

# The Crime Cafe with Lee Anne Post

Presented By:



**Debbi:** Hi everyone. My guest is a person of many parts as you can see. I have three-quarters of them with me today. Lee Anne Post is the pen name for co-authors Cathy Baldau, Tara Bell, Ginny Fite and K.P. Robbins. I have three of them with me here today—Cathy, Tara, and Ginny. So, welcome. Stories by these authors have appeared in numerous journals, and individually they're published as well in 10 novels, I believe it is. They've worked as reporters and editors covering various types of topics, and they have written a highly relevant novel that entertains and raises important issues, [Thoughts & Prayers](#). So it is my great pleasure to have with me today, [three of the] four authors who represent the one author Lee Anne Post, the collective author. Thanks guys for being here. This is great.

**All:** Thanks for having us.

**Debbi:** Oh my gosh. Well, I'm so glad to have you here. So tell me more about the book [Thoughts & Prayers](#). What is it about?

**Ginny:** Cathy, you go.

**Cathy:** I always get this. The author's scariest question is what is it about? Even though you've worked on it for five years. It's basically about an outcast, overprotected girl who unwittingly lets her boyfriend into their school thinking that he's just going to scare a few people, but he ends up bringing a gun and minutes later, 14 people are dead, and then it's her trying to hide her complicity or she's the accomplice. She's trying to hide that from the authorities. And then as the town and the survivors' grief turns to anger and revenge, she's also trying to hide from them as well.

**Debbi:** My goodness.

**Ginny:** I think of this book as the *Crime and Punishment* novel of the 21st Century, and really it's basically Ross Konikoff. That was his name, right? She struggles with this issue of how much her guilt will force her to give away, and whether she can conceal herself in plain sight or not, and whether she should help the authorities or not. It is both character driven and plot driven, which is fairly unusual for a crime novel.

**Debbi:** You know it's interesting that you bring up that point of complicity because I'm currently working on a story about my attorney character, where she's trying to figure out if she's crossing a similar line. Interesting. Real interesting. What really fascinates me is the fact that you were able to collaborate on this, four of you. How was it that you divided up the work and how was it that you met and formed this group exactly?

**Ginny:** Tara, you want to give that a go?

**Tara:** I'll give that a go. We started out as a writing group to begin with, so we knew each other. We had been reading our work for maybe at least five years, I think the four of us. And one day we decided, one of us said, do you want to try

writing a book together? Let's try writing a book together. So at first we weren't too sure whether this was a good idea, but we just started. We just began and with our computers in our laps and a whole other way of working, we plotted out a plot, decided that each of us would have two characters. We designed those characters. This was all done maybe in two weeks, I think. We laid this down, this basic story, and that each of us would have two characters and who they were, what their names were, and how they pretty much interrelated with each other. We wanted a community of diversity, and so I took two teens and Cathy has the protagonist Lily, the person that was the accomplice, and Ginny had two characters—a policeman that was involved in it and the father of one of my characters. Anyway, I'll stop, but you get the idea.

**Ginny:** I just want to say the reason Cathy's character Lily became the protagonist is that she missed one of our weekly meetings. We decided while she was not there that Lily was definitely it.

**Debbi:** Oh my gosh. Wow! This is so fascinating because each of you took a character and created an arc for them then.

**All:** Yes.

**Tara:** Yes. Two characters, two character themes.

**Ginny:** Two characters, and we did that up front. You know, the weird thing about this is we really knew this book even before it existed, and so we knew the character's names almost immediately.

**Tara:** Yeah, we did

**Ginny:** With very little movement about those. And then we knew what had to happen for each of them, and so we wrote little character exercises about each of their individual arcs and shared them with each other.

