel this great writing energy. If I slept later to like six, I would wake up like a slug. Blah. But something about this time of the night, and I curl up with my giant German Shepherd who keeps me safe when I'm writing scary things. And I advise everyone to have a giant German Shepherd and get a cup of coffee and then curl up in bed with my laptop or

my notepad if I'm, I write. If I'm writing new scene work, I always do my first draft by hand. I've been editing quite a bit. I've got a new book that I'm turning into my publisher on Monday.

Debbi ([15:02](#)): Whoa, congratulations.

Lynn ([15:04](#)): Thank you. It's actually a fun book. It's a romantic thriller set in the Alps of France, and I had such a good time writing this novel. I just don't want it to end <laugh>. But that's when I do my writing. And if I don't get up that early, then I'll do it. Say, Let me put it to you this way. At some time between three and noon, I'll be doing my writing, my yoga, my training with my dog. Okay, coffee, all of that, no writing. And then at 2:00 PM is when I do client work or teaching work or student work. And then my total focus is on reading their pages and giving them integrated notes. I do it in all caps, all through the manuscript so that I can have an ongoing engaged discussion with them. "Hey, that was fascinating, but I have these questions."

([16:07](#)): "Hey, I love this, where you're going? But I don't understand what's going on." "Oh my God! That was so sexy. Write more scenes like this." Whatever they're doing good. I tell them whatever needs work, I tell them, Okay. And then some clients just want to Zoom and we work out where they're going with their novel, and some clients want both. So I do that until about five at which time puppy shows up in my office and it's, "Let's go, It's time to walk, mom." So we ramble around and then I'm exhausted. So I open bottle of wine, cook dinner, watch Netflix, and just I'm toast. That's my schedule. And for publicity, I have a couple of days when I'm in a big publicity mode where I will schedule no client work. And so those afternoons will go to publicity.

Debbi ([16:59](#)): <affirmative>, Very wise. I like the way you've done that.

Lynn ([17:03](#)): And then I think your brain gets acclimated to what you do at certain times of the day. So when I wake up in the morning, I'm ready to write, and in the afternoon I'm ready to like, okay, let me read your stories. Once upon a time, entertain me. Let me tell you all about it. Yeah.

Debbi ([17:18](#)): I like the way you do the comments on it, too. Inserting them in so that people will know. There's an immediacy. And a feedback there,

Lynn ([17:27](#)): There's an immediate feedback, and they know exactly when that thought hit my little brain. Exactly. It's not like later they're like, Oh, you said this. Did you mean this? Or did you mean that? It's right there precisely where I meant it. Okay. And I just randomly tried that once with my students at UCLA and they were like, "Oh, we've never gotten notes like this. We love this. Please, please always give us notes like this." And I'm like, well, okay, this is a winner. I'll just do it this way.

Debbi ([18:00](#)): That's fantastic advice, actually. Thank you for that.

Lynn ([18:03](#)): Oh, you're welcome. Just since I am a novelist, I work with my writers novelist to novelist, and I don't think anybody else can do that other than another novelist. And I always go, What would I need? What do I need people to do for me? I do that for my clients.

Debbi ([18:22](#)): <affirmative>. Yes. It puts giving notes in a whole different light cuz people talk about giving notes in screenwriting all the time and not understanding. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> Disconnect between the note giver and the note receiver.

Lynn (18:38): Yes, yes.

Debbi (18:39): This is a great way to get at that.

Lynn (18:42): This is an immediate connection. And still, there are times when I'm not quite clear, in which case I say, Just ask me. Let's kick it around. I'll tell you what I mean. And I will also work with you on the craft to get it where you want it. I'm not just gonna say to you, "You really need to work on the voice" and then wander off <affirmative>. Because most of my clients are like, What actually is voice? And I'm like, yeah, nobody explains that do they, and they say they can't teach it, and that's a lie because I can, so <laugh> just discuss what it is and how you get it on the page.

Debbi (19:20): Yes. What authors or books do you particularly enjoy and which inspire you?

Lynn (19:30): I will read any author, any genre, as long as you entertain me and you don't bore me. And if you do, I'll give you three chapters. And then I used to throw books across the room, but I had to stop because A) I live in a old Victorian cottage and the walls are plaster and they're very hard to repair. And B) my other dog used to duck, but this dog tries to catch it and she gets hit in the head, so I had to quit throwing books across the room. She's like, I'm gonna get it, I'm gonna get, awww, I didn't get it. So we can't do that anymore. But who do I like? Oh my gosh, I so many. I love John Irving. When I was, my mother handed me *The World According to Garp*, this old worn out, thick paperback. And she said, Read it. And I said, What's it about?

(20:19): She said, Life. I was just, Wow. I'd never read anything like it. I like a good western. I love the Georgia Heyer Regency Romance novels. She created that genre, and they are like a comedy of manners. It's like, it's like a play and the dialogue is hilarious. The characters are funny and she sets everything up and it's so much fun. I love those. I love man, I love Martin Cruz Smith, Jonathan Kellerman, Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, Wendell Berry. Just so many writers I love. I'm always afraid I'm gonna miss one. When I, you know I loved, two books have been, that are constantly banned, which are *A Wrinkle in Time* when I was a kid, which is utterly brilliant. And *Harriet the Spy*. I loved *Harriet The Spy* because she cursed and she eavesdropped, and she did all the things I loved to do. So Harriet and I were really, you know.

Debbi (21:34): Yeah, that's awesome. How did you get involved in teaching and coaching? When did you start and how did you get started?

