

The Crime Cafe with David Swinson

Presented By:



Debbi: Hi! This is the Crime Cafe, your podcasting source of great crime, suspense and thriller writing. Before I introduce our guest, I'd like to remind you to check out the *Crime Cafe* story collections; a boxed set and a short story anthology. They're on my website, debbimack.com. Just click on the link "Crime Cafe" and you can get to the buy buttons there, as well as see our merchandise and other stuff that's cool, and subscribe buttons, of course, to the podcast. Also, get ready for our Patreon launch. I'm setting up an online community for supporters of the Crime Cafe and there will be great perks for anybody who contributes and exclusive content if you contribute at a certain level. It's not a very high level, either. So, it's monthly contributions and I would greatly appreciate your support for that. When that comes out, I'll let you know. In any case, without further ado, I would like to introduce my distinguished guest...

David: Oh geez!

Debbi: A really great author who writes wonderful crime fiction, David Swinson.

David: Hi!

Debbi: Hi, David. How's it going?

David: Good, good.

Debbi: Excellent. I met you online after reading, *The Second Girl*. I found a review, I can't remember where it was, but somewhere or other a review popped up for, *The Second Girl* and I was just captivated by it. Not only because it's set in D.C., which is, you know, I live near D.C., arguably Columbia is a suburb of D.C.

David: Fairfax Station.

Debbi: Yeah, but it was just such a wonderful story with a great protagonist.

David: Thank you.

Debbi: Now reading *Crime Song*, which is a stunning and wonderful follow up. It's excellent and I would like you to tell us more about Frank Marr and the series and how and why you developed this character.

David: Well, Frank Marr ... I think *The Second Girl* was published in May of 2016 and then *Crime Song*, June of 2017 and then the third book is not coming out until February 2019. But prior to 2016, I mean Frank Marr was in my head seriously for years, I mean a long time. And I had written a couple of other books prior to *The Second Girl* and they got rejected and they were police procedurals and then I went back to Frank and said, listen I'm just going to have fun. I'm going to do something that's so outside of me, and Frank Marr is totally outside of me. I mean, in certain ways I'd love to be like him. In certain ways I would not want to be like him at all. But nothing bothers him or affects him, I mean as far as like his habit and stuff like that. It's like he's almost blind to that kind of stuff.

But I just sat down and had fun and wrote it, and when I gave it to my agent with the other two books I had written, she goes, "Are you sure you're done?" You know? And that's sort of like an indication, well,

maybe I better go...but on this one she didn't say that. She just said, this is good and she did not send it out wide, she only sent...I wanted her to send it to an editor who had turned me down like two times, Josh Kendall at Little Brown in Mulholland and he ended up falling in love with it. But Frank...before Frank was a retired cop turned PI, he was an actual burglar. Not a cop, just a regular burglar that got involved in some PI work. But he was also a burglar and that's what, you know got him his money and stuff like that.

But Frank Marr, he ended up changing and I made him a retired cop turned PI. It also used to take place in 1999, because that's really when MS-13 was really active with trying to recruit young girls and stuff like that in high schools and I agreed with my editor. I mean 1999...I wanted to really get away from all the social media, because I can't stand having to write about that stuff. And he said does it have to be 1999 and I go, no not really. So, we changed it to present and then I had to add social media stuff obviously because teenagers and social media and us and social media.

Debbi: Yes. Yeah, technology really can kind of screw up a story sometimes or enhance it depending on what you're writing.

David: Yeah, and it's funny that it is so much a part of everything we do. If you have a book without it, it would be weird [laughs]. I mean, you want to read a book without it that's done realistically. I mean like I'm old enough that I used to use a map, you know [laughs]. Or write down the directions in a notebook. Now I'm so dependent on Google Maps and all that stuff. You know I couldn't live without it. You know and a lot of detectives, too, active working detectives, the iPhone changed everything. The Samsung phone on crime scenes and all that kind of stuff they use. But that stuff becomes evidence. They don't have to turn over their iPhone, but they have to transfer information. But I mean it changed everything in such a short period of time, you know when you think about it.

Debbi: Yeah, I know what you mean. Well, your series, what's the series arc that you picture for this?

David: Well the arc is *Crime Song*, it's a trilogy.

