

# The Crime Cafe with Laurie Buchanan

Presented By:



**Debbi:** Hi everyone. My guest today is the author of the Sean McPherson series, and while Sue Grafton had her alphabet series, this author has picked one letter and stuck with it—the letter I. All the books in the series have one-word titles that start with I, which I think is really kind of cool. The latest one released is [Impervious](#), and the next one will be called [Iniquity](#). It's my pleasure to have with me today Laurie Buchanan. Hi, Laurie. How are you doing today?

**Laurie:** Hi, Debbi. I'm fine. Thank you for having me. I'm looking forward to talking with you.

**Debbi:** Awesome. Well, I'm glad to have you here. The last time you were here, your first book was out, right? [Indelible](#)?

**Laurie:** Yes. Yes.

**Debbi:** And that established the story of Sean McPherson, who works at this kind of place where writers' retreats are held.

**Laurie:** Exactly. Pines & Quill is a writing retreat in the Pacific Northwest, and now by [Iniquity](#), which comes out this April—it's a premier now. It has had so many people, and now there's this huge waiting list and you need to be background checked and so on and so forth, because some murders have taken place there. Some from without and some from within. So they're being more than cautious. And the neighbors can see when first responders come, oh, what's going on there? There's paramedics, there's police, there's whatever it is. And then the news crews come over. So we've gotten now pretty far into the story, so Book Four *Iniquity* comes out in April, and Book Five is with the publisher. I just finished writing Book Six. It went to the beta readers, and I'm now starting *Insidious*, Book Seven.

**Debbi:** Oh my goodness.

**Laurie:** Yes. I'm on a nine-book contract right now. It went from one to three to five to seven to nine, and I suspect it will grow.

**Debbi:** Good heavens, nine books! Well, this is very interesting, because you have anticipated a few of my questions already. Well, we can talk about

that, though. Boy. Nine books! How has the story of Sean McPherson developed over time so far?

**Laurie:** So we've gotten now where there's three very close friends—a private investigator, Sean McPherson, one of his two best friends, homicide Detective Joe Bingham, and then his other best friend, Sean Rafferty. Because there are two Seans, they go by their last name. Sean McPherson goes by Mick, Sean Rafferty goes by Rafferty, and he's an FBI special agent, and the three of them work together very well. Two of them, the homicide detective and the FBI special agent, have constraints, bureaucratic constraints. There are some things they cannot do because they are law enforcement agents. And because Sean is a PI in the state of Washington, he carries a gun. He doesn't have bureaucracy to answer to. He doesn't break the law, but he doesn't have the same constraints. So the three of them can get places and accomplish things that they wouldn't be able to do if they were all just police or all just FBI. So they've got this three thing going on.

Now where I'm at in the story, Sean McPherson in *Impervious*, which is the one that we're talking about today, Sean and Emma get married. They go to New Orleans, which is a destination location for weddings and horrific things happen there. Somebody who is near and dear to the readers' hearts while they're there dies in San Francisco, which stops the honeymoon and Sean leaves. Emma, his brand-new bride, stays for a different reason and things happen. And you can see the front cover here is a swamp and it's an alligator-infested swamp and things take place.

**Debbi:** It does have a very New Orleans vibe to it, or a Louisiana vibe.

**Laurie:** Louisiana. Absolutely!

**Debbi:** I can practically picture ... What is that movie? The one with... The one that takes place in the swamps of Louisiana. It's really scary at parts.

**Laurie:** I'm thinking of *Dueling Banjos*, and I know that's not it.

**Debbi:** Not that one. It's the other one with Powers Boothe.

**Laurie:** Oh, I don't know.

**Debbi:** And it's just eluding me. Well, it's great. It's a great movie. That's all I know. I'll think of the name eventually, probably after this is over. Anybody who loves movies probably is saying the name and saying, "Debbi, Debbi, it's this one."

**Laurie:** They're shouting it out.

**Debbi:** Yes. Your book descriptions always seem to mention the occupations of various characters who are at the retreat to write. How do you decide what your ensemble characters are going to do for a living?

