

# The Crime Cafe with Barry Finlay

Presented By:



Debbi (00:12): Hi everyone. My guest today has written fiction and nonfiction. Among his achievements, he's climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with his son and written a book about it called *Mount Kilimanjaro and Beyond: A Life-Changing Journey*. I love that title. He's also written a travel memoir called *I Guess We Missed the Boat*. In 2014, he began work on his Marcie Kane thriller collection consisting of five books. He recently released a second in a new series of books, I assume it's a series, featuring his protagonist Jake Scott. Among his many accolades, he's received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal for Philanthropy. Impressive. I'm pleased to have with me Barry Finlay. Hi Barry. How are you doing today?

Barry (01:49): I'm doing well. How are you doing?

Debbi (01:51): Fine, thank you. It's great to have you on. Thank you for being here.

Barry (01:55): Thanks. Thanks for having me.

Debbi (01:57): Oh, I'm glad. I'm thankful that you could wait to be on <laugh>. I have people on the waiting list now. It's so ridiculous. I can't believe it.

Barry (02:06): Yeah, I think I booked in March, I think.

Debbi (02:09): Yeah. Well, that's doing relatively well compared to some people. Yeah, he would not believe so. Tell us about Jake Scott and why you decided to write a series about him.

Barry (02:22): Well, Jake Scott is kind of an old-fashioned, affable, easygoing individual. He is a former reporter and he stumbles across crimes that he just can't resist poking his nose into and trying to find out what happened. It's a mystery series. The first one's called *Searching for Truth*, and I decided to write this one. I wrote another series first called the Marcie Kane Thriller Collection, and the first book in that series, *The Vanishing Wife* had a protagonist called Mason Scott. And Mason Scott was an easygoing accountant, and I kinda liked the character, but I also had a character in the first book called Marcie Kane. And so I had a choice of continuing on with Marcie or continue on with Jake, and I decided to continue on with Marcie, but at the same time, I really like Jake. So after writing five books in the Marcie Kane thriller collection, I kind of reinvented sorry, I let, the guy's name was Mason Seaforth in the Marcie Kane series, and I kind of liked that character, and so I turned him into Jake Scott in the Jake Scott series, and so here we are.

Debbi (03:41): Fascinating. I was going to say it's interesting that you started out with a series of five books about Marcie Kane, but actually they were about somebody else, but they ended up being about Marcie Kane.

Barry (03:53): Exactly. That's exactly right.

Debbi (03:55): Wow, so that doesn't sound like you did a lot of planning as far as what you were going to write for the rest of the books. I guess the first one.

Barry (04:04): Yeah, I'm not a plotter or a planner. I know there are plotters, there are pantsers, and I guess I'm a seat of the pants kind of guy. I do plot ahead a chapter or two. I at least work it out in my head but I don't plan the whole series or anything like that. I'll let the characters take me where they will.

Debbi (04:29): Well, I really admire people who just do that, who just wing it because I have to plan a little bit when I write a novel. It's just the way I am, I guess.

Barry (04:40): Well, it's interesting, cause I saw Jeffery Deaver speak once and he said he plots about 250 pages before he starts to actually write the book. So he basically got the book and then he just fills in the blanks, I guess. And I give a lot of credit to somebody that can do that.

Debbi (04:59): I do too, because I can't. I have to plot very, very sketchily.

Barry (05:06): Yeah. Yeah. Just not me.

Debbi (05:08): No, I could not possibly write the detailed outlines that some people do. I find that absolutely remarkable. It's like, why don't you just write the book then?

Barry (05:16): Exactly. I guess they never have writer's block.

Debbi (05:19): I don't know. All I know is I like having a certain amount of surprise in my plots. And if they occur to me while I'm writing them, all the better.

Barry (05:32): Yeah. I honestly don't know--

Debbi (05:33): I could plan a certain way, but yeah, go ahead.

Barry (05:36): I honestly don't know how the books are going to end until I get close to the end and the characters take me where they wanna go. And I'm always surprised too, so that's part of the enjoyment for me.

Debbi (05:52): Absolutely. That's so true. Yeah. Most of the time I feel like I know where I'm going with the end, but sometimes the end will surprise me.

Barry (06:01): Yeah.

Debbi (06:02): At the end, you'd think that's a good sign.

Barry (06:05): I think so.

Debbi (06:07): I think so too. Yeah. When you wrote the thrillers how did they differ or do they differ from the mystery series you're working on?

Barry (06:19): I think there's more action in the thrillers. The mysteries in my mind are a little more character driven, so there's a little more relationship development and that kind of thing. And the mysteries hopefully people, the readers won't be able to figure

them out until they actually get to the end. Whereas the thrillers everybody knows who done it pretty early in the book, and it's just a matter of dealing with those people.