Debbi: Okay.

David: The third book, which is done called, *Trigger* will be out in February 2019 like I said, and it's the end of the Frank Marr trilogy.

Debbi: Story.

David: Yeah, but it's not necessarily the end of Frank Marr [laughs].

Debbi: Interesting.

David: Yeah, but it, you know, obviously it's the end of his voice and stuff like that, but something happens in the third book where the publisher liked it so much they gave me another three book deal and they want me to pursue that. But it's not Frank Marr. It is Frank Marr with someone else, but it's not a Frank Marr series like this is, with his voice.

Debbi: Will Frank Marr appear in it I guess is the question?

David: Oh it will be a major part of it, but it won't be first person present tense.

Debbi: Gotcha!

David: I'm giving away too much, but I'm excited about the third book and I haven't been excited about a book...I was excited about *The Second Girl* and I haven't been excited about a book like that until this book. So, that's good or bad. I mean, you're a writer so you know if you say your book, you like your book, then that means it's bad, you know [laughs].

Debbi: [laughs].

David: If you hate your book, then that sometimes means it's really good, you know. So I'm afraid to like it.

Debbi: I know how you feel. I mean you don't want to raise your own expectations about it.

David: No.

Debbi: Or assume that because you like it, everybody else will; that sort of thing.

David: Well. my publisher, they love it, you know, and they're outside of family, so it is important you know. But will the critics, will the fans, readers, new fans you know. Will it get a further reach? It's not like I even want to become like this writer that has, you know, like a million readers. I just want to be able to make the publisher money and obviously me make, you know I have a pension but I'd still like to make a little money. But I just want a readership, you know.

Debbi: Exactly.

David: And continue to publish, you know. I love Mulholland Little Brown. I mean they're like a family in every sense of the word. They really are.

Debbi: That's fantastic!

David: So I want them to do well. I want them to keep me.

Debbi: That's great. Let's see, you also have a novel that I wanted to ask you about called, *A Detailed Man* where the protagonist has Bell's Palsy. Tell us a little about that and what prompted you to write about that story.

David: That book took like ten years to write because I was writing it while I was a working detective with D.C. police and it sort of came about where it's not me, but it is semi-autobiographical because I did have Bell's Palsy in 2003 and my seventh cranial nerve is destroyed. I'm atrophied on this side of the face. I mean ... you can't really tell now but if I smile or I do a half smile because I can't, this is frozen. But I wanted a guy that was sort of like...I mean Bell's Palsy, you get the droop and I couldn't blink my eye for eight months, you know. You have to wear a patch when you sleep and so I just liked the idea of just

something really simple that's not life threatening but it sort of is disfiguring for a few months, you know weeks or months. And I created Ezra but again because a lot of my career was one detail after another until I finally got assigned as a detective and once I got assigned, it's like you can finally kick your feet up and put your feet on the desk because it's your desk. Ezra was one detail after another and I'm really expecting more with that book but I'm thankful for that little book with a really now defunct publisher because that was really the start for me because a guy named Jacques Filippi. Do you know Jacques?

Debbi: No, I don't know him.

David: The House of Crime and Mystery, but he's also responsible for selling you know like a lot of my...

Debbi: I might have met him.

David: Yeah. Bouchercon maybe or he goes to a lot of those things. But he was doing this thing called the Quebec Crime Festival, sort of like C3 and all those nice crime festivals and I mean Laura Lippman was there, John Connolly and Mark Billingham and you know Owen Laukkanen and Chris Holm. Where it all started with me was Chris Holm and Peggy Blair and Owen and all these people and I was like the little rookie with his very independent book and these guys were all like...I mean Laura Lippman, I mean come on. But that's really where it started for me and I started feeling like okay, I'm a writer despite this little book, *A Detailed Man*. So that really set the tone for me and also it was an experiment in first person present tense, which *The Second Girl*, I mean Frank Marr is all first person present tense.

Yeah, but I owe a lot to Jacques in Quebec, you know, because Chris Holm who is now a Mulholland author, he had a lot to do with like talking me up to the editor and stuff like that. Like he really should you know check this guy out so that made Josh read the book a little faster. That was the start of the writing family.

Debbi: [agrees].

