

The Crime Cafe with Saralyn Richard

Presented By:



[00:00:00] **Debbi:** Hi everyone. And welcome to the first episode of Season Six of the Crime Cafe. It's great to be back. And I can't believe I've done this for five years, really. Before I introduce our guest, I'd like to make one little announcement.

[00:00:16] As you may know, the Crime Cafe has a Patreon page. Where patrons help out with micropayments. And you get perks in return. As part of that, I've been sharing pre-publication drafts of my work. So what I'm doing as a result is broadening the Patreon page's scope to expand into my own work as well.

[00:00:39] Most of my books are crime fiction, so it seems to fit. And anyway, the Patreon page has been rebranded as Debbi Mack's Multimedia Experience. And to know why you really have to check it out. I'm writing novels, screenplays, blog posts, reviews, and making short videos. So I'm up to a lot these days, but the podcast is still called the Crime Cafe and will continue to be called that.

[00:01:05] That hasn't changed. The focus here as always is on the absolute awesome variety of authors who write crime, suspense, and thriller stories: page turners and puzzles, if you will. So our guest for today is an award-winning author of mystery and kidlit—I gotta ask about that—who hopes change the world one book at the time. Now that is a mission statement I love. Her latest novel in the Detectives Parrott mystery series is called *A Palette for Love and Murder*. Her other books include *Murder in the One Percent* and *Naughty Nana*. She also teaches creative writing and literature at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Our guest today is Saralyn Richard. Hi, Saralyn. It's great to have you on today.

[00:01:56] **Saralyn:** Thank you so much, Debbi. It's wonderful to be here.

[00:01:59] **Debbi:** Well, I'm so glad you are here. And I just think it's intriguing that you write mysteries and kidlit. Tell us about the kidlit. What is it? Is it a type of children's book and what made you interested in it?

[00:02:13] **Saralyn:** Well kidlit is children's books. This is my first book, *Naughty Nana*. And it's a little bit of a mystery, too. There's a mystery that goes on inside of this picture book. And I actually have the dog, Nana. You just met her a little bit before we started this podcast. And she really was naughty.

[00:02:41] So I was making a list of all the nasty things she was doing, and I decided to turn that into a book. And that was actually the first book that I published. That's really, that's what kidlit is.

[00:02:56] **Debbi:** That is so interesting because I've written a young adult novel that's good for middle graders. And it also has a mystery element to it, though it is not what I would call strictly speaking a genre mystery. So I think mystery and suspense tend to work their way into other types of fiction as well. I think that's really interesting. What drew you toward writing mysteries in particular?

[00:03:23] **Saralyn:** I'm a very eclectic reader. But if given my choice, I'll choose a mystery over anything else.

[00:03:33] I think because I love the intellectual and emotional puzzle that a mystery presents, I think in no other genre are authors and readers so tightly connected, because the author of a mystery has to have the reader in mind throughout the writing process, because you're laying this plan, you know, with the clues and the red herrings and the, the emotional plan, also the tension and the suspense.

[00:04:09] And so there's a constant connection going on between the current writer and the future reader. And to me, that's very exciting. That's really why we write is so that we can connect to readers.

[00:04:28] **Debbi:** Absolutely. That is a really great explanation. I love it. And it also demonstrates how good mystery writers can be as marketers, because if you can do that in a book, you should be able to do that online. Create that sense of anticipation that comes out of what you write. If you write something that intrigues people enough, they should be drawn to what you're writing. Wouldn't you think?

[00:04:57] **Saralyn:** I never thought about it that way, but yes,

[00:05:03] **Debbi:** That remark just made me think that, um, that's good. Let's see. How would you describe your writing style to someone who has not read any of your books? Who would you compare yourself to say?

[00:05:14] **Saralyn:** Well, I think I've been influenced a lot by John Irving, who's not a mystery writer, but who has really quirky characters and is a really ambitious writer.

[00:05:41] He's quite literary. And I wouldn't say that I've borrowed the literary style from him, but I have kind of a quirky sense of humor about my characters. And so my mysteries are a [00:06:00] little touch of romance and a little touch of humor and a bit of setting, you know, I'm big on setting. Try it. You'll like it, I think.

[00:06:16] I like to surprise my readers. If you're looking for a surprise, I think that you'll find it in my books. And I like to write character-driven mysteries. I think I get that a little bit from Michael Connelly because his Harry Bosch detective is so human and, and so deep. He's complex. He's not just a detective.