**Laurie:** That's a great question, and in fact, for Book Seven, I had to create, I had to give birth to the four writers in residence that will be there. And I always want them to be something interesting, somebody who would actually be writing a book. So I just created, one of them is a standup comedian. Her book is—I always get to come up with their titles too. That's hard. You know how hard it is to come up for your own title. It's equally hard. Hers is called *Unzipping My Genes In Public: A Humorous Look at Genealogy and Genetics*. One is a former nun and hers is called *Out of Habit*, a memoir. One is Sarah Tedesco. She's an advocate for human rights, and she's a well-known author. She's in a wheelchair and she's continuing a series called *In Cahoots* for children, so that kids in a wheelchair with prosthetics don't succumb to bullying and they feel proud of themselves. And the final one is Jane Allen. She's a New York Times bestselling author who you will find out doesn't write her own books. She goes to writing retreats and murders someone there and steals their manuscripts and pawns them off as her own.

So we've got those. So it's fun for me to be able to come up with these characters and the titles of their books, making sure that they don't already exist on Amazon or anywhere. Who are they? Where could they be coming from? How can I use them in the book? And so every time I write a book, I have to write the entire book around that one I word that's four syllables long. So we have *Indelible*, *Iconoclast*, *Impervious*, *Iniquity*, *Illusionist*—I just turned it in. Hold on, let me, I'm cheating here—*Illusionist*, *Innocuous*, and now I'm writing *Insidious*.

So a lot of thought has to go around writing around one word, writing around the meaning of that word. What negative thing can take place

around that word? And of course, when you write crime thrillers as you know, what does the protagonist have to lose you? You have to have that —what does the protagonist have to lose. And so as I write my character bible for each of these things, also for them—and it may not ever appear in the story—what is their secret that they don't want anybody to find out, because that's how they approach life. That's the set of lenses they look through. And it may again never be something that the reader finds out, but I write around that secret and that I word.

**Debbi:** That's fantastic. That's absolutely fantastic. You're kind of a natural for adaptation to television, frankly .

**Laurie:** Wouldn't that be fun? Wouldn't that be fun?

**Debbi:** Wouldn't that be fun? She said with a smile. Hmm. Well, you have a plan for how the stories are going to go obviously, because you're all the way up to book what ... Seven?

**Laurie:** Seven, yes.

**Debbi:** Lord! Do you have an idea of where you're going to go with Eight and Nine?

**Laurie:** Well, I won't write this one—I would love to—*Indigenous*. In the Pacific Northwest, there are reservations and so forth, but because I'm not Native American, I wouldn't want to step ... somebody else can write that book. But I am going to write *Iditarod*, which takes place in the month of March up in Alaska. Going to go do a lot of research for that. I'm also going to write *Imitation*. That's one of them that's coming down the line. That's going to involve Sean McPherson's mom, who's in her seventies and she's retired FBI so she knows exactly what she's doing and something horrific will be happening.

Now, as you know, writing the mystery series that you do, the McRae Mysteries, you have to be able to drop breadcrumbs previously and follow them up. I'm not a huge fan of red herrings. I don't trick the readers. I don't want to say, well a-ha! I want to have viable breadcrumbs that if they've been reading the series, they're like, oh my gosh. That's right. That happened. They saw this in the morgue when they opened

that drawer, and there was the diver in that suit, and he had this Russian blade. And so it's something I can build on, but you have to have enough of an idea. I never know how any of the books is going to end. Haven't a clue. I just know the direction I'm going, and I use my character bible as my compass. That's my true north and I just follow it, but I know enough that if I'm going to be writing this, I better be dropping these hints now. I better do this.

**Debbi:** Yeah. Yeah. Because if you want something to happen, say in Book Eight, and plant a seed for it in Book Three, you need that bible to kind of create that link.

**Laurie:** Exactly, and I do have a guy in a drawer that they took the wetsuit off of, and there was a particular tattoo, and fastened to him with a belt was this particular knife. Someone had died from a knife with the same jiggy-jag kind of a thing with a Russian blade, with the manufacturer. You've got to be able to speak authentically with whatever weapons you're using, whatever fight scenes, and you have to plot it out, and that's half the fun.

I don't know if you're like me. I don't sleep well. because my mind is busy. I lay there with my eyes closed and I'm not wiggling around, but I'm busy. And if I think of something, I always keep my phone on the nightstand and I'll pick it up and I'll say Laurie, don't forget this. Remember that. Hey, this is a good idea, or check this. What about that? Remember those spies in World War II. What was that thing that they called? They had a fake tooth. Their upper left back quadrant, they would remove the tooth, put in there a pill that if they got caught, they could knock that tooth out with their tongue, bite into it and die. What was that really called and what was in it? Would the morgue pick that up if they weren't looking? Would the M.E. be able to pick that up if they weren't looking for it? You have to be able to do this.

