

The Crime Cafe with

Faye Snowden

Presented By:



Debbi: Hi everyone. Today I'm pleased to have with me the author of a series of dark Southern Gothic mysteries with strong and flawed female characters. She's going to give away a copy of her first book, [A Killing Fire](#), and her second book [A Killing Rain](#) was named by CrimeReads as one of the best Southern Gothic mysteries of 2022. She also won and has been long-listed for various writing awards. So it is my great pleasure to have with me today [Faye Snowden](#). Hi Faye, how are you doing?

Faye: Hi there. Fine, Debbi. How are you?

Debbi: Good, thank you. And I need to put you in the spotlight if I can manage to do that. I am just a technological mess today. There we go. That's much better. So, tell us about Raven Burns and the Killing Series, and what inspired you to write it?

Faye: Oh my. Certainly. This series was actually not my first. I had a mystery suspense series back in the day. But the Raven Burns series is, like you said, southern noir, complete mystery, dark mystery, and it is about a woman whose father was a serial killer. So in order to atone for his sins and to prove that she's a good citizen, she decides to become a homicide detective to right his wrongs in that small town, made up fictional town. She lives in Byrd's Landing, Louisiana that seems for some reason have a lot of serial killers and she has to spend an inordinate amount of time chasing them. So the series is actually based on - what is it, the four? Is it the four? Oh, I'm kind of drawing a blank there. But it's based on fire, water, soil, and then air.

So the first book in the series is *A Killing Fire*, and then the second book is *A Killing Rain*, which is out now. I'm working on *A Killing Breath* as we speak, and then the last book is *A Killing Soil*. And in each book, Raven is going to learn something about herself that's either going to push her to be a good citizen of Byrd's Landing, Louisiana, or become more like her father.

Debbi: Oh, wow. I'm really hearing some interesting themes that people are basing their series on lately. I've heard the Seven Deadly Sins, now the Four Elements.

Faye: The Elements, right.

Debbi: Earth, wind, fire, water.

Faye: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Debbi: Wow.

Faye: I got the idea for the book because - I tell this story all the time, my poor dad - but I am a child of divorce. My mom, who's since passed away - she died in 2015 - but she did not have a fondness for my dad after the divorce, and she would disparage him in front of us. I looked a lot like my dad. I favored him a lot, and I used to look in the mirror and say, well, if my dad's a something and something, what does that make me? What kind of person does that make me? And you know, a writer's mind just takes off sometimes, the imagination. I said, oh, you know, that would be a neat character to write, but you have to up the stakes. So it's like, what if her dad's a serial killer? And so it just kind of snowballed from there and then I had an idea and a book and so forth.

Debbi: Wow. That is intriguing though, the premise there. The idea of a detective who's motivated by the fact that her father was a serial killer.

Faye: Yes.

Debbi: I thought that was very intriguing. So what are you working on now?

Faye: What I'm working on now is short stories, and I just think the short story form just really helps you hone the craft. I have a short story now that's out in the Best American Mystery and Suspense called "The Obsession of Abel Tangier". I just try to do them in my spare time, but what I'm working on now as far as this series is concerned, I'm working on the third book in the series. It's going to be called *A Killing Breath*. I am almost ready to submit the first 50 pages to my agent and my editor to see if it's a go. Let's hope that it is. But it's been just a joy to work on.

Debbi: That's great. That's wonderful. Is there kind of an overarching journey that you see Raven going on throughout the series? Does she reach a kind of closure at some point?

Faye: I do, and I'd like to think that it mirrors the journey that we go on through life, I mean, my journey. I can only speak from my perspective, but you know when you're young and you have all these doubts about who you are and you don't know who you are, I constantly ask myself, am I a good person? Am I kind of a good person? I think I'm a good person. I'm not sure. And then as you get older, you become more sure about that, more sure about who you are, more sure about your values until you reach a point. And I'd like to think I reached that point where you are okay in your skin. So the journey that Raven's going on is to determine, to get to that place where she's okay in her skin. However, what's going to be different from Raven is that, like I said at the end of the series, her moral compass may be way off from the moral compass of us law-abiding citizens. I mean, you may still want to go have a beer with her, but you may not want to trust her with your bank account.

Debbi: Wow.

Faye: So that's the arc, but I don't know how it's going to end because she is influenced by her father, and then by people constantly telling her that she's evil and her thinking that she's evil, and so she's got all of that to sort out. She's wrestling with that dark place inside her and trying to figure out how to kind of incorporate that into something useful.

Debbi: Interesting.

Faye: Yeah.

Debbi: So along with writing fiction, I see that you teach. You've been a guest lecturer for writing courses as well as teaching information technology. I thought that was intriguing.

