

The Crime Cafe with Curtis Bausse

Presented By:



Debbi: Hi everyone. This is the Crime Cafe, your podcasting source of great crime, suspense and thriller writing. I'm your host, Debbi Mack. Before I bring on my guest, I'd like to remind you that the *Crime Cafe Nine Book Set* and *Crime Cafe Short Story Anthology*, are available for sale on my website, debbimack.com and just click on "Crime Café", and you'll get to the buy links as well as the podcast subscribe buttons and the merchandise store. Now, having said that, I'm very pleased to have today with me mystery author Curtis Bausse [Pron: Bowse]. Did I say that correctly?

Curtis: Well, it should be Bausse [Pron: Bose] normally, the French pronunciation.

Debbi: Curtis Bausse.

Curtis: I accept anything these days, you know.

Debbi: But you go by Curtis, I assume.

Curtis: Yeah, yeah sure.

Debbi: Okay, Curtis, who comes to us from Provence. Am I saying that right?

Curtis: That's perfect, yeah.

Debbi: Oh, fantastic! Well, it's great to have you on and you are originally from Wales though.

Curtis: Indeed, yes.

Debbi: That's awesome.

Curtis: I grew up in Wales, educated in England and then I moved to France like ages ago. Shall we just say ages ago.

Debbi: Ages ago. So you lived in Wales for a while.

Curtis: I lived in Wales all my childhood and then went to school in England. I was actually, I'm pretty much Welsh. I'm 75%, but we lived very close to the border with England and I never learned to speak Welsh for example. I couldn't understand Welsh, so my education is more English.

Debbi: [agrees]

Curtis: And then I moved to France. So, I'm a bit of a mix, yeah.

Debbi: Okay, well I just have to ask, have you ever been to Portmeirion?

Curtis: In Wales?

Debbi: In Wales.

Curtis: Uh, yes, a long, long time ago. Why do you have to ask that? Have you been?

Debbi: I have to ask that because I'm a big huge fan of the TV show that was set there, *The Prisoner*.

Curtis: *The Prisoner*. Yeah.

Debbi: Whenever I see that place, I always think creepy, small town [laughs].

Curtis: You're right, yeah. No, I went when I was a kid and that series was amazing. And I think afterwards it actually burnt down. Did you read about that?

Debbi: I didn't read about that, no.

Curtis: There was a fire there in Portmeirion and I think that whole kind of set that they used burnt down. Whether they rebuilt it, I don't know, but yeah. There was a fire there.

Debbi: Wow! Because I know that there was quite an uproar after they aired the ending of the series.

Curtis: Yeah.

Debbi: To the point where Patrick McGoochan actually fled the country as I understand it.

Curtis: Yeah, I didn't know that.

Debbi: Oh! I love that show though. So, what inspired you to move to France?

Curtis: What inspired me? Well, my parents were always Francophiles. We came to France when I was a kid for holidays from the age of like eight or 10 onwards; you know we would come to France every year. I studied French at uni and I had what we call a sandwich year abroad when you study languages. So, I came to France during that year at the university and more or less fell in love with the country. Well, I was already pretty much, you know, and met my wife at that time.

Debbi: [agrees]

Curtis: And so settled there as soon as I left, as soon as I left uni in fact. Britain at that time (the UK) was not in a very great state. This is kind of the mid 70's. More or less bankrupt and there wasn't much that would, you know, want you to stay in Britain, and France was a very attractive proposition at that time. So, I came and settled and stayed ever since.

Debbi: Huh. And where did you get the idea to write about Magali in your mysteries?

Curtis: You mean where did I...

Debbi: Why

Curtis: ...find her as a particular...

Debbi: What inspired that character? Yes.

Curtis: Well actually she lived just down the road from here. Sort of 500 yards down the road. That was the person that inspired me if you like, the initial spark because I like to have something from reality to kind of set me off. We knew her as a neighbor and she'd just been left by her husband after like 20 or 26

years of marriage. I thought well, we discussed it with her what she was going to do and everything. Eventually she moved on and we no longer have any contact with her.