I have talked with M.E.s, with psychologists, with psychiatrists, with the SWAT team here in Boise, Idaho. I've gotten to ... let me see here where I thank people. I've gotten to talk to a detective in the Major Crime unit. I've gotten to go to the crime lab here, forensic pathologist. I've talked with a private investigator, Dickie Floyd. He writes detective novels, a forensic psychologist, and a chief public defender. I mean, I go and I ask for their time, and they're happy. No one has ever told me no, because

they are going to get thanked back here, and they give me the lowdown. How would you do this? How could that happen? I ask, and I ask and I ask. They're so gracious and they step up to the plate and they say, this is what would happen. This is most likely the weapon that they would use, and in response, this is what we would do. And it's really fun.

**Debbi:** Sounds like you do a lot of primary research.

**Laurie:** I do.

**Debbi:** How much time do you spend on research and how do you organize your research?

**Laurie:** I'm very organized. Almost everything for me, I keep on my laptop. I'm not a messy person. I dot my i's, I cross my t's. I don't have a bunch of stuff. I work with an almost blank desk. I get my research done in advance, so when I get on my laptop, all of the tabs are closed. I don't have Google open, I don't have Facebook open. My phone is in a drawer in airplane mode. I just power through it. At three o'clock, I stop. Doesn't matter what's going on, what's happening. I get up at four. I walk six miles a day, three two-mile increments so I get my walking done. I put a headlamp on. I'm in the Pacific Northwest. It's very dark at that time of morning. I take my dog and we go and come back.

Butt in Chair. I use the BIC method—Butt in Chair—and I write, write, write, write, write, stop. Two more miles, come back, Butt in Chair. Write, write, write, write, write, and I end my day at three o'clock. Two more miles. I'm done. I'm done. My brain is mush.

**Debbi:** Wow! Well, that's very diligent and an excellent routine, I have to say. Walking is a great thing to do.

**Laurie:** It is, because your pot is simmering on the back burner of your brain, and it helps you drop things off that you don't need, think of things that you need. I have, like I said, a nine-book contract. My publisher, Spark Press could let me go at any time, just like our contracts are written where I could let them go. If I don't hit certain bars, they can let me go. Effective August 1st of this year, I no longer have Pacific Group West as my distributor. It's Simon & Schuster. That raised the bar like you can't

believe. So the book that's coming out, I went out and studied their catalog. What we had had, we have these blueprints that we work with, and this is what I envisioned for my cover. This is how I want my pages laid out. Well, I had to Simon & Schuster-ize from *Iniquity* on. I thought I was done, and I still needed to write because I have to hit a target of a book release every April. And it's not easy.

It sounds like I just sit down and it flows out of my head. No, that's not true. That doesn't happen. I bang it out of my head. So I had to back up and Simon & Schuster-ize all of this stuff that takes place. You know on the back of a book, you've got what we've always called the hook in the past; they call it a keynote. It has to be 250 characters—not words—including spaces and periods and commas and everything. No longer, no more. And this is what it must contain. It cannot recreate anything down here. And then this is this many words with this many spaces, and it must contain.... And that was an amazing feat. Now moving forward, it won't be hard, but I had to re-up several books for that, but it's an exciting thing. What a great reason. I have to do this because of Simon & Schuster. Well, I like having that problem.

**Debbi:** Can't say I blame you. I can see the benefits. How would you describe your writing in terms of sub-genre? Is it thriller, suspense, mystery?

**Laurie:** It is a little of each, but it's mostly thriller. On my bookmarks, it's the Sean McPherson crime thrillers, but it does contain mystery, it does contain suspense, almost from the get-go in any book. It's very Alfred Hitchcockian in that. Remember, he puts the bomb under the table and the people in the audience get to see that, but the characters don't know. The movie stars on the screen don't know. So that's where the suspense comes in. Right from the get-go in my books, almost within the first chapter, you know who the bad guy or gal is. You know but the other characters in the book don't. That's what makes it suspenseful. So the reader is going, "Don't go into the forest. No, don't go into the garage. Don't go in the kitchen no matter what you do," because the reader knows what's going on, but the characters in the book don't. And that's an Alfred Hitchcock method, and that's what makes it suspenseful.