David: I have no regrets but that book is like a galley, you know. It's not like a finished book. It's like I put a galley out there because it really was not copyedited well and I mean I give a ton of credit to copyeditors because they really clean stuff up.

Debbi: I agree.

David: So there's a lot of mistakes in *A Detailed Man* but it's still, you know I can take it away and get it off but I let it stay.

Debbi: Well, I think that's good. We all get our start somewhere and you got off to a good start I think.

David: Yeah, I mean well *A Detailed Man* was a very different book. Very police procedural and, you know, it's nothing like Frank Marr [laughs].

Debbi: But it tells you a lot about your background.

David: Yeah, police life.

Debbi: Yeah, that kind of thing. So that's pretty cool.

David: Yeah. There's an author, Kent Anderson who's like I mean, everyone... I had the opportunity to read his galley, his new book called, *Green Sun*. But he started in Vietnam and he wrote, *Sympathy For The Devil* and we're talking in the 70s and then he wrote, oh gosh I forget the title of the second one, but he became an Oakland police officer, a Portland police officer and then an Oakland police officer and his stuff was very police procedural and in today's market, back then in the 70s and 80s, would that get published? Not necessarily, but *Green Sun* is very procedural but it is so incredibly well written and beautiful, but total police procedure, you know. And that's really what I wanted to do with, *A Detailed Man*, but I'm not even close to being the writer that Ken Anderson is. Yeah, check that book out if you can.

Debbi: *Green Sun*.

David: It was just released, yeah.

Debbi: I'll have to check it out.

David: Yeah, he's incredible and if you can get him on your podcast. I mean, good luck. He's like some high and mighty...he's very reclusive.

Debbi: Wow.

David: But he's an ex-cop and all that kind of stuff. He's a really cool guy.

Debbi: Well I think talking to police officers is a pretty cool thing to do, these days especially. I think police are human beings and that's something that we need to remember.

David: Some of them aren't [laughs].

Debbi: Some of them are better than others, I know [laughs]. Some of them are worse than others. That's true of everyone. I'm interested also in your background in film. You had started as a film major in college?

David: Yeah, well, it was called then Radio, Television, and Film, and I went to Cal State Long Beach. I mean there was USC, NYC, UCLA and then Cal State, Long Beach had a really good film department, too. That's where Spielberg went first and then he ended up going to USC and the Hughes Brothers. A lot of people came out of there. But I picked Cal State, Long Beach because my mother lived in Seal Beach and I had free rent and I was a block from the beach [laughs]. See, of course, I'm going to take CSULB. I didn't really fall into film right away. I always thought I would be a screenwriter. A relationship that was like sort of a wonderfully bad relationship in California with...I was introduced into alternative music and punk rock and so I took a different course.

Debbi: Yes. Tell us about your dealings with alternative music and punk rock. You got to meet Timothy Leary and Hunter Thompson?

David: Yeah, well, I mean that was years later. I mean it started with a record store on Main Street in Seal Beach, and kids in Orange County and Seal Beach and Long Beach really had nowhere to go, you know. So I'd have some in-store signings like with a popular punk band and alternative bands at the time that would come by and they would flood conservative Main Street, Seal Beach [laughs] with punk rockers and we closed down.

But it turned into, I found a couple of venues. I found one that held 1,500 people, then I found the great venue, Bogart's which is sort of the equivalent of like in D.C. the 9:30 Club or something like that. And that's where it all started because I was given, you know, six days a week where I was the booking agent/promoter and we booked everyone from Social Distortion to The Red Hot Chili Peppers to, you know, major punk acts to Devo. But then Robin Trower and B.B. King, so it wasn't just punk/alternative. It became something different.

But Wednesday was always a dead night, you know and it was a very difficult night so I came up with the idea of like an evening of conversation. And I had met this guy and to this day he's my friend, Bill Stankey, who was with Westport Entertainment, and he handled a lot of the tours and stuff for people like Timothy Leary, Hunter S. Thompson and a lot of other people; Abbie Hoffman and people like that. And I thought, what about "an evening of conversation with ..." and I think the first one, I don't remember, it may have been Jim Carroll who wrote, *The Basketball Diaries* but then it was Henry Rollins, Jello Biafra, The Dead Kennedy's and Timothy Leary several times and then Timothy Leary paired up with G. Gordon Liddy.