But, I took that situation and transposed it into Magali and joined up with something kind of fantasy I had, kind of a long time ago, was to be a private detective. And at that time in France, I don't think it's the same in the States, but at that time in France, it was not regulated at all. You could just put up a plaque and say, I'm a private detective, come you know, I'll solve your cases. Since then, it has been regulated in France about a dozen years ago; no later than that you know. That was what sparked it off, you know that idea of someone looking for a new life and they could just put up a plaque and say they were a private detective. Obviously she was illegal doing that at this time, but it hadn't been very long since it was illegal and so she had to go through the process of becoming qualified and so forth. But that was what gave me the idea of using Magali as a protagonist, yeah.

Debbi: Well I like it a lot. I love your sense of humor. Would you describe your series as humorous mystery? Do you fall kind of like more on the cozy side of the spectrum or more...does it get grittier or how would you describe it?

Curtis: Actually, it gets kind of darker. The further I go, it gets a little bit darker. I'm not particularly...I don't know a lot about mystery series in general. I mean I do read them, but I read loads of other stuff. The other various sub-genres, was something I actually discovered as I was going along; so cozy mystery, procedurals, and all that.

Debbi: [agrees]

Curtis: When I set out, it was just going...I'm going to write a detective story; a mystery story. I wouldn't call it cozy. It's a little bit of everything really. Not in a particular sub-genre and as I go along, it's getting more and more dark in fact. So, I wouldn't call it cozy, even if I do try to keep the humor in there, yeah.

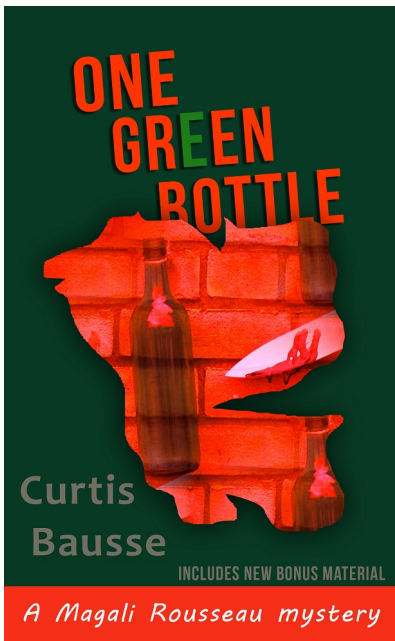
Debbi: Well, I like that actually. I like the idea of incorporating so many different types of literature and elements in there.

Curtis: I find it difficult to let go of humor entirely, you know.

Debbi: [laughs] Good. Tell us about your latest book in the series then.

Curtis: The latest. Well, the one I'm working on now you mean? Or the one...

Debbi: The one that's currently out that you're giving away.



Curtis: Okay, okay. The first one was, *One Green Bottle*, which you started reading perhaps. And then the other one is, *Perfume Island*, the second one. That's the one that was set in Mayotte, which is a tiny island in the Indian Ocean; a French island which is the latest and most recent department of France, so a fully integrated part of France, but 5,000 miles away from Paris, where we went to live, my wife and I, just a few year ago. We spent two years there.

My wife was a school inspector before she's just now retired, and I had just retired at that time and so she had a post out in Mayotte for two years and so we went out there and it's quite an exceptional place. I mean there are a lot of places in the world which have inequality; obviously, you know a lot of rich people and the rich and poor living together and the rich in protected communities and so forth. But, this island is quite special in so far as it's only recently become a French department, which goes against if you like the whole idea of decolonization. The whole trend since the 1950's of African countries getting their independence.

