The Crime Cafe with Kristin Helling

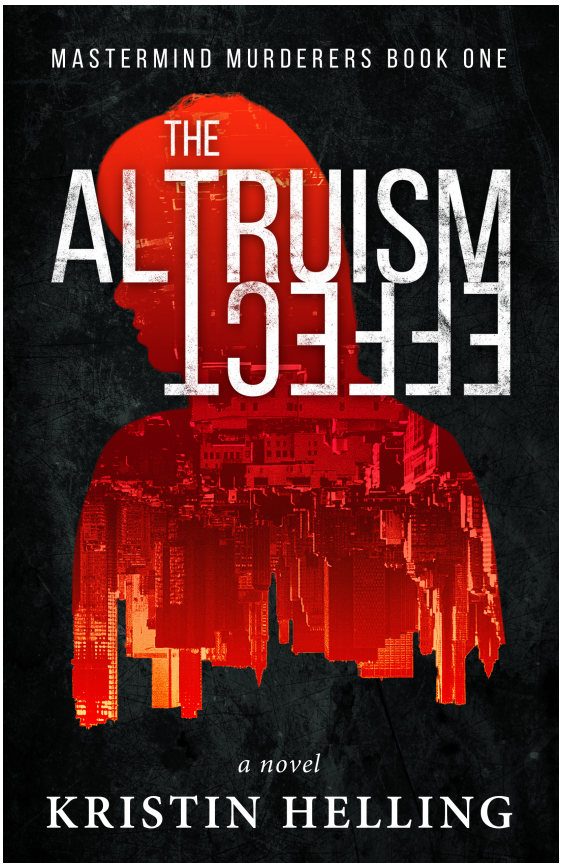
Presented By:

Debbi Mack
NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR

CRIME CAFE

Debbi: Hi, everyone. This is the Crime Cafe. Your podcasting source of great crime, suspense and thriller writing. I'm Debbi Mack, your host. Before I bring on my guest, I'd like to say two things. First, check out my website and the link at debbimack.com. The link "Crime Cafe" where you can find all the buy links for the *Crime Cafe* publications, as well as the subscribe button for the podcast. Secondly, I'm putting together a Patreon campaign for people who would like to support the podcast. Yes, you can help keep the lights on here and keep the great crime, suspense and thriller talk coming. So, they'll be great perks for people who get involved and donate as low as a dollar. So, please consider it and be on the lookout for the page. I'll let everyone know when that's up. But now, what you've been waiting for. My guest is Kristin Helling who "enjoys stories with a journey, whether it's a journey across the globe, a journey through space, or a journey of finding oneself." I like that. How's it going Kristin? It's great to have you on.

Kristin: Good, thank you for having me, Debbi.



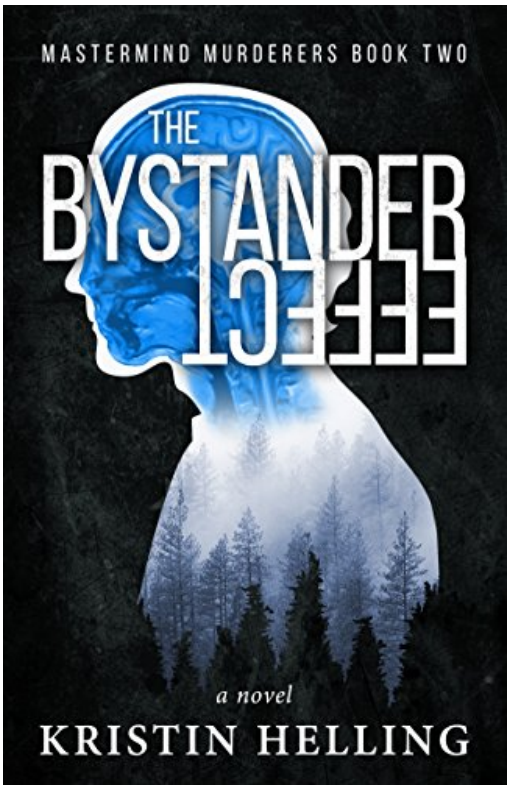
Debbi: Sure thing. It's wonderful. So, you've done a lot of different types of writing and that intrigues me, but we'll start with your thriller writing. *The Altruism Effect*, tell us about the book. What is the book about?

Kristin: Yeah, so the premise is based around a psychological experiment from our history, a real one. As I was studying psychology, I got my minor with my bachelor's in psychology and it was just all of these cases from the past that have taught us so much about humanity, was just so inspiring to me and so I

feel like the stories write themselves when I read these cases and so my series, *Mastermind Murderers* is based off of loose inspirations from psychological studies. So, the first book, *The Altruism Effect* is based off of the Stanford Prison Experiment that happened in 1971. So, yeah my protagonist is a psychologist herself. She's graduated with her doctorate and she's running a clinic with a few other graduates that she has come close with and she's had a couple of horrific experiences, which relates back to the prison experiment. Kind of helps her guide herself through life.