[00:06:46] He's a human being first. And my detective, Oliver Parrott, is the same way.

[00:06:55] **Debbi:** I like that. Yeah. I think character writing character-driven stories is really. It's a skill that people need to develop in order to be good writers. I mean, plot is important, but character adds something to the story that nobody else can add. Your take on people and how they interact with each other is so important in terms of telling stories and relating that, making it relatable for other people? You know?

[00:07:29] **Saralyn:** I led a class on that last night. It was a class for other authors on writing memorable characters. I think one of the reasons that characters are so important is that a plot is a plot. And in some ways there's nothing new about any plot. But characters are as diverse and different and unique and special as real life humans.

[00:08:03] So when you meet a character in a book that you, that resonates with you, it's like meeting a new friend or meeting a new person who's different and adds something to your life. So I think that characterization is probably the most important skill of a writer.

[00:08:26] **Debbi:** That's a great observation. I have been reading *Murder in the One Percent* and I get the distinct sense that there's a bit of satire in there. Would I be wrong about that?

[00:08:38] **Saralyn:** There is. I have been asked before if certain characters are certain people who are in our government today. They're patterned after that.

[00:08:55] And, and the answer to that is they weren't when I wrote the book. I, you know, the book is purely fiction and I had no intention of doing that, but I also believe that once a book is published, it no longer belongs to the author. I think it belongs to the reader. So if a reader sees something in a book like satire, then that's valid for that reader. And so, yes, it's a satire for you, then it is for me too, but, um, I really had no intention of going after anybody in our government.

[00:09:43] **Debbi:** I got you. No problem. I mean, if you take a little poke at the one percent, that's somewhat of a satire. You're not ... nobody in particular, you know.

[00:09:55] **Saralyn:** I'm often asked if I am in the one percent.

[00:09:59] **Debbi:** Oh, but you're not.

[00:10:00] **Saralyn:** I mean, how could I write, how could I write with such detail and specificity, if I'm in the one percent, but no, I'm not in the one percent. I had to do some research too, to just ascertain exactly what is. The top one percent and you'd be surprised like worldwide, all you need is your whole net worth of \$89,000.

[00:10:29] And you're in the top one percent worldwide, but that is, that's a figure that is more indicative of poverty levels in the world than it is of richness. But to be a one percenter in America, you have to have a net worth of \$10 million.

[00:10:53] **Debbi:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm nowhere near that. Not even in the neighborhood, not even in the neighborhood next door. Um, let's see. Let's see, you've created, you created an opening scene in that book that introduced a whole lot of characters in a group setting. And I'm always impressed when a writer can manage to distinguish large numbers of characters from one another in scenes like that.

[00:11:24] Is there a process that you go through to make sure that they don't all sound alike or do you develop a bio for each one? What's your process on that?

[00:11:35] **Saralyn:** When I first started the book, my first draft of the book, they really were a lot alike. They're couples who are attending a party in a very lush landscape, which is Brandywine Valley, Pennsylvania.

[00:11:55] And they were a lot alike. And then I went back as I revised the book and tried to give them distinguishing characteristics. I had a plan for how they all looked, how they all talked, and how they connected to the murder victim, and how they connected to each other, what their backstories were.

[00:12:25] I had that all set forth, but the actual tools of an author to make a character stick out. You have to put in certain ticks of characters. That this character flips her hair behind her shoulder, so that, you know, when you see that character again, that's who that is. And you don't want your readers to be getting your characters mixed up.

[00:12:56] **Debbi:** That's a great tip for screenwriting as well. Visual clues are often part of screenwriting, but the idea of individual character characteristics is real important in writing, I think. You're also doing a giveaway of both a recipe book and a copy of your latest. This that correct?

[00:13:17] **Saralyn:** That's correct.

[00:13:19] **Debbi:** Awesome. So what made you decide to focus on food? Are you a cook? A chef?

[00:13:28] **Saralyn:** Well, I do like to cook, but I actually went to a party in Brandywine Valley that's similar to the party in the book. And as I was sitting around after this sumptuous nine-course meal, I talked to the person next to me. And I said, this would be a great setting for a murder mystery.

[00:13:49] And she looked at me like I was out of my mind and I said, but for that to happen, one of us would have to die and one of us would have to be a killer. So that thought, that idea stuck in my head for a number of years before I actually sat down to write it. And when I did sit down to write it, that meal also surfaced in my head because it was such a spectacular meal, really, a memorable, unforgettable, over-the-top gourmet meal with wine pairings for every course. And it was like a four-hour meal.