Faye: Yes, my day job. I say it's the only job I know aside from writing is I've been in information technology my entire career. The last maybe 10 years or so, I've been in project management, so sometimes I'll teach a university course on project management. And then, because I'm still really in contact with my professors, they will ask me to come in and do a lecture on writing courses, on writing or the business of writing or just readings and those types of things.

Debbi: That's really interesting. I went to library school. I have a library science degree.

Faye: Oh wow!

Debbi: It's an old library science degree at this point, but nonetheless, so I am a fan of librarians, I have to tell you. And I am in awe of people who do good jobs on information technology, so well done, you.

Faye: Thank you.

Debbi: I was looking around for information about Southern Gothic mysteries, so I did a little Google search and this article pops up from CrimeReads, and I'm reading through it and it's like, whoa, this is so good. And I'm reading through it, and I get to the bottom and guess who wrote it? It was you. I have to say that was a nice article you wrote.

Faye: Oh, thank you. Yeah.

Debbi: Can you talk a little bit about what you said about Southern Gothic mystery in that article?

Faye: Oh, I certainly can. The origins of Southern Gothic of course has its origins in the Gothic stories that were told in England way back when, and it has certain elements. What I said in the article is that the genre traveled across the pond and of course, you know the Americans. We put our own little spin on it. So what the Gothic or the Gothic genre, the Southern Gothic genre does, usually stories that are set in the south, but it's really heavy on the subtext. So it's the kind of stories that will kind of make the reader feel uneasy because of what it is saying and what it's not saying, so there's an element of corruption in it, especially religious corruption. Like in Gothic stories, the action happening in some old haunted mansion, the whole south becomes that haunted place or that dark place where the stories happen. It's about the return of the repressed, things that as a society we don't like to think about or talk about, but it's there in the undertones of the story.

For example, in the book *A Killing Fire*, the parish that the town is set in, the imaginary town, if somebody said, okay, Faye, what parish in Louisiana, because Louisiana has parishes, I would say in Caddo parish. And I read once - I don't know how true this is - but that area of the country had more lynchings than any other country. And yet we build a town on top of that. We build all our societal structures without ever dealing with that, so this bubbles up. In Gothic fiction, these things that we don't like to think about or talk about kind of bubbles up in the stories that you read. You may see things like incest or talk about incest or the damsel in distress, that kind of thing. There may be elements of the supernatural. So in the second book *A Killing Rain*, it's a mystery, no paranormal elements, but there are things in there that happen that can't be explained. If I were to sum it up in a nutshell, it's about stories that we as a society tell about ourselves. However, with that dark undertone that surfaces things that we don't like to think about.

Debbi: Yeah. It's interesting how much crossover there is between that kind of crime writing and hardboiled mystery and film noir.

Faye: Yes. Oh yes, yes.

Debbi: They all seem to kind of come together at some point in this big Venn diagram. There's a part where they all kind of intersect. How much research do you do when you're writing a book?

Faye: A lot. For *A Killing Fire*, I did a lot of research about the town that I wanted to model my fictional town on, about Louisiana, and I grew up in Louisiana, so it was kind of learning a little bit about where I grew up. I do just enough research that helps me drive my storyline when I'm doing it in a healthy way. When I start doing the research and I'm saying, oh my goodness, I can do this in the story, it goes to my plot and then I pretty much stop at that point. But sometimes I'm a

procrastinator, so sometimes I do so much research to keep from writing, and I get paralysis analysis of that and that's when I know that I need to stop.

Debbi: Yeah. It's easy, too easy for you to get sucked down that old rabbithole of research online. Boy, I tell you.

Faye: It goes and goes.

Debbi: It does indeed. What authors have most inspired you to write and who do you love to read?

Faye: Oh my goodness. The authors that have inspired me to write. I would just say the classics, because I am an English major. My favorite book in the world if somebody said, lay It down, let us know, would be Ralph Ellison, the *Invisible Man*. *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison. And then Toni Morrison, of course. Was a big fan of Alice Walker, and then another one. She wrote *The Street*, and I can't - oh my God. I can't believe I'm forgetting her name - I think it starts with Ann, but *The Street* is a really, really good book. Zora Neale Hurston also and then Faulkner. Love William Faulkner. So when you say the classics, that's it. But contemporary writers, Tracy Clark is a great writer. Right now I think she has a book out that's called *Hide*. Another one who is knocking my socks off these days, S. A. Cosby.

Debbi: Oh boy. Yeah.

Faye: Really, really good. I don't know if you interviewed him, and he's such a nice person, so it's good to see all that wrapped up together.

Debbi: Oh my gosh. Yeah. I have to say, I read *Blacktop*, uh ...

Faye: *Wasteland*.

