

The Crime Cafe with Laurie Buchanan

Presented By:



Debbi (00:12): Hi everyone. My guest today is the author of two self-help books and the first in a new series of crime novels. Her debut novel *Indelible* introduces Sean McPherson, an ex-cop turned handyman at a writer's retreat where the story takes place. Her next book in the series *Iconoclast* is scheduled for release in May of 2022. Twenty twenty-two. She enjoys yoga, bicycling, camping, and travel. She also likes long walks, including apparently a 211-mile hike across Scotland. Well, I'm ready to go if she is, back. Scotland's cool. It's my pleasure to introduce today's guest Laurie Buchanan. Hi Laurie. Thanks for being here.

Laurie (01:50): Thanks for having me.

Debbi (01:52): Sure thing. It's a pleasure. What inspired you to start writing crime fiction? After two self-help books?

Laurie (02:08): I had been to, I won't name it, but I had been to a very large conference, writing conference in the Midwest. And I teach and sometimes I'm in the audience and do both sometimes at a conference, and I was teaching at a conference, but in this case I was in the audience listening to another speaker. And you know, when people go to a writing conference, they pay good money and they assume that what they're being told is accurate. And a speaker got up, a female, a well-known female writer, and she said, and she looked everybody in the face. And she said, "I hope you enjoy the genre that you're writing in because you are stuck in it. You can only write in one genre." And I thought, you know, I wanted to just stand up and say, "No, no, no, no, that's not true." So my, my way of saying that's not true is to, I stepped out of my comfort zone nonfiction and I started writing fiction and I absolutely love it.

Debbi (03:04): It is wonderful, isn't it to use your imagination that way? Let's see. I take it that being at this writer's conference might've been part of the inspiration for setting your book in a your retreat?

Laurie (03:20): Actually, no, I was writing my first book. I got an idea writing my first book, even though, even though my idea was for fiction, I was writing my first book and I was at a retreat on Whidbey Island and I, it was a retreat for all women writers and across the way I happened to see with my very own eyes, an extraordinarily handsome man who was the groundskeeper and he was limping. And that planted a seed, it just planted a seed and that seed took hold and grew roots, and many years later, came out in the form of a book.

Debbi (04:06): That's fascinating. It just goes to show how much of our life experiences can inspire a story.

Laurie (04:12): Absolutely. And you know, I'm sure that you do this too. I think whether a person's a writer or not, all of us are, I think, people watchers and you never know what that thing is that's going to trigger this whole domino effect.

Debbi (04:29): So true. How would you describe your writing as a genre? Crime fiction, mystery, thriller, suspense?

Laurie (04:41): Yes. Yes, It's actually, crime fiction, it falls under that umbrella. And then within there, thriller, suspense, mystery. Actually, a lot of people call it mystery. It's even out there on Amazon as one of the little things, but you know, a mystery, a true mystery is where the reader doesn't know who done it till the end. In a suspense thriller, which mine is, you know, right off

the bat. Jason's the bad guy. There's no, there's no qualms about that. Right at the beginning, in the prologue, which I think you've put on your website, you know, right from the beginning. And what makes it suspense is that the reader knows what's going on, the people in the book don't. And so they're saying, run, run, don't open the door, don't whatever it is, you know? And so that's what makes it suspenseful because the reader knows exactly who it is but the characters don't.

Debbi ([05:38](#)): Exactly right. That's why I always like to ask about these things, because really it struck me as very much suspense, definitely with kind of the thriller edge to it. I sense that it will get even more so as the book goes on. Let's see. Even though your main character is ostensibly Sean McPherson, it's funny how he goes by the name Mick, because of McPherson. It's almost as if he's trying to minimize his presence by sort of stepping away from being Sean.

Laurie ([06:13](#)): He ... yes.

Debbi ([06:14](#)): And then you had this ensemble, which I thought was really amazing, you know, kind of this ensemble around a writing retreat. What inspired you to structure the novel, that particular way, putting each person in?