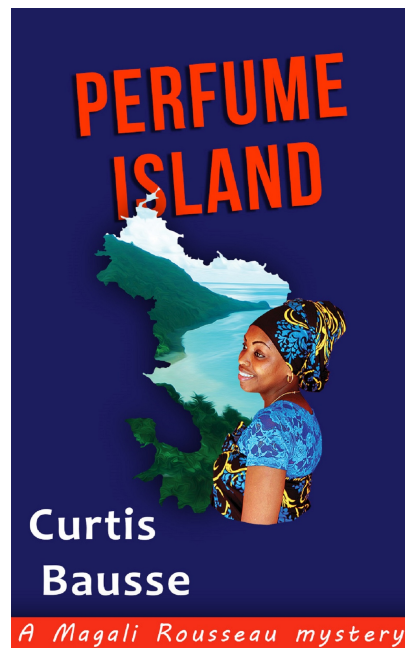
Mayotte was in the mid 70's part of the French colony, the Comoros Islands and they voted whether they wanted to become independent or not and they are composed of four islands. Three of the islands voted to become independent and Mayotte was the only one that said, no we don't want to be independent, we want to remain French.

Under international law, the majority vote would be the valid one. In other words, the whole country becomes independent. But France said, okay three of the islands have voted to become independent so yeah, you can become independent, but we're going to keep the fourth one, because they voted to remain French. That's more or less how it happened. So the three Comorian Islands now say, well that's completely illegal and there have been actually several resolutions in the United Nations to say that

France is occupying Mayotte illegally, but the French don't really care about that and the United Nations is not going to do anything.

So, that's the situation as is it now and little by little Mayotte has become fully integrated into France. It's a fully French department, except that it's 95% Muslim. The main language (the first language) is not French. The minority of people speak French and you get a lot of immigrants now coming from the other three islands to try and live in Mayotte because Mayotte is part of Europe (being part of France) and so they expect a better lifestyle, better standard of living. They want eventually to acquire French nationality and maybe make it to Europe, etc.

So you have all the problems of migration that we get in Europe on a slightly smaller scale, but in Mayotte we get those and they cross from Comoros, it's about 70 kilometers; it's a risky crossing. There's been about 20,000 people that have lost their lives in the last 20 years or so, and that's where we went to live for two years. It's a fabulous island, extremely beautiful. It has a lagoon which is said to be the second most beautiful and largest lagoon in the world, and yet there is this undercurrent and a very exceptional political situation, which gave rise to the second novel.



Debbi: Wow, sounds like quite a bit of interesting background goes into that story.

Curtis: Yes, indeed! It's a fascinating place which I, you know, tried to convey in the novel without laying it on too thick, but I think...

Debbi: In a way that's entertaining, yet at the same time informs.

Curtis: I mix it up in the story and yeah.

Debbi: And it's probably a situation that a lot of people where I live don't know about, so it sounds fascinating.

Curtis: Yes, even in France, there aren't that many people that know, I mean they've heard of Mayotte because they know that it's part of France, but if you ask them to say where it is, they wouldn't really know, you know, it's off the radar.

Debbi: Oh, my gosh.

Curtis: A bit of a flash point.

Debbi: Interesting, very interesting. Who are the authors who have most inspired you and your writing?

Curtis: Wow!

Debbi: That's a tough one I know, but...

Curtis: You didn't warn me about that one.

Debbi: I didn't warn you, no.

Curtis: I've had loads of people that have inspired me that I've just adored.

Debbi: Yes.

Curtis: As a reader, you know, ever since I was a kid. I guess if you're looking at crime writing, it would have to go back to Agatha Christie, you know.

Debbi: [agrees]

Curtis: As a child, she was the person that really opened me to what it meant to write a mystery which would bamboozle the reader, and I suppose I still have that, her in my mind when I write the "who done it". Nowadays, I don't know, but they're not mystery writers. I adore Haruki Murakami, the Japanese writer, but that's more stylistic. Well, it's mysterious, but he doesn't write mystery novels, so yeah.

Debbi: But he writes extraordinary stuff.