Debbi: I know as a lawyer, it affected me.

Kristin: She went through the training to be a psychologist and that definitely came from my background in psychology as well as, you know the cases that I allude to as well.



Debbi: Yeah, I thought it was interesting that you had that reference to the Stanford Experiment, because I think I've heard of it before and that's just very scary. And where does *The Bystander Effect* go from this, the next book I assume in the series? Is it an extension of what happens before? Is it the same protagonist or does something else happen?

Kristin: It is, yes. So, this is a four book series. So, I don't think it's a spoiler in saying that she survives [laughs].

Debbi: Thank heavens [laughs].

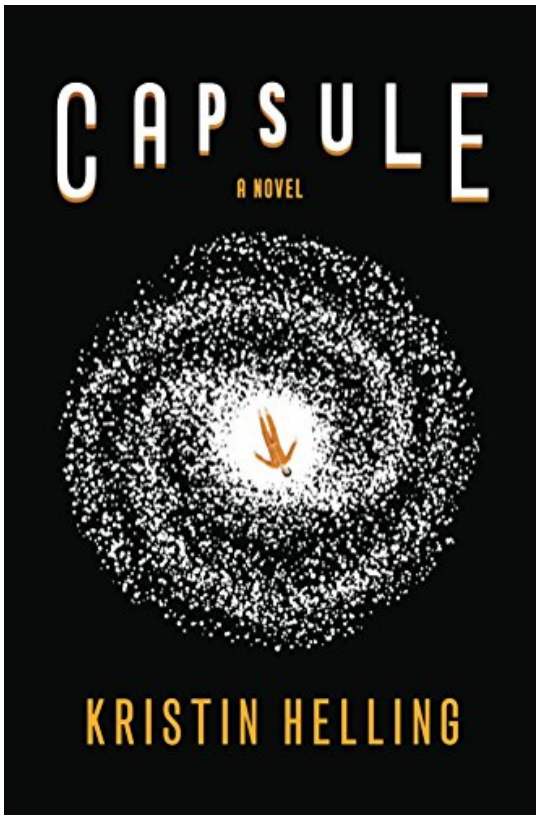
Kristin: And so the second book, *The Bystander Effect* opens up with the detective that speaks to her when she's in the hospital at the end. He actually goes back and visits her after there's been some time

for her to heal and he actually approaches her to ask for her expertise in a case that he's currently working on. So, he…because of the experience that she had, he's finding similarities in some current cases he's working on and he thinks with her experience and her education that she would be a really big help to the case. And so, with a lot of kind of going within herself and seeing if this was possible for her to even do, she ends up taking the job, and so the two of them work to try and solve the next case that comes up. That's kind of how the rest of the series is lined up. She ends up becoming a very integral part to solving cases that are also related to past experiments.

Debbi: That's very interesting. So, you create kind of a team in essence.

Kristin: Yes.

Debbi: A crime solving team.



Kristin: Yes.

Debbi: Psychologist and police detective, I guess. That sounds really interesting. What about *Capsule*? I noticed you wrote … it looks like a sci-fi thriller.

Kristin: [laughs] Yeah, interestingly enough, I've got lots of stories and they all tend to be within the thriller genre. I just love, you know fast-paced stories that have twists and turns you're not expecting and so this story came into my head and it's very character driven. It's more of a character kind of experiment and it could have taken place anywhere really. It could have been in a submarine, it could

have been in the woods. But, it just happen to make sense in space so that was actually the first novel that I published and it's a standalone, even though some of my readers want me to continue it. Kind of made that, you know mistake of leaving it a little open-ended at the end for the reader to decide and they didn't like that [laughs].

So, yeah I love that story and it was with me for a long time and I finally got it out onto the page and I love talking about that one as well because it really is a character study that also tells us a lot about humanity and I loved writing that story because the main character was born in space because his parents, the astronauts, knew that it would be a suicide mission and they knew that they needed to have somebody to pilot the ship back to earth. So they birthed a child to do that. So his whole life is essentially out of his hands. He felt like he didn't really have a choice. He has to do this mission. So he starts to kind of formulate those decisions whether or not, you know am I living for myself or am I living for this other thing. And so for me, writing that character was hard because I have all the biases of a person who was born and who has lived on earth. This person has never stepped foot on earth before. So to really take myself out of my biases and put myself into that character psychology was very interested and fun to do.