Debbi ([06:51](#)): So they are very definitely thrillers as opposed to mysteries?

Barry ([06:55](#)): In my mind. Yeah, there's a clear distinction in my mind between the two.

Debbi ([06:59](#)): There definitely is. Yeah. So are you currently working on the next Jake Scott?

Barry ([07:08](#)): They percolate for a while. After I finish one I, it's kind of rolling around in my head, I guess, and I'm coming up with different ideas, but right now I'm focusing on marketing and promotion and that seems to take a tremendous amount of time. So I'll probably start writing after Christmas and see where it goes.

Debbi ([07:31](#)): It does seem to take a tremendous amount of time, doesn't it?

Barry ([07:34](#)): Yeah. When people ask about writing a book, I always warn them about the marketing promotion aspect. It's very time consuming.

Debbi ([07:45](#)): It is. And I don't think people really appreciate just how much work it is.

Barry ([07:50](#)): Oh, I don't think so either.

Debbi ([07:52](#)): I think a certain picture has been painted by certain people of what writing is like, which it is not at all.

Barry ([07:59](#)): No, no. I guess if you're with a traditional publisher, a big name traditional publisher, and you have a big name, then you can spend all your time writing. But for the rest of us, it's a lot of work. Doing the promotion and marketing

Debbi ([08:15](#)): And having that big name publisher does not always work out so well for the smaller, less well known authors, that's for sure. Well, we won't go there, though. <laugh> Let's see. Where do you set your books? Are they all in Canada?

Barry ([08:35](#)): The thriller series? Marcie Kane lives in Florida, but I do bring her back to Canada somehow. So there's a Canadian element in, I think pretty well all of them but some of them are international as well. For example, *A Perilous Question* is about human trafficking, and it starts in Africa, and it's actually based on a question I was asked when we were in Africa. We were touring an orphanage, and one of the girls took me on the tour and one took my wife and another girl took somebody else. And at the end of my tour, the girl said to me, so when are you taking me to Canada? And she would've gone in a heartbeat. She would've. If I pulled up at midnight at the gate, she would've gone. And so I kind of thought, that's not a good thing. So the book evolved from that question.

Debbi ([09:37](#)): Interesting.

Barry (09:37): And *Remote Access*, part of it takes place in China. So there's an international component to a few of them as well as just being U.S. and Canada based. The mystery series all is, the main character lives in Ottawa, Canada.

Debbi (09:57): And you live in Canada?

Barry (09:59): I do, yeah.

Debbi (10:00): Do you live in Ottawa?

Barry (10:01): Yeah.

Debbi (10:03): So how much does Ottawa figure in your book in terms of adding to the plot or the feel of the book?

Barry (10:13): Well, the feel of the book, definitely. The first one in the series, in the Jake Scott series, takes place in the winter, which people living in Ottawa are very familiar with. So I think the setting is very Ottawa-based. The book itself could take place anywhere. The storyline could take place anywhere, but the setting for sure is very Canadian.

Debbi (10:44): I do love when a book gives you a sense of place, and Canada is a really cool country. I've been there a couple of times and I always feel like everybody here is so nice when I go there.

Barry (10:58): Well, I like to think it's a cool country,

Debbi (11:03): Very laid back. I mean, I've been to Toronto and I always am reminded of New York except really laid back New York.

Barry (11:11): Yeah. And Toronto is much less laid back than most of the rest of the country, so.

Debbi (11:22): <laugh> Cool. Let's see. Do you do a lot of research when you're writing your books?

Barry (11:30): That's probably the most enjoyable part for me. I've learned so much from writing. Each one of my thriller books had a particular theme as I mentioned. One is human trafficking, one is computer hacking, one is the drug culture, another is PTSD. And so for each one, I spoke to subject matter experts and also members of the Ottawa Police Services who are very forthcoming in talking about what they do. And so I've learned a great deal. And to me, that's the most exciting part about writing the books is it's a learning process for me.

Debbi (12:16): It is, isn't it? It's amazing what you find out when you do research.

Barry (12:22): For example, when I wrote the one about PTSD, which was the last one in the Marcie Kane series, I spoke to a person who was a paramedic, who has PTSD and has a

service dog. And it was just fascinating and just to understand, try to understand a little bit about what she's going through and try and put that in the book. And I just found it very satisfying and I really enjoyed the process.

Debbi ([13:00](#)): I noticed that you enjoy travel. Yes. Do you tend to travel to the places that you write about?

Barry ([13:09](#)): I think it's the opposite. I tend to write about the places I travel to. Some of my friends will say they know where the next setting's going to be based on where we've been lately. So yeah, they're ... Africa's in one of the books. China's in one of books. Some of the books are in various places in Canada. And the main character in the Marcie Kane series living in Gulfport, Florida, we stayed there a few times or in the St. Petersburg area during the winter. So yeah, it's nice to have been somewhere that you can write about.