**Debbi:** Wow!

**Ginny:** Maybe as juice to get us started.

**Debbi:** I have got to make an observation here. You said something in your guest post that really resonated with me. You said, "*we had to learn how to go from being soloists to members of a chamber orchestra, to blend our understanding, writing styles, language use, pacing and approach to character and storytelling into one harmonious melody.*" Right away, all I could think was that I was struck by the similarity with the filmmaking process and the screenwriting process. Honestly.

**Tara:** Yeah.

**Debbi:** And I thought, wow, this is like a TV writer's room almost in a sense. Seriously.

**Ginny:** In a way, yes.

**Debbi:** I was just like, wow, this is fabulous. Fabulous stuff. I'm loving it. Was it difficult at all to adjust to writing collectively?

**Ginny:** Cath?

**Cathy:** I think the writing part was easier than the editing part, to be honest. I think the writing part was the fun part. You know, we were all just flying and reading every week. Every week we were reading what we were writing, and then when it came down to the editing process, that's where things got tough because you had to sort of give up a part of your own work to these other three voices to make sure that all these characters, that everything made sense and matched. We did a big timeline. We couldn't write that the character had blue eyes when the character really had green eyes. So there was a lot, and we got down to the micro level of editing too. Every word, basically every sentence was debated. As an author, you're usually flying solo, so you don't have to compromise as much. Well, you don't have to compromise at all, except with your editor, I guess. But we really worked together to make it one voice between the four of us.

**Debbi:** Oh my gosh. Wow! I mean, if any screenwriters are listening, I'm sure a lot of them are thinking, whoa! Well, this is kill your darlings. This is a kill your darlings thing.

**Ginny:** Oh, definitely. So there were issues about backstory. How much do we put in and how much do we leave out? And many of us, like me, like our backstory, so letting go of that little comfort blanket, sometimes very difficult.

**Debbi:** But it can also be very freeing.

**Ginny:** Yes. That too.

**Tara:** And we all got to know each other's characters really well, too, as we kept working. So in a way, we had that ability to get to know them, even though we still had somewhat control over what we thought about it, and then we would discuss it and see if it went along with everyone. Discuss how we felt that character should feel or say or do, and so it really wasn't ... we didn't have to give up a lot. Sometimes we would compromise or add to our ideas of that character, and it really, in a way was pretty wonderful. I learned a lot about putting a novel together by working with these wonderful writers.

**Debbi:** Collaborating does that, I think. You just learn so much from it. And I love the point you made in the post, your guest post about humor, how it really is appropriate to include humor in heavy material, just to give it some lightness so that people don't get so depressed they want to put the book down.

**Ginny:** The book has that effect from time to time because the subject is so difficult, but mostly it's Cathy who's the funny one, and these lines would just pop up out of

nowhere and make us all laugh, which was so helpful as you pointed out. Just like, oh, now I can breathe again. Let's go back and do this.

**Debbi:** Absolutely. How much research did you do as part of this?

**Cathy:** I like to say that we're all on some government watch list based on our browsing histories into guns and pipe bombs and shootings. Go ahead, Ginny.

**Ginny:** Trauma. A lot of research about trauma and the after effects about PTSD. And you know, I've long thought that life just gives you PTSD, but these specific assaults are so vivid for all of us that I don't know that we ever as a society get over them, particularly, you know, if the newscaster when they're reporting what is happening on say a day like January 6th, comments that the young staffers knew what to do when there was an active shooter threat and moved the members of Congress away from windows and doors. I mean, that kind of acceptance of violence in our society is there all of the time. And so we need to find a way to understand that and encapsulate some of that in the story.