[00:14:36] **Debbi:** Goodness.

[00:14:37] **Saralyn:** And so I had that in my mind as I started the book, and it became kind of a keystone part of, one of the early chapters of the book. So I have the menu, and I actually did a blog post about that menu. And I researched how much the wines would have cost for that party.

[00:15:05] And for 13 people, which is how many were sitting around the table, for these wines, it was \$28,780. Just for the wine. So, it's a pretty spectacular menu, and I put the menu together with the recipes, for those courses into a PDF of a cookbook. And that's what I'm giving away to anybody who will sign up for my email list and other special offers come with that.

[00:15:43] **Debbi:** That's awesome. That's really cool. Did you deliberately pick 13? I guess, just out of curiosity, since the number 13 has a certain amount of baggage associated with it.

[00:15:55] **Saralyn:** Well, that party also is on Friday the 13th.

[00:16:00] **Debbi:** Yes. That was the birthday.

[00:16:00] **Saralyn:** And actually that sort of happened organically.

[00:16:05] **Debbi:** Huh?

[00:16:09] **Saralyn:** It surprised me too. That's perfect. Isn't it?

[00:16:11] **Debbi:** Don't you love when that happens too, when things just happen and it's like, Oh, I didn't even mean to do that. And look what, look what I did.

[00:16:19] **Saralyn:** Right.

[00:16:20] **Debbi:** Tell us a little about Detective Parrott as a person. What kind of a detective is he? Is he like Sherlock Holmes or is he more like Phillip Marlowe or what?

[00:16:31] **Saralyn:** He's more modern, of course. He's African American. He's young. He's 26 years old. He's a former football hero. He went to college on a football scholarship at Syracuse, and his father died when he was young. So he has a very close relationship with his mother. His fiancée is a Navy seal in Afghanistan.

[00:17:05] When the book begins at *Murder the One Percent*, he is struggling with a couple of things. One is he chose criminal justice as a career because he has a very strong moral compass and he wants to make a difference in the world. He wants to right wrongs and make life safer for others. And so he chose this career path, but with all the things that have been going on with police brutality and police killings and racial incidents, and he's African-American, he's right in the midst of this. This becomes a demon of his.

[00:18:01] And his cousin, his first cousin, Bo, who he was very close to is killed by random gunfire by a police officer. And so he's really struggling with, did I make the right career choice? What am I doing here? And what kind of world is this that my innocent cousin could be so easily just picked off.

[00:18:28] So that's something that's going on in the background as he solves this case. And he's not a one percenter, or of course. He's really an outsider in this community. And that in a way, gives him an edge because he can see things that other people just take for granted. But he is so different from the people that he's investigating, and they close ranks on him and try to foil his solving the murder.

[00:19:09] And he just won't back down. He's ambitious and he's tenacious and he just won't back down. So he's, you know, the reader has a rooting interest for Parrott.

[00:19:24] **Debbi:** Well, I already love the guy. Now, I want to read all your books. He sounds fantastic. And you couldn't pick a more timely topic and character, protagonist.

[00:19:38] **Saralyn:** Well, right now, he's whispering in my ear. He wants me to write about what's going on today, but actually I started writing *Murder in the One Percent* in 2014, I think.

[00:19:54] **Debbi:** Wow. And is that what you're working on next? Another book for him?

[00:19:58] **Saralyn:** No, I'm working on a standalone mystery. I have a standalone that's coming out in January and I have another one that I'm about 50% finished with.

[00:20:10] And then I'll write the next Parrott book. Parrott is sitting right here on my shoulder. And he keeps, he keeps saying, finish that book already. Cause I have things to say.

[00:20:24] **Debbi:** I know that feeling. I kind of know that feeling. Let's see. Since you teach creative writing, what advice would you give to someone who'd like to have a career in fiction writing or even nonfiction, creative nonfiction. Any advice for aspiring authors?

[00:20:43] **Saralyn:** Yes, do it. Just do it, do it. If you have the slightest inclination or the slightest curiosity about your own ability to do it, or if you have a story that you want to tell, do it, just, just jump in and try it. It might not be perfect the first time. You might not. Um, you might not absolutely love every part of the experience.

[00:21:16] It's something that I think everybody should do if they want to, you know, if they have, don't be discouraged by other people, don't let other people stop you from doing this. If you have a

passion to write, go for it. And I also think it's important to take classes. I'm not trying to, to build up my class list.