Laurie ([06:31](#)): Because I write, I get the opportunity to meet a lot of writers and, and writers like anybody else have wonderful personalities and we all have these different things that shine, and we all have these different things that maybe are quirky. And so I started thinking about the different elements. If I'm going to write a series, I have to have different people each time. Otherwise it's going to be very, very boring and I can't have, you know, just a cookie cutter A with different people, cookie cutter B with different people, cookie cutter C. You can't do that and be as successful in a series. So I had to think about how. I had to think in advance, because I knew I wanted to do a series. How can I do this and do this extraordinarily well? So I have, the retreat starts on the first day of each month.

Laurie ([07:21](#)): The first book starts in May and it goes for three weeks, 21 days, and then they leave and then a week off so they can clean everything up. They go visit their mom and dad in San Francisco come back. And then they're ready for the next month's writers and residents. Another group of four. Typically four. Something happens in *Impervious*. So each person has to be kind of interesting, you know, interesting in their own little substory what's going on in their life. They're each writing a book or trying to get a book written. And it just took off from there. I love, I love ... I've got in the first one, I've got Jason, the bad guy. I have Cynthia, a forensic intuitive. I've got Fran who is a person writing about her experience of not being able to have a child and her husband divorcing her for that. And then I've got Emma who's in a wheelchair. And every time there's a group of four that come to Pines and Quill, which is a fictitious writing retreat in a very real location. Fairhaven is the historic district of Bellingham, Washington. But Austen Cottage, there's four cottages. There's Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Thoreau. Austen Cottage is designed specifically for wheelchair access. And it's very roomy. It's gorgeous. Anyway, Emma rolls with her wheelchair at the, when, when Nick is picking them up at the airport, rolls toward him in her wheelchair and rolls right into his heart.

Debbi ([08:58](#)): Interesting. So there's a touch of romance in there and your self-help books. What inspired you to start off writing those? And how did you handle switching from nonfiction to fiction?

Laurie (09:16): Well, when I, after I hung up my shingle, I hung up my shingle of being an HHP, a holistic health practitioner. My PhD is in energy medicine. And, while I was in practice, had a brick and mortar practice called Holessence. Two words put together--holistic essence, Holessence. I created a program and any time anybody went through the program, they said, this should be a book. This should be a book. This should be a book. And so it became a book. That's my first book *Note to Self: A Seven-Step Path to Gratitude and Growth*. And then people said, well, my gosh, you know, you seem to be a subject matter expert in business. And a lot of the people that came to me, cause I wasn't just an HHP. I was a coach, too. And they, they wanted to be coached about business, about having their own business, leaving the corporate world, or what have you. And hence came *The Business of Being: Soul Purpose In and Out of the Workplace*. And then I went to that conference. Somebody said something, and I thought, you know what? Oh, heck no. And so that was the birth of *Indelible*.

Debbi (10:30): Did you find it was, that you had to adjust your writing style to go from nonfiction to fiction?

Laurie (10:39): Yeah. Yes. So fiction in my experiences, and I'm sure different for every single person, fiction is easy because it's based on fact. Facts exist and you're pulling facts in making them relatable and fun and all of that, creative, not just dry, you don't want curriculum, but the facts already exist. And I would write in spurts. I could write in like, you know, a 15, I've got 15 minutes. Oh my gosh. You know, that's not true for fiction. I'm either all in or not in, at all, give me the day to write. Or forget it. It's not a writing day. If you go down a rabbit hole and you stay there, you just you're, you're there and you have to make everything up. You're, you're just literally, you're acting as God. And you're creating this little environment and you've got good people and bad people and good things happen and awful things happen. And at least with my stories. And it's harder, but it's actually in my experience funner, it's juicier.

Debbi (11:47): Yeah, absolutely. What are your plans for this series? Where do you to take it?

Laurie (11:54): Well, I'm not going to give too much away, but--

Debbi (11:58): Do you have a certain number of books in mind?

Laurie (12:01): You know, if I could pull off a Louise Penny Inspector Gamache. She's I think on Book 16. If I could pull that off, well, I will. If I can pull that off extraordinarily well. She's the most phenomenal story. I don't know if you read Inspector, Chief Inspector Gamache or not, but she's a phenomenal storyteller. She's right up there with, completely different type of storytelling, but may have been, she is one of my, she's no longer living one of my all-time favorite writers and just like Dorothea Benton Frank. She's no longer living. Olivia Goldsmith. She's no longer living, but my living ... Hank Phillippi Ryan she's, even though her name is Hank, Hank Phillippi Ryan.