**Debbi:** Yes. Yes, absolutely. How have readers responded to your book?

**Tara:** We were, I have to say, pleasantly surprised. You do not know when you finish a novel how it will be accepted. We went through beta readers. We heard from them and advised and re-edited after we got our manuscript back, but we didn't know what just readers that would actually get the book would feel. So we were surprised to see on Netflix and—I mean not on Netflix—on NetGalley, a lot of wonderful responses from people. 5 stars we got fairly often and how many people relate to it. It's just like what Ginny was saying, that there's a lot of relation. [Phone bleeps. Tara silences it.] You can tell I'm really techy savvy. [laughter ]

People really responded to it, and when we've had groups together, like library groups, book signing in our area, people asking, and the questions have been phenomenal and been really good. We're not experts in the field. We are fiction writers, but we did the research and we worked, and it was interesting to feel the readers respond to our story and relate it to that story. One teacher said, I'm so glad, one thing I recognized in the book is that you didn't blame anyone. You didn't blame the schools, you didn't blame the police, you didn't blame gun laws. Well, some of the characters do. Some of them do, but it's all about how each of us in a different way is responding to this really traumatic, awful thing that's happening in our country.

**Debbi:** Well, that's great that you've written this book and that you did it all together. I'm a big believer in the power of collaboration on a lot of things. Are you working on anything else collectively?

**Ginny:** Not yet.

**Debbi:** Not yet.

**Ginny:** It's gonna take some convincing.

**Tara:** We've talked about it.

**Cathy:** You know, writing a book is like childbirth. You have to have that time to recover and forget about all the pain of it.

**Debbi:** I know the feeling.

**Tara:** Yes.

**Debbi:** Who are your favorite authors and are you reading anything now that you particularly love?

**Tara:** Ooh.

**Ginny:** Well, my favorite all-time author is still Toni Morrison, no matter what else I read. But she doesn't write crime unless life is a crime.

**Tara:** I really love Anthony Doerr. What's it called? *Cloud*... I can't remember.

**Ginny:** *Cloud Cuckoo Land*.

**Tara:** Yes. I love him. If I could remember his titles, that would be nice. How about you, Cathy?

**Cathy:** Well, I've been in the past few years reading voraciously Fredrik Backman, I think because he has that combination on one page. You can laugh and cry and scream and be happy and sad and all of those things that he does brilliantly that is life, you know, because in life, you have happy, sad, scared moments throughout your day. So he kind of inspired my wanting to put all of those emotions on the page in such a difficult situation.

**Tara:** Yes.

**Debbi:** This is one of the things I like most about doing these interviews. I get to hear what other authors are reading, and sometimes it's an author that I've never even heard of and I'll get interested and start reading them. So thank you for those thoughts.

**Tara:** Yes.

**Debbi:** Let's see. What advice would you give to someone who would like to write for a living?

**Tara:** For a living. Would like to write and for a living is like an oxymoron.

**Debbi:** I hear that.

**Tara:** Go ahead, Ginny.

**Ginny:** I've been working on this idea for a presentation elsewhere, and I think my advice is always what it had been, which is keep going. There are just innumerable insults and pauses and life events that come at you that prevent you from writing, but you just have to keep going. I mean, you don't stop breathing because it's difficult. You keep breathing, therefore you keep writing. I don't think there's any simpler advice than that.

**Tara:** I think it's good. I've watched Ginny out of the group or all of us. Cathy has a full-time job and three of us are retired from other work that we did and have maybe more time to write. Ginny has just gotten into some wonderful writerly habits that I admire so much. I think perseverance is a big advice. And don't feel guilty. Try not to feel guilty about not getting your writing done. Just do it. Like Ginny said, that's the best thing you can do. Just do it. And then be in touch with ... Do things like this. Be in touch with ... keep up with how you market, keep up with people to connect with. What do you think, Cathy? And the disappointment. It's hard. You know, you think you're close to something and then it doesn't pan out, but go ahead, Cathy.

**Cathy:** Well, I think it's like any other sort of art or becoming a master at something. You have to put in the hours. It takes 10,000 hours to become a master at anything. My daughter danced ballet for a very long time, and so a lot of my years of writing, I call that barre work. You have to be in the studio and doing that writing and building up your writing muscles before you can go out on stage with your finished product. It takes hours and hours and hours. If you're not willing to put in the work and if you don't find joy in the work, that's the thing.