Lynn (21:45): I was living out in Los Angeles, and I lived there for 18 months, and I had a friend who was teaching at a university, and I said, Well, how do you even do that? And he said, Well, here's what you do. And so I tried it and I got in touch with all these little colleges and they wouldn't gimme the time of day. I thought, Well, I maybe I'll go for broke. And I went to UCLA and they're like, Oh, yeah, now we're talking about the Extension Program, the Writer's Extension Program, not the straight up university. But I went to their writer's program and Linda Venus was running it at the time, and she was so awesome. And we met in her office and I started teaching classes and I didn't even think about online teaching. So when I left, I quit, and then I had to get in touch with her a couple years later. I said, Linda and I, and she emailed. She said, Lynn, I was hoping you were gonna tell me you could teach again. I said, But I'm not living in LA. She said, Honey, online. I'm like, Oh, I'm the last person to figure that one out. So I started teaching online.

Debbi (22:51): Wow. Well, that's great.

Lynn (22:53): Yeah.

Debbi (22:55): How much research would you say you do? How many hours would you say you spend researching a book?

Lynn (23:02): Research is ongoing, and Google is such a gift to novelist. I've done those card catalogs in the library. I've been to the universities, and it's just agony to get even a little morsel. And with Google, you can go everywhere and I mean, I have a degree in journalism, and I'm very well aware of, you get three sources and you make sure they're not all backing each other up and they're all just saying the same thing. And I mean, I spend a lot of time researching.

(23:37): <affirmative> For the ideas. I've got to get the science right. This book that takes place in France. I went to France and went to the town where the books take place. And luckily I got a lot of it right, but not all of it. And I like to go to the place and I found a great taxi driver, somebody local that'll talk to me and they tell me really great stuff that you just cannot get on the internet. The true things that are happening, say with the melting of the glaciers in the mountains, what's really happening with the people that live there, what they think? And that's just pure gold.

(24:20): It's great. Law enforcement is great. I've interviewed a lot of cops and ATF agents, and they're hesitant sometimes to talk to you. And my feeling is I write fiction. If you wanna talk to me, or if you feel it compromises your career, I'm gonna go away. I'm not gonna bother you because this is fiction and I don't wanna mess with your life. But there's this sort of magical serendipity that if you want to know something weirdly, the person you need to talk to shows up in your life. So magic is actually part of it. I'm gonna tell you.

Debbi (24:59): <laugh>, I think one—

Lynn (25:02): Does that happen to you? When you're writing and you're researching?

Debbi (25:04): Absolutely. Yeah. You run across these situations all the time where you meet up with people and something happens there, there's a spark, there's a connection. You get an idea.

Lynn (25:17): They know just what you needed, which I kind of rely on it now. I'm like, Well, I'm sure they'll show up when I need <laugh>. So far so good.

Debbi (25:27): Excellent. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Lynn (25:36): Yes, there is. I feel very strongly about this too. I get so many clients and so many people tell me, Well, I want to write a novel. I have children, I have a job, I have obligations, and I feel guilty about the time it takes, and I don't have time to go off in a mountain in the woods for six months. And what I will tell them is this, Writing a novel I feel is work of your heart and your creativity, and you don't need anybody's permission. In case you do, Lynn Hightower gives you permission. Okay? But I think it's essential to humanity to write a novel. I don't understand why everybody isn't writing a novel. It's not for the cool kids, it's not for the perfect published people. Just get in there and tell your story. Tell the story you wish that someone would tell you and write in real life, which means, Ah, you got two hours, three times a week, and your goal is

three pages, three times a week. If you do that, you'll get your novel written. So that's my advice.

Debbi ([26:49](#)): That's it. That's great advice. Thank you. Take it bird by bird. Right?

Lynn ([26:54](#)): Exactly.

Debbi ([26:55](#)): Chapter by chapter. Word by word.

Lynn ([26:58](#)): <affirmative>. One page at a time.

Debbi ([27:00](#)): That's it. Well, that is wonderful. I wanna thank you so much, Lynn, for being here today. Thank you for doing this interview at the last possible moment. <laugh>

Lynn ([27:10](#)): Happy to. Happy to, I enjoyed it. It's great to talk to you. Love talking to other writers.

Debbi ([27:15](#)): Yeah. Amen to that. Yeah. All right, Let's hear it for writers and also to readers, I wanna say, let's hear it for readers because we need you, <laugh>. So everyone, please remember to leave a review for the podcast wherever you listen to them, and be sure to tell all your friends about it. And also check out our Patreon page where I've been posting serialized fiction. Let's see. As well as book reviews, ad-free episodes and bonus episodes. And check us out there, see what you think. Finally, just a quick plug for my own book, *Fatal Connections*, which will be coming out.

Lynn ([27:58](#)): I love your cover.

Debbi ([28:01](#)): Oh, thank you. Yeah, the artist is Stewart A. Williams. He's absolutely fantastic. I recommend him highly to anybody who self-publishes. It's coming out in print November 11th, Veterans Day, because my protagonist is a retired Marine veteran, so I figured that was appropriate. <laugh>.

Lynn ([28:22](#)): That sounds awesome.

Debbi ([28:24](#)): Well, thank you. Thank you very much. It's been quite a process getting this ready. I will say that, but it is finally ready. If you'd like to see sample chapters there is a link in the show notes to where you can check out my work on Substack. Also, there'll be a link to where you can buy Lynn's book, so please check that out. And our next guest in two weeks will be Chip Jacobs. Until then, take care and happy reading. Oh, and happy Halloween. I'm recording this on Halloween, even though it's going to appear later. But anyway, close enough, right? <laugh>

Lynn ([29:10](#)): Right. Happy Halloween.

Debbi ([29:11](#)): All righty then. Take care and I'll talk to you later.