Debbi (12:45): I know her.

Laurie (12:48): Okay. David Baldacci. These are some of my favorites still living. So the storytelling is important to me, and my stories are driven by the characters. And as long as I can do it extraordinarily, well, I will keep doing it. As long as there's a demand, I will supply.

Debbi (13:09): Cool. Very cool. Let's see, are you more of a plotter or pantser?

Laurie ([13:16](#)): Total pantsner. You wouldn't think so, I mean, I'm a person who dots my I's, crosses my T's. I am "a place for everything, everything in its place." You would not think that I'm a pantsner. You would never think that I am. I mean, I just fly the seat of my pants. When I go to bed at night, I've got like, you know, I've erased my chalkboard, and I'm just waiting for it to be written on. I get up very early. I get up about four o'clock each morning. And then I come in and do a dump, a data dump, whatever's on that chalkboard. And I do a dump, but I don't know when I go to bed, what it's going to be. I have no idea. And I just finished writing chapter eight for Book Three yesterday. I finished writing it and today I've been kind of hacking at it. And it, what happened in the night was not what I thought was going to happen. So I'm just as surprised as anybody else, because I have no idea until they tell me what's going on. And when I say they, I mean the characters.

Debbi ([14:16](#)): Wow. I'm really, I really admire people who take that approach, because I'm more of a plotter, but I've let go a little bit as time has gone by, you know, it's like at some point you just have to say, just get in there and do it, you know, write your way through it or whatever.

Laurie ([14:35](#)): Yes.

Debbi ([14:36](#)): Let's see. There was something I was going to say. With the writing retreat setting, you can have different characters come in with each book and Mick or Sean ends up being kind of the common thread.

Laurie ([14:53](#)): Absolutely. And--

Debbi ([14:56](#)): I love that, actually.

Laurie ([14:56](#)): It is, I am having so much fun and bringing the characters in. And of course, each character needs to have their foibles, their, their wounds, and each character has to have their strengths. And it is, and sometimes depending on the book, they band together and sometimes they're like, no, that one is the bad one and they kind of ostracize. So it's interesting. It's fun for me to decide who is going to be in the Austen Cottage, which is handicap-accessible, handicapped-friendly, wheelchair-friendly, and what's their backstory. And when I do, when I do a backstory, for myself, you know, I've got this notebook here that tells me how tall is the person? What color are their eyes? What color is their hair? What is their spiritual tradition? What's their Zodiac sign? What's their favorite color? What's their favorite food? Where are they from? I mean, I know everything about this person. I could, I could be them in an interview, and so I get to create them and then I have to stick with it. And so if I, because I have so many people, if I can't remember "Were her eyes green? Were her eyes blue?" I just go to my character Bible and I go, oh, that's right. Okay. And then I move on. I know what length hair, what color hair. I know everything because I created them.

Debbi ([16:24](#)): That's awesome. That's awesome that you do that with a notebook for the Bible. You'd make a good television writer. Who are your very favorite authors, the ones you look to for inspiration? I think you mentioned a few, but go ahead.

Laurie ([16:39](#)): So let me go way back in time. So I am a voracious reader. I read just under, usually about 75 books a year. Just, I mean, I just, I read a lot. I eat books for breakfast and always have. My mother was a voracious reader and she instilled the love of reading into us. There's my sister and I, my sister, Julie and myself, and we both enjoy reading very much. And so

growing up, I loved *Harriet the Spy*, *Black and Blue Magic*, *Time at the Top*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, those types of books. And then as my son was growing up, you know, he got the love of reading. And so I've got childhood favorites and I've got favorites now, like I said, David Baldacci. I'm not gonna miss a book of his. Hank Phillippi Ryan. I'm not going to miss a book of hers. Robert Dugoni, Robert Bryndza, Keith Houghton, H-O-U-G-H-T-O-N. Keith and Robert Bryndza are in Europe. They live in Europe. They are phenomenal. Scare the bejeebers out of you. White knuckle, hair-raising writers. Not horror, but exquisite suspense, thriller writers.