Debbi: Oh, my gosh.

David: G. Gordon Liddy, the FBI was the one that arrested Timothy Leary and pairing the two of them up, ended up becoming a national tour. Not by me, but by them. It was so popular, I guess at Bogart's, but Bill Stankey was responsible for a lot of this. And then there was Hunter Thompson. I remember reading, *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas* and then I called Bill and I say, do you think I can get Hunter for a show and he just like over the phone goes, "David are you sure you want to do that?" [laughs]

Debbi: [laughs].

David: Yeah why, you know. And it ended up becoming a *Fear and Loathing in Long Beach*. I can say that honestly.

Debbi: What was Hunter Thompson like?

David: He was...I met him at the airport and I rented a red convertible, like the Shark in *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas* and he's unmistakable when he walks out in his aviator glasses and he has that hat.

Debbi: He looks like Johnny Depp [laughs].

David: Depp did a good job.

Debbi: He did a fantastic job.

David: Laila Nabulsi was Hunter's ex-girlfriend and had the rights to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and we were trying to get that film made for two years, and I ended up going into the police academy and she finally got it made with Johnny Depp. But it was her book, but I was just trying to help her because I had done another little movie prior to that. But I mean, when Hunter gets off the plane, it's like first thing he goes is [inaudible]-bar. The only thing I could understand was bar.

Debbi: [laughs].

David: I think he wants a drink. I could not understand a word he was saying. It was like a different, like not language, but just like an incredible accent, but it was an accent fueled by drugs and a lot of alcohol.

Debbi: [laughs].

David: So, I'll cut the story really short because it ends up he had a show at Bogart's (two sold out shows). In the 80s, \$25 a ticket is a lot of money because I was doing punk rock shows and all that for \$5 for four bands and Hunter Thompson sold out two shows, \$25 a ticket.

Debbi: Yeah.

David: Three and a half hours late.

Debbi: Oh, yeah.

David: Because he wanted to go bar hopping and see basketball that was playing; college basketball. But it ended up becoming over the course of a few years, you know, if you just compress that into a time, the amount of time I've known Hunter is just several hours or a full day. But he so influenced my life over the course of that time, you know, and I think that's just because he...and that's how I saw Frank Marr a lot too, because he had this lifestyle and he didn't make excuses for it.

And I don't agree...cocaine is a terrible thing, but that's why I chose cocaine for Frank, because it's not like heroin and crack. It's a substance where you can get off it easier. It still doesn't make it good, but Hunter was just a man that got caught up in this image that became Hunter S. Thompson that I think that he had to live up to that image, you know? And that image was drugs and alcohol, and I often wonder like if he were alive today, you know with all this presidential stuff and would he be writing, you know. Because *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail...*

Debbi: I know.

David: All this stuff. My gosh!

Debbi: We could use some Gonzo right now.

David: Gonzo, yeah. I mean again, he was not like a friend or anything, but he was like...throughout the years he knew me, I knew him because I also wanted to be a writer, and despite all of his failings, you know, with drugs and stuff like that, he was an incredible mind, and an incredible writer and some of the

stuff he said was incredible. It ended up turning into, we got a deal, Bill Stankey and I got a deal with Atlantic Records to do something called *Sound Bites From the Counter Culture* and it was Hunter Thompson, Jello Biafra, Timothy Leary, Eugene McCarthy; all these speakers, Abbie Hoffman, and it had to do a censorship at the time because that's when NWA came out and Tipper Gore was just really anti-NWA and all that, you know and all that rap and all that kind of stuff. So we put out a record with these guys that was just about censorship and then that turned into film. Timothy Leary was in that. Timothy Leary did become a friend.

Debbi: Interesting.

David: [laughs].

Debbi: You could write a whole book about that. It's fascinating stuff.

David: I mean, I'm not ready. I'm not to the point where I'm counting the years in my life, you know, but when I get to the point where I'm counting the months in my life, that could be the 80s I'm hoping or like my dad, the 90s. That's when I think I could write something, you know but I'm afraid to write it because I don't know if I'm good enough to write something like that.

Debbi: Have some faith in yourself. You're really good.