Curtis: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

Debbi: Where do you see the series going from here?

Curtis: Where's it going?

Debbi: Yeah, in terms of like story arc for Magali. Is it Magali?

Curtis: Magali. Yeah, she's...the third one I'm in the middle of writing the third one.

Debbi: Yes.

Curtis: Gets a little bit darker, while at the same time, you know keeping those elements of humor. There's a relationship with Charlotte Perle, whose son is murdered in the first one. She's the first person who comes to Magali and says, you know, I want you to find the person who killed my son. And in the second one, *Perfume Island*, they are there together and that's where the mystery starts and Charlotte is actually at one point accused of being a killer there. And in the third one, they get back together again and, so I'm in the middle of writing that. I don't want to say too much about it because I'm in kind of the second or third draft, but it's now working out I think okay. It's going to be slightly different from the first two in so far as there are multiple points of view in the third one, and it's slightly more towards the thriller end, or at least it's a blend of mystery and thriller. The others were, well I think especially *Perfume Island* was very much a "who done it" when I spoke about Agatha Christie it was kind of more that end of things. Whereas the one I'm on now is, blends thriller and mystery.

Debbi: That's excellent. That sounds really great. I have to tell you, the opening chapter in your first one just grabbed me by the lapels [laughs].

Curtis: Oh, good, good.

Debbi: Truly, truly. I'm loving it.

Curtis: I'm very glad about that. I think you'll even...I even prefer the opening chapter in *Perfume Island*, the second one, which is I think even better. But, I'm very glad you liked the first one. Yeah, great.

Debbi: Oh, yes. I can't wait to finish it so I can get on to the second one now.

Curtis: Lovely, lovely.

Debbi: Let me see. If you could pick anybody to play Magali in say a television or movie adaptation of your books, who would you pick?

Curtis: Oh...

Debbi: Didn't warn you on that one either [laughs].

Curtis: That presupposes that I know a lot of actresses.

Debbi: Well, if you can think of anybody at all. You don't have to think of a lot.

Curtis: Right.

Debbi: It doesn't have to be a huge A-list star.

Curtis: An actress that appeared in a film called, *The Constant Gardner*, which was taken from a book by John Le Carré. I thought it was her, but maybe I'm...I'm not very good. I love movies, but I'm not very good at remembering the names of actors and actresses and so forth, which is probably all to their

credit because, you know they play the characters and afterwards I just forget who the names of the actors are. I think that's how it should be.

Debbi: That's funny. I have the same problem. I can never remember actor names these days.

Curtis: And I don't follow, you know I don't read about them or I don't follow that. So, I'm sorry I probably got the name wrong, but there's an actress. I've definitely got an image of her face, but I just can't put the name on it.

Debbi: Well, look up *The Constant Gardener* and she's in that.

Curtis: Yes, yes.

Debbi: In a lead role?

Curtis: Well, yeah definitely. There was kind of a pair.

Debbi: Okay.

Curtis: Yeah.

Debbi: Alright, *Constant Gardener*. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Curtis: I can't think of anything except to thank you. A, for your commitment to the whole writing business and you know, crime writing especially and B, for having me on the podcast.

Debbi: Well, it was my pleasure and I thank you for being here. It's fantastic. Thanks!

Curtis: You're welcome. Glad to have been here.

Debbi: So, I will just remind everybody to please enter Curtis' giveaway. You can enter by going to his website and going to the contact page. Is that correct?

Curtis: Yes, that's right. Just enter the name. Well, just say giveaway, your name and that's it and I will have the address and I'll put everybody into a draw and as you mentioned the prize is *Perfume Island*, plus the box of candies.

Debbi: Yeah, candy! That's excellent and you have until January 23rd to get in on the giveaway. So, do that and don't forget that you can buy the Crime Cafe publications on my website, debbimack.com. Thanks again for being here, Curtis and until next time, happy reading, everybody.