Debbi ([18:01](#)): Yes. How much time do you spend on research before you write?

Laurie ([18:06](#)): I research as I write. I don't research in advance. I research as I write. So if I need to know about a gun, I'm going to grab something really quick. I think you would love this. Hold on one second. One of the things that I keep at my fingertips is this phenomenal book it's called *Forensic Speak*, and it's how to write realistic crime dramas. And it is, if you need to know blood spray, blood spatter, you know, stab wounds, bullet wounds, garrote marks. What happens? How does it happen? How does blood congeal, what does it look like? This is phenomenal. I just, I keep it handy. And so that's one great way of research. And then there's, there are other things that I will do. I'll ask my husband, he's a pilot. If I've got something going on that ... he also happens to know a lot about handguns. I don't know why, but he knows about these things. He knows about bullets. And is it a casing or is it a shell? What makes the difference between the two? I can ask him.

Debbi ([19:17](#)): I love that forensic book, by the way. And for those of you who are listening to the podcast, you can't see it. The cover is designed to look like crime scene tape across that says forensic science or something?

Laurie ([19:30](#)): Yes. It's called *Forensic Speak* and it's just.

Debbi ([19:33](#)): *Forensic Speak*, written in yellow sort of crime tape over the cover. I don't know if I'm describing that well, but ...

Laurie ([19:44](#)): And just so the listeners can know, the author's name is Jennifer Dornbush. D-O-R-N-B-U-S-H.

Debbi ([19:55](#)): Very cool, thanks. How about writing versus marketing? How much time do you spend on writing versus marketing?

Laurie ([20:01](#)): I mentioned I get up at four and also in a day, I walk six miles. So I do two before I start writing, two in the middle of it, and two at the end of it, two, two and two. And so when I get up in the morning, I have a large following on Twitter, on Facebook, on Instagram and on LinkedIn. And I am the kind of person who am not going to farm that out to somebody else to take care of. So when I respond and I respond to every single person, I respond personally. So I do everything. So in the day, in the morning, I respond to everybody, get it all taken care of. And I create three memes for the next day. And then three memes for the next day. So this morning, when I sat down, I had three to go.

Laurie ([20:58](#)): One goes out at midnight, one goes out at 7:00 AM and one goes out at two and then they get hit. And then I respond. So I get up pretty early to create these things. They're not schlocky-looking. They always come with a photograph. One of my own, it's written. 97.9% of

the photographs I use. It's rare that I have to pull one from Canva or BookBrush or something like that. A huge portion of the photographs I use are my own. And if you were to look at Instagram, you would see that everything has a white frame around it. So it's my signature. It's crisp and clear. And I'm very proud of taking care of social media, myself, and responding personally to each person. And then my website gets hit with people, they know my background. So a lot of people still ask questions about my holistic health practice or coaching, which I say, I'm sorry. I'm retired, thank you for asking. And I'll point people in other directions. But most of it's for, you know, thank you for your book. Your book helped me this way, whatever it might be. But I take care of that in the morning. And that takes three hours.

Debbi ([22:15](#)): Yeah. I do tend to be personally respond to everything. I don't even like those auto responses on Google mail. I never use them. It's like, no, don't tell me what to say. I want to say what I want to say. And I noticed that you've listed photographer as one of your passions. So I thought that was pretty cool. And since you like travel, have you ever considered becoming a travel writer?

Laurie ([22:46](#)): No, I haven't. I haven't. I love to travel. I haven't traveled for a year. I missed it. I travel now in my books. I'm an armchair traveler right now during COVID. I love to travel. I love to travel with my sister. She and I will, you know, meet up places or I'll go down to her home. She lives on the West Coast as do I. I won't give away her location, but she opens her home to me. It's like a writer's nest. And I can just go there and write for two, three weeks in my pajamas. I don't have to brush my teeth, comb my hair, get out of anything. And she doesn't judge me, which is really nice, but we haven't been able to do that for a year. The last time I was with her, I was with her last year from February 1st through 19th. That's how generous she is with her opening her home to me.