**Tara:** That's hard.

**Cathy:** That's hard, because I've collaborated on other projects with people that don't have the writing "disease", and it makes a big difference. You have to want to go through this agony of sitting down and writing every day.

**Tara:** Pain.

**Ginny:** Although I've been thinking that writing is the cure for this disease. The disease is something else. Find another name for it. But I think that writing is the way you get through it. So if the disease is say obsession, then writing allows you to work out the thing you're obsessing about. Like clams or oysters, the "thing" is a piece of sand in your mind and this is going to keep grinding around in there until you push it out.

**Debbi:** You guys have just described it all so perfectly, there are no words I can add. I mean, that is such great advice right there and it is so true. A lot of this is obsession, habit, determination.

**Tara:** Procrastination.

**Debbi:** Procrastination. Exactly. Sometimes you have to procrastinate well, if you know what I mean. You have to just kind of let that idea sit there and let the solution of whatever problem it is come to you. Interesting, isn't it ?

**Tara:** It is.

**Ginny:** I can't remember which philosopher talked about the raw and the cooked. He was talking about civilizations, but I think that somehow creating anything is like that. You can't surface the idea until it's cooked. Before then, it rattles around in your brain going through whatever process that you use to cook it and you are not really in charge of that process. It is going to happen without you and you just do have to wait until it's ready.

**Debbi:** That's great. That's very interesting.

**Tara:** And another thing I'd advise for writers too, and probably they do this, is to be in a group, because it inspires you or you get to share your woes with people.

**Debbi:** You get woes. You get comments. You get real comments, not just nasty comments from people on Amazon or whatever.

**Tara:** Exactly.

**Debbi:** Real, genuine, caring comments.

**Tara:** Because we know what it's like to get to that point or that page where we can share.

**Cathy:** I think we've all said we could not have written this book alone. It would have never happened if one of us tried to write it alone. I think it was the four of us coming together and inspiring each other to be better writers and having that knowing that somebody's going to expect you to have your work done the next week and have your pages ready to be read aloud. You know, having some accountability also helps in the writing process.

**Debbi:** Absolutely. Absolutely. This is so beautiful, a beautiful note to end on, but I do want to ask, is there anything else you'd like to say before we finish up?

**Ginny:** We missed having Karen's brain here.

**Tara:** Yeah, we did.

**Ginny:** I mean, each of us adds a particular flavor to this particular stew, and I think she is as much a part of what we're saying as anything we could say.

**Tara:** Now this is the first time we haven't had her here with us when we are doing an event or something like this.

**Debbi:** I understand she's off somewhere doing another thing.

**Ginny:** Yes. Death Valley.

**Debbi:** Death Valley!

**Ginny:** Her husband is a photographer and she goes with him on these shooting trips.

**Debbi:** That's fascinating. That must be awesome.

**Tara:** It is neat.

**Debbi:** Well, I want to thank you so much for being here today and sharing your thoughts with my audience there. I really appreciate it.

**Tara:** Thank you.

**Cathy:** Yes, thanks for having us.

**Debbi:** I think what you've done is great, just fantastic. So thank you very much.

**Tara:** You're welcome. We could keep talking for hours, so it's good to end.

**Debbi:** Probably.

**Tara:** Thank you, Debbi

**Debbi:** Sure thing. And I will just say thanks to everyone who's listening. Don't forget their giveaway. They are giving away a copy of *Thoughts & Prayers* and you can check my blog for the details on that—[debbimack.com/blog](http://debbimack.com/blog), something like that. My thanks to my supporters on Patreon. I couldn't do this without you guys, without Patreon and Substack. Our next guest will be Lorie Lewis Ham, who is not only a crime writer but has her own podcast called I believe it's Mysteryrat's Maze, where authors get to, I think, read their work so that's fascinating right there. In any case, thank you for listening. Take care. I'll see you in a couple of weeks and until then, happy reading.