David: As writers, you know I mean it's just like there's a fine line with all the people I've met and the life I've gone through with these people. I don't want to like brag, but these people I've met have had such an influence on my life and it's not like... I would want it to be natural and something cool.

Debbi: Absolutely!

David: And just not, oh I know this person.

Debbi: Oh, absolutely! There's just the experience of it. Just having lived through it would be something that would be fascinating.

David: Well I didn't....okay I went through it, but I didn't live that.

Debbi: No, no, no.

David: Like some of these guys.

Debbi: Living through knowing certain people. It kind of shows people I think something about the affect other people can have on your life.

David: Yeah.

Debbi: And your own writing. I mean I can see glimpses of that Hunter Thompson approach in Frank Marr.

David: Oh gosh, thank you. That's a huge compliment.

Debbi: It is truly there.

David: Grapefruit is a tribute to Hunter.

Debbi: Yeah, yeah.

David: Citrus and grapefruit that...which actually isn't really true because it counters some, you know prescriptions you take and medications you take and actually hurts and doesn't help. But that's a tribute to him. There are several other tributes to Hunter and Tim in it.

Debbi: And there's something about the single mindedness with which he pursues this cocaine. It's like...

David: Yeah.

Debbi: ...and the scattered way he thinks. It's kind of like these short, oh you know, sentences kind of underscore the...

David: And that's what Hunter was like but in some of them, I'm not saying Frank had those moments. Frank did not have those moments of brilliance. But like Hunter when he would speak and it would be two hours on stage and he'd speak, there would be those like little fragments of sentences...

Debbi: Fragments

David: Like one sentence out of every ten that is like, whoa, you know that's incredibly brilliant you know? But yeah, his mind was like that and I don't claim to know...I mean there's people that know him incredibly well. I'm just talking about my short time knowing him. But in that short time, again how that short time seriously influenced me.

Debbi: Yeah, yeah. I mean just reading his work was always inspiring to me.

David: Yeah.

Debbi: But knowing him, that's really cool.

David: Meeting the man is, you know...there's a lot of authors out there right now, several of them dead, you know but that I would die to meet. You know in the afterlife I'd love to meet them. Hunter I was happy to have met him.

Debbi: Yeah. Okay, well I'm going to have to wrap up here. Is there anything you'd like to say before we finish up?

David: No, I mean. If you're going to read anything of mine, if you haven't read anything, start with *The Second Girl*.

Debbi: Absolutely.

David: And then go from there. There's only three books and then, like I said the third one will be out in 2019 and I just really appreciate, Debbi, this. And you didn't mention, but we ended up meeting in person. Was it the first time at C3?

Debbi: It was at C3, yes.

David: Yes, a conference. And your husband, who's an ex-firefighter so there was like that bond.

Debbi: That was cool. That was totally cool listening to you guys.

David: I really appreciate this, yeah, and the support of all this, you know, this crime fiction family which is like, unlike any other writers I think.

Debbi: Well, I agree with you. It's a wonderful family to be a part of and I'm so glad you could be here today.

David: Thank you!

Debbi: Thanks so much. Okay, so having said that I will just add again that I would love it if you would check out the Crime Cafe links on my website.

David: There's still a couple of *Second Girl Books* left to give away.

Debbi: Oh, okay. Well, be sure and e-mail David about that if you're interested.

David: Yeah, and my e-mail is on your, I think it's on your site, isn't it?

Debbi: Yes it is. It's in my original post. I'll send that around again as far as putting up on social media and maybe tweeting it a few times. So, if you're listening please do enter the giveaway. I'll extend the date, whatever date I had on there as the final day for entering. We can say (what day is it now) the 16th. Do you want to make it the 20th?

David: Sure.

Debbi: Okay! I'll have the video up by then.

David: Okay.

Debbi: We can even make it the 23rd if you want to do it after the...

David: The 20th is fine.

Debbi: Okay, the 20th then.

David: Okay.

Debbi: So if you're watching the video, please get that entry into David and also check out the Crime Cafe publications: the short story anthology and boxed set. The links to which are on my website at

debbimack.com. With that, I will just say, thanks for listening. This is the final episode of this season, but we will be back in July, and happy reading until then.