Debbi ([13:53](#)): Absolutely. It's wonderful to have that sense of actually being there. Not at all like just researching it online.

Barry ([14:03](#)): No, it's not. No. The pandemic kind of put the kibosh on that. So that's probably why my new books are set in Ottawa

Debbi ([14:12](#)): <laugh> Probably right. It seems like you're exploring a lot of social issues in your books.

Barry ([14:22](#)): Yeah, I tried.

Debbi ([14:23](#)): Is that true of the Jake Scott series as well?

Barry ([14:28](#)): Not so much. They're more straightforward mysteries so there's not as much social content, but definitely in the Marcie Kane series, I tried to address a socially relevant theme in each one.

Debbi ([14:44](#)): That's cool. I was going to ask you about the reporter there.

Barry ([14:52](#)): Jake Scott?

Debbi ([14:54](#)): Yeah, the question just slipped outta my mind for some reason. Maybe it'll occur to me later. Let's see. What authors have most inspired you and who do you like to read the most?

Barry ([15:09](#)): I kind of got eclectic taste, I guess. I read people like Michael Connelly, and right now I'm reading Tom Clancy. I read him quite a bit, but I'll kind of flip back and forth between biographies and autobiographies and fiction. I've also read every book written by one of the Rolling Stones and astronauts and politicians. I can't really say I have a favorite, I don't think. There's an interesting story of, you've heard of Louise Penny, I'm sure. I was doing a book signing once, and I had all my books out on the table, and I think I had about seven at that time. A little old lady came along and she looked at my books and she said, "Do you have anything by Louise Penny?"

Debbi ([16:00](#)): <laugh>

Barry ([16:03](#)): And I hadn't read Louise Penny at that time, so I did. I read one of her books and I wrote to Louise Penny and told her this story and how I'd read one of her books as a result. And she sent me a message back saying that she was pleased to have a new fan.

Debbi ([16:22](#)): That's cool. I know what I was going to ask you. Do you think of them as more like being cozy mysteries than say hard boiled or police procedural?

Barry ([16:32](#)): I think they're cozy mysteries with an edge.

Debbi ([16:35](#)): Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Barry ([16:36](#)): There's murder in them, but it's not graphic murders. You know? Don't read about somebody's head exploding. You never will in my books, that's not me, but I think they're a little edgier than a cozy would be. So, I call them mysteries, but I don't think they fall, I don't think they quite fall into the cozy category. They're close.

Debbi ([17:07](#)): Close, but not quite there.

Barry ([17:11](#)): Yeah. And one of my reviewers commented on that. She said it was almost a cozy.

Debbi ([17:22](#)): A good way of describing it. I mean, these days the cozy is edging toward edgier anyhow.

Barry ([17:28](#)): Yes.

Debbi ([17:30](#)): So kind of almost a cozy, you're not Agatha Christie, but you're not decapitating people. <laugh>

Barry ([17:38](#)): Exactly. Yeah, exactly.

Debbi ([17:39](#)): Graphically, at any rate. I admire your interest in philanthropy. How did that come about and how did you make it happen?

Barry ([17:51](#)): That started with Kilimanjaro, the climb of Kilimanjaro. When we made the decision to climb, we wanted to use it as a platform for fundraising and for the kids of Tanzania. And so we contacted a few child-centered fundraising organizations and only one got back to me. And that was Planned Canada. They're around the world and they're under the auspices of Planned International. And so we raised money before we went, and we had no clue how much we were going to be able to raise. We had no idea. And we ended up raising, we set a goal of \$5,000, we ended up raising about 15,000. And we did that by putting people's names on the Canadian flag. And I think that kind of enticed people to donate. And we carried the flag to the top of Kilimanjaro, and then we presented it to the school that we raised money for after that.

(18:58): And when we were at the school and we were sitting at the front, and I'll never forget this, we were sitting at the front and there were some teachers and school dignitaries sitting there. And one of them said that quite often, the mizugu, that's us, the white people will make promises but don't keep them. And I understand that because when you're caught up in the moment, you say things that, and then when you're on your way home, you realize you just can't do what you said you were going to do. But I was in a position where I had the time and the desire to do something. So we continued fundraising by having golf tournaments and variety shows. And we did that for about 10 years, and we ended up completing, I think it was five projects in Tanzania. So there was a classroom, we drilled a well, we helped some young women start small businesses. We did a sanitation project. And there was one other one that slips my mind at the moment. And then we also raised money for Wounded Warriors Canada for the service dog program. And so over 10 years, we raised a little over \$200,000. So it was very satisfying. And when we met the kids in 2011, we went back to Tanzania. And when we met the kids and the teachers, they treated us like rock stars.