[00:21:44] **Debbi:** You're right though.

[00:21:45] **Saralyn:** But I think it's, it's good to immerse yourself in a milieu of writers, because you get great ideas. It's like a firing of neurons. You know, the room is just energized by other people's ideas. And I have people who come into my class, uh, the classes are for seniors, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

[00:22:14] So you have to be 55 or older to sign up for my classes. And so I'll have people who come in and say, I don't even know if I can do this. It's just something I always thought I might want to try. And they come in and they become writers. And they're really good writers because they have a wealth of experience to draw from.

[00:22:38] They know a lot of people, those people turn into characters. They have a lot of wisdom and I used to teach creative writing to students in high school. And there's a big difference. I enjoyed that too. But the high school kids would say to me, I don't know what to write about. I just don't have any stories, nothing exciting has ever happened to me or, you know, I don't have that wellspring of wisdom.

[00:23:08] So, yeah. I just think it's good to push yourself. It's good to try something different and something new and don't let any little thing discourage you. It's all fun. The one thing I put into every assignment for my students is you must have fun doing it. If it's a drag to write it, then it's going to be a drag to read it.

[00:23:37] So make yourself have fun with it. Enjoy the process, because it really is a fun process to express yourself in words is fun.

[00:23:50] **Debbi:** Absolutely. This is fantastic stuff. Thank you. Thank you. This is wonderful. Um, where can readers find you online?

[00:23:59] **Saralyn:** Well, I have a website at saralynrichard.com. My name is spelled unusually.

[00:24:10] You can also find me at murderintheonepercent.com. That's easier to spell. So that's my website and you can contact me there or I'm on social media. I'm on all of them. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest. You know, I'm on all of them. So I'm looking forward to connecting with a lot of your listeners.

[00:24:39] **Debbi:** Fantastic. Well, I'm looking forward to reading more of your fiction and I can't wait to finish *Murder in the One Percent* so I can go onto the next one. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

[00:24:53] **Saralyn:** Are we wrapping up?

[00:24:56] **Debbi:** It only takes 20 minutes or so.

[00:24:59] **Saralyn:** It's gone by so fast. It's really fun talking to you, Debbi.

[00:25:03] **Debbi:** Thank you so much. I have a blast doing these. I mean, like you say, it's good to talk with other writers and just bounce ideas and so forth off each other. And, to me, it's all about the

conversation, you know, kind of getting to know you and hopefully everybody else is getting to know you, too. I think what you've had to say was absolutely wonderful in terms of encouraging writers and everything, which you were saying about your main character. All of it is really interesting. Thank you.

[00:25:32] **Saralyn:** Thank you so much. Well, here are my books. This *A Palette for Love and Murder*. That's the sequel, and this is *Murder in the One Percent*, the original. The same person did these covers that did the Naughty Nana cover. So you can see some similarities, I think.

[00:25:55] **Debbi:** Yeah. Very nice.

[00:25:57] **Saralyn:** So, you can find out more about them. I have my tour schedule, which is fairly limited by this pandemic, but I do have a tour schedule and media and reviews on the website. And then my email address on that website is saralyn[at]saralynrichard[dot]com. So if your viewers will email me and join my email list, I'll send them the Epicurean Feast booklet, and I'll also enter them in a giveaway for this book, *A Palette for Love and Murder*.

[00:26:37] **Debbi:** Fantastic. Well, that's great. Thank you so much again for being here. Saralyn.

[00:26:43] **Saralyn:** Oh, and thank you so much for having me.

[00:26:46] **Debbi:** It was my pleasure, believe me. And, so with that, I will just say to everyone else, to all of you watching or listening, I'll just add that I recently released my new novella *Damaged Goods*, which is about a female Marine who comes back from Afghanistan and is working as a, um, unlicensed private eye. She has an opioid addiction and some PTSD problems that are keeping her sort of sidelined from getting a license at this point, but she's working on it.

[00:27:18] She's working on her issues and I'm also, I'm hustling to get that into print. So hopefully it'll be out in print soon and do check out the Patreon page. Just to go to a debbimack.com and click on Crime Cafe, and you'll see it there. You'll also find the links to books and other things. So in any case, thank you for listening or watching.

[00:27:43] We'll be back in two weeks with my next guest, Mark Bacon. And in the meantime, take care and happy reading.