Debbi ([23:41](#)): Wow. That's cool. My sister lives in the Northwest, in Portland. Yeah. And, so, we used to frequently go out there and visit. I mean, now of course, we're just here. And it's just, well, it's just a beautiful part of the country though.

Laurie ([24:01](#)): It is. It's gorgeous. When you start talking about Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana. Oh, my gosh. And of course, every part of the country has its own beauty. This is just green, just green, green, greener than green. It's amazing. And the people up here are very earthy. Very friendly. It's clean. We are clean here in Boise where I live. You don't, there's not trash around. It's just, it's a clean, we're very proud of how clean we are.

Debbi ([24:41](#)): That's funny. You should mention that because when my husband and I went out there to see a baseball game in Seattle, we were walking around Seattle and he was looking down. He's a DC, retired DC firefighter. He's walking around and looking in the alleys. He said, "I don't even see a candy wrapper. This place is so clean."

Laurie ([25:04](#)): Right?

Debbi ([25:06](#)): He was just struck by how clean an urban alley could be.

Laurie ([25:12](#)): Exactly.

Debbi ([25:14](#)): It's very interesting. You are working on third one at this point.

Laurie (25:19): Right now, I'm right in *Impervious*, just finished chapter eight. The next one is *Iniquity*. *Impervious* comes out. So I've got one, Book One in 2021, Book Two, 2022, Book Three, 2023 and Book Four. That's where I'm signed through right now at SparkPress, *Iniquity*, 2024. But like I said, if I can do it extraordinarily well, I will continue to do it. As long as there's a demand, I'm going to supply.

Debbi (25:51): And it looks like you're doing the opposite of Sue Grafton. Instead of doing the whole alphabet, you're taking one letter and making the most of it with each title.

Laurie (26:01): Exactly. I'm doing an I-word, just one word, that's an I-word with four syllables. And if you look up words that fall into that category, the majority of them are start with "In". And I didn't want to be locked into that. So again, the first one is *Indelible*. Then *Iconoclast*, then *Impervious*. And then I'm going to go back to "n" in *Iniquity*. Someone just suggested to me, my friend and writer, author Ashley Sweeney, she said, "Irascible, Laurie. Irascible. You've got to use irascible." And so that might come into play, but yeah, single letter I-word with four syllables, that's going to be my signature.

Debbi (26:47): And then there's invincible.

Laurie (26:49): There you go. And invisible.

Debbi (26:53): Invisible. Ooh. This gets more and more interesting. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Laurie (27:01): Just if a person is a foodie, they would also like these books. There's some delicious food. My husband is the inspiration. He's the model for Neil in the, in the book. He is a phenomenal cook and he also knows a lot about wine. So I'll ask him for, pair me something, I need a breakfast, I need a lunch. I need a dinner. I need a picnic. I, you know, I need a snack and he does it. And he's phenomenal.

Debbi (27:29): Cool. And inspiration is another one.

Laurie (27:36): There you go!

Debbi (27:36): Well, I just want to thank you for being here, Laurie. This was great. It was fun talking to you.

Laurie (27:41): You too. Thank you so much for inviting me. I appreciate it.

Debbi (27:45): It's my pleasure. Believe me. Thank you. And, to everyone who's listening, just so you know, the Crime Cafe is Patreon supported. And as a patron, you get early access to ad-free versions of the podcast. Along with social media shout-outs, and more. Each episode is transcribed, or at least many of them, most, a lot of them at this point. I hope to transcribe all of them eventually and create a series of books based on some of the points that I'm taking away from these interviews, because they are full of great information for writers and readers. I've also been sharing early drafts of my next Erica Jensen novel on Patreon for supporters at \$10 and above level. So I'm currently distilling the episodes down, as well. So I have things to do. I gotta tell you, I'm keeping busy. The pandemic is not slowing me down. In any case, my thanks again to

Laurie and thanks to all of you for listening and watching. And in two weeks, I'll be interviewing Daniella Burnett. In the meantime, take care and happy reading.