(20:35): They were so grateful for what we'd done, and it was just such a satisfying experience.

Debbi (20:40): Oh, wow. Is this in your book about Kilimanjaro?

Barry (20:44): It is in the last third of the book, at least part of it. The beginning of that story is in the last few pages of Kilimanjaro.

Debbi (20:55): That's amazing. That is something else. Bravo.

Barry (21:00): Well, thank you. Like I said, we had the time and the desire and we had help, so we were able to put it all together. We've kind of retired from fundraising now, but you know, it's taxing.

Debbi (21:19): It is. I know. I've done it.

Barry (21:21): Yeah. Yeah. So we've kind of put it on the shelf for the time being.

Debbi (21:27): Wow. Well, I am impressed, really, truly.

Barry (21:30): Thank you.

Debbi (21:32): What advice would you give to someone who's interested in writing for a living?

Barry (21:39): I get that question all the time when I'm doing book signings, and I've been working on a good answer. But I think initially my advice is to write. If somebody has the urge to write, sit down and write, well, it doesn't matter how good it is. Just get it out on paper and worry about polishing it later. If I was advising people to do it as a career, I would advise them to try and get an agent, which is very difficult to do, but try,

and try and get a traditional publisher. I've had my own experiences with traditional publishers, which haven't always been totally positive, but I guess I would keep that to myself if I was advising an aspiring writer. I think you have to be careful who you're getting involved with and make sure that you have a lawyer read the contract, if you get a contract. And just persevere. You're going to get a hundred rejections. They are pretty famous authors that have had hundreds of rejections and persevered, and finally, they're JK Rowling is a perfect example. And finally, they're doing really well. So I think the key is to write. And then the second thing is to persevere.

Debbi (23:10): Absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more. It's a business where if you're not willing to persevere and just keep going in the face of the word no, <laugh> you're just not going to make it.

Barry (23:23): Yeah. And just reviews are perfect example. You're going to get some negative reviews, and it's tough when you get the first one. When we wrote *Kilimanjaro and Beyond*, we were getting positive reviews. And the day we got a book award, I just got a word that we had received a literary award for the book. There was a review on Amazon that said something about it's a good thing the Finlays can fundraise, because they certainly can't write. Something like that.

Debbi (23:58): Ahh, yeah.

Barry (23:59): So my first reaction, that was my first bad review, my first reaction was to fire back. But my wife said, maybe you should sleep on it for a while. And so I did that. And I mean, not going to please everybody. You can't fire back. You have to just accept it. And as long as you're getting more positive reviews than negative, then you're doing well.

Debbi (24:20): Absolutely. Absolutely. The heck with reviews, I say. I mean, it's like you can't worry about that stuff. No.

Barry (24:29): No. Well, the other--

Debbi (24:30): It's out of your control.

Barry (24:31): Yeah. The other thing I would say about reviews is look at your average review, not the individual reviews, but if you're averaging somewhere between four and five, you're doing very well.

Debbi (24:45): Absolutely.

Barry (24:46): There are going to be one star reviews in there for whatever reason, so.

Debbi (24:51): Exactly. And there's no nothing you can do about it, so you may as well just get used to it.

Barry (24:57): Yeah, exactly. You have to develop a thick skin.

Debbi ([25:01](#)): Yes, definitely. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Barry ([25:09](#)): No, just that my books are available on Amazon. Actually, I just opened a new one today, which is the hardback version of *The Guardians of Truth*. It's the first time I've ever done a hardback version.

Debbi ([25:23](#)): Wow. Fancy!

Barry ([25:26](#)): Yeah, it is fancy. Whether it'll sell or not remains to be seen. But there are hardback versions available. And I do have an audiobook of my first book in the Marcie Kane thriller collection, *The Vanishing Wife* narrated by my son, who's a musician in Nashville.

Debbi ([25:45](#)): Oh, cool. I was going to ask you about the guitar that's behind you. Do you play?

Barry ([25:52](#)): I play a few songs very badly.

Debbi ([25:57](#)): But you play, that's what's important.

Barry ([25:58](#)): Yeah, I play at playing. It's a diversion.

Debbi ([26:04](#)): Well, that's cool. That's wonderful. Well, Barry, I would really love to thank you for being on the show today. It was wonderful talking to you.

Barry ([26:15](#)): Thanks very much for having me. It was my pleasure. Thank you.

Debbi ([26:17](#)): Well, it was my pleasure as well. Thank you. So on that note, I will just remind listeners to, if you enjoyed the show, please leave a review. It helps a lot with the whole visibility thing, algorithms and stuff. And we are also Patreon supported, so check us out on the Patreon, check out our Patreon page. We have perks there for supporters. And until next time, when our guest will be Tessa Lunney, please take care and happy reading.