Debbi: *Wasteland*, thank you, way back when it first came out. It was submitted as part of the Hammett submissions. And to me, that was one of the ones that really stood out for me. And I thought, wow, this book could be made into a movie.

Faye: Yeah. And it is being, as I understand, yeah.

Debbi: I'm not surprised. I'm not at all surprised. Wow! Great book. If someone adopted your books, say *The Killing Series*, into a television show or film, who could you picture playing Raven?

Faye: Oh my goodness. Do you know the woman who's in *The Big Sky*? I don't know her name.

Debbi: I don't know *The Big Sky*.

Faye: Big Sky, CJ Box's series. It got adapted to television. *The Big Sky*. It's set in Wyoming, I believe, or in the Plains states, but she would be to me a great person that could play Raven. I just love that actor. She's really good.

Debbi: Cool. What advice would you give to anyone who is interested in a writing career?

Faye: Yeah, that's a tough one. I get asked that question all the time, but that's a really tough question because it has a really tough answer. The first advice I would give is that they need to read, read not only the stuff that they want to write, but they need to read widely in all different genres, all different - fiction, nonfiction - just read. Kind of learn how sentences are put together, how stories are told, the elements of story, and you can get a lot of that through reading. The other thing is that when you're writing, know that your first and second and maybe not even your third draft, may be ready for prime time. So you have to write the best story that you can write and just focus on that and not focus on oh my goodness, I can't wait till the fan letters come in because I wrote. You have to be that. And then the other one is that - I hesitate to say this because it is hard. Writing - and I just said it in the blog post I think ...

Debbi: I saw it. Yeah.

Faye: I think it's hard so you have to make time for it and make time. You have to miss out on some things, so you really have to get over that fear of missing out, that FOMO.

Debbi: Yeah. I think that is so true. I don't know about you, but when it comes to writing, I need to kind of shut out everything else and just do it. I can't be checking my email, I can't be looking online all the time. I can't be doing Instagram or anything else. I have to be writing. People I don't think really quite appreciate just how much your life gets consumed by all this.

Faye: It does, it does.

Debbi: It really, really does.

Faye: Yeah, and especially when you have a day job, because I have a really intense day job and having to go into your office or wherever you write after you've been doing a lot of heavy brain work all day is tough.

Debbi: Oh my gosh. I really admire people who have a day job and can write. How do you manage your time? What kind of writing schedule do you keep?

Faye: When I'm being really good, which I'm just starting being really good, because I really want to finish this *Killing Breath*, I make appointments with myself. For example, I used to take a lot of classes, extra classes. I'm like, Hey, if you can go to basket weaving class every Tuesday and Thursday from six to nine o'clock, you can write every Tuesday and Thursday from six to nine o'clock. So I just set those appointments and I keep those appointments, and even if I go in the office and stare at my computer, I do that. And then eventually I'll get bored of doing that because I don't let myself go online, then I'll start working on what I need to work on. And then usually I have a schedule maybe like seven in the morning till twelve or one on the weekends, and that's because that's when all the kiddos and my grandkids who live with me start getting up and then I'm not missing out on spending any time with them. So basically making a schedule and keeping to that schedule.

Debbi: Yeah. That's really kind of what you have to do, isn't it?

Faye: Yes, most definitely.

Debbi: Very, very important. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Faye: I think the one thing I add is writing is serious business, but don't take it too seriously. Remember you are writing to tell a good story, to have fun, write what you like to read and give yourself some grace while you're doing it. So that's probably what I would want to finish up with.

Debbi: That is excellent advice, I have to say. The best. Really give yourself a break there. It's not brain science.

Faye: Right.

Debbi: It's not brain surgery or rocket science.

Faye: Right.

Debbi: Nobody's going to die, literally if you write the wrong word. It all works out somehow

Faye: It does. It does. Yeah.

Debbi: Awesome. Well, this has been great. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Faye: Oh, you're welcome. And thank you for inviting me. It's been a great time.

Debbi: Well, it was a pleasure having you here, and thank you so much for everything you've said because it's so true. Writing is hard and it's important to have a schedule and all of those things. So for everyone listening just so you know, I have launched another podcast, if you can believe that. This one is a podcast on film noir that I'm co-hosting with crime writer [F. R. Jameson](#). We discuss one film noir a month, and for our first episode, we're discussing *Double Indemnity*, a real classic, so we're giving you the good stuff.

The next episode is going to be on *Out of the Past*, which is really a wild movie, so stay tuned for that. Anyway, just thought I would mention that. And if you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review and consider supporting us on [Patreon](#). We are a Patreon-supported podcast. In the meantime, I'll just say thanks for listening and next time our guest will be Amanda Lamb. In the meantime, take care and happy reading.