**Debbi:** Yes, very much so. What do you think has been the most effective way that you connect with your readers?



**Laurie:** Two ways for me. I am very interactive with readers on Facebook and Instagram. I just recently left Twitter. I left 12,000 people behind, but I wasn't excited to stay there anymore. So I get a lot done there. I live very close to Boise State University. I get invited to speak there a lot. When I speak, then I get readers. I belong to the Blackbird Writers. I get to do stuff with them. I get readers, then I get to interact with them. I do book signings. I get to go to where my stories take place. They pivot from the Fairhaven Historic District in Bellingham, Washington. I go there, I do a book launch at Village Books, and I get to meet people and talk with people, so connecting. So for me, social media is social. If somebody says something, I respond. I would never not respond.

I have a newsletter and I have a blog and that type of thing. So it is responding to people who reach out and say, will you talk with my book club? Will you Zoom in? We're in Maryland. Would you Zoom? Sure, I will. Sure I will. So for me, social media, I get to talk with people there. I see you all the time out on Instagram. I think you see me back. I'm out there quite often. I like to take pictures. I take my own pictures, and then I get them out there, and that spurs conversation.

**Debbi:** Yes. I like taking pictures too, actually. I've really gotten into photography lately. It's enjoyable. If your books were adapted into a series for television say, who could you picture playing the lead characters?

**Laurie:** Henry Cavill for Sean McPherson for sure. And I'm going to not think of her name. She's just lovely. She was in Superman and she was the sidekick gal. She has red hair and I cannot think of her name, but that is who I would pick for Sean and Emma. I can't think of her name. I'll think of it later, like when you think of the Powers Booth movie.

**Debbi:** Yeah, that Powers Boothe movie is still eluding me.

**Laurie:** And I can't think of this person's name either.

**Debbi:** Oh gosh. I hate when that happens.

**Laurie:** I know.

**Debbi:** What insights or advice would you offer to anyone who's interested in writing for a living?

**Laurie:** The most important thing is to show up. The second most important thing is to be concise, and the third most important thing is to be consistent. You don't show up every other day or every other week. You show up every day. You're concise. We live in that time now, our place in the world now, our time in history is sound bites. You have to pare it down. You can write it blah-blah-blah and then just get it down to blah. And then consistency. Those are the three. Show up, be concise, be consistent.

**Debbi:** And what are you actually writing right now? What are you working on? Because I know you've got plans for books in the future, but what book are you actually working on right now?

**Laurie:** I'm actually writing Book Number Seven. I just wrote the first paragraph of the prologue for it. Sean Rafferty walks through the doors of Maine State Prison—I won't tell you why—and how has that made him feel? What is he seeing? What is he smelling? What is that doing to his breathing? I won't tell you why he's there, but he's there for a really darn good reason. And literally before I got on with you, I wrote that first paragraph and it took me a long time. You know, out of the gate, that first sentence better be extraordinary and that first paragraph better support it. And then I went and I said to my husband, Len, what do you think about this as an opener? He said, I would only change one word. Instead of thud, I would say clang. Other than that ...

**Debbi:** Very good. Well, it sounds like you have your work cut out for you in between Simon & Schuster-izing and just coming up with all of these plots. I really have to say well done. Way to go! Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

**Laurie:** Just a reminder to the listeners that I'm doing a giveaway if they get on your blog site on the Crime Cafe, and they go to the little piece that I put out there where they get to read a chapter of *Impervious*. There's 1, 2, 3 instructions. I can't remember what they are, but if they go there, they'll see 1, 2, 3 instructions to enter the giveaway, and then I will sign a copy, put a bookmark in it and mail it to them and it's for US residents.

**Debbi:** Well, that's a deal and a half right there.

**Laurie:** Right there.

**Debbi:** Well, thank you so much for spending time with us today. Thank you.

**Laurie:** Thank you for having me. I enjoyed talking with you.

**Debbi:** It was great to see you again.

**Laurie:** You too. Thank you.

**Debbi:** Sure thing. If you enjoyed the episode everybody, please leave a review. And if you're watching this on YouTube, please like the video. If you would like to enter the contest for that giveaway that Laurie just described for a copy of *Impervious* signed by the author. Just follow her instructions after you like the video. And check us out on Patreon also, where I have book reviews, excerpts from my work and bonus episodes that are just pure fun, basically. On that note, I'll see you next time when our guest will be Ted Flanagan. Thanks for listening. Take care and happy reading.

**PS:** We both later remembered the names that eluded us: Laurie was thinking of Amy Adams, and I was thinking of *Southern Comfort* (1981).