Debbi: Wow! That sounds really intriguing. I've got to check that out.

Kristin: Thank you.

Debbi: Because I love sci-fi actually and to combine sci-fi and thriller is really cool.

Kristin: It's very soft sci-fi. So I don't go through a lot of technology and things with the ship. Maybe one sentence of how it works and kind of move on from there.

Debbi: I kind of like that though; the psychology part of sci-fi.

Kristin: Yeah.

Debbi: You also write creative non-fiction and travel narratives.

Kristin: Yes.

Debbi: How did you get started with that? I love to travel by the way. I noticed you've been to all these places, countries. That's fantastic!

Kristin: Thank you. Yeah, so traveling is gosh, it's so opening to your perspective of what you know as your culture. When I met my husband, he was born in a small city outside of Kansas City, Missouri and had lived in the same house his entire life and so I was like, you've never seen anything else outside of, you know this little Missouri town, like we need to see things. I grew up traveling with my parents and everything, so my husband and I went on several trips so that I could show him. I have a love for France, so I actually studied there in college for a month and brought my husband along and he's a photographer so it was kind of perfect mashup and traveling just opens your perspective and it's

inspiring and you meet different people from different cultures and walks of life and it's pretty awesome.

So, creative non-fiction was a genre that was kind of emerging, I would say back in like 2010. A lot of people really hadn't heard about it and there was an anthology by a guy named Phillip Lopate that I read and I just loved it and creative non-fiction is kind of just like snippets of life that you can embellish upon. I love just taking the brevity of life, small things. You know I wrote a story about leaving for work and forgetting my coffee cup on top of the car and it falling off when I pulled out and me not knowing what it was and me thinking I hit the neighbor's cat and that's the whole story. The whole story's about my coffee cup falling off the car. But, you can really elaborate on that and you know bring the creativity into the story by taking something so simple and just, you know expanding it.

Debbi: I love that. I love the idea of the small story and I think that's true of documentary as well. I've been taking some documentary classes myself and some of the best documentaries I've found have been small stories about people you don't even know. I mean just the stories that they tell and they'd be amazing on the page as well as visually.

Kristin: Right. Narrowing the scope on a subject can be really impactful.

Debbi: Exactly, exactly right. So you did a Da Vinci travel series. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Kristin: Yeah, so you know I read Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code* and there's quite a few places to travel in that book and me being a book nerd, thought it would be fun, you know to go to all of those places in the book [laughs]. So, yeah we actually kind of did it backwards. So we started in Scotland and then worked our way down through England and to France and ended up at the Rose Line and of course it's a fictional book so for me it was really inspiring to see these places that you know, Dan Brown saw and worked into this whole world. That was pretty awesome and it was fun.

Debbi: That's fantastic! Have you published any of these?

Kristin: Just on my blog, which I don't think I have live anymore actually [laughs]. I've written several, you know travel narratives and blogs about my traveling. I don't think I have them live anymore. They're kind of archived.

Debbi: You should put them together into an e-book and self-publish those.

Kristin: That's a great idea [laughs].

Debbi: I'm full of ideas [laughs]. I'm just full of ideas. And they sound interesting. Do you have a favorite? Well, is Paris your favorite destination? Is France your favorite destination or is there another like secondary one that you also love?

Kristin: Oh my gosh! I don't know. There's so many to choose from. I really love France. I love their culture and I love the politics and the language and the food. When I was studying over there I was in Cannes, which is in Normandy. So, I was actually in the north of France and it was just a small like, you

know World War II town with like the remnants of the castle and I really loved it because it was like a countryside kind of town as opposed to like the big city of Paris, which I also love [laughs]. I love beaches, so Puerto Rico is very close to my heart and just lots of other places. I've gotten to see Hawaii and Jamaica and Cancun and you know all those places and I was actually born on Lake Erie, which I will say Lake Erie has the best sunsets of anywhere I've ever seen on earth [laughs].

Debbi: Wow.

Kristin: So yeah.

Debbi: Interesting, wow! I've heard that Key West also has some fabulous sunsets. I've never been there but I've heard. Someday I want to go. I want to see Ernest Hemeingway's house full of cats [laughs].

Kristin: Yeah [laughs].

Debbi: Let's see. Is there any of your work that you can picture being made into a movie or TV show? If so, who would you want to play the main character?

Kristin: Well, I actually do this thing when I am planning my novels where I do cast my characters. So, when I write certain characters, I choose an actor to play them and then as I'm writing it brings them more to life for me, having pictures on the side and things like that. So, I would love *Mastermind Murders* to be made into a movie. That would be so great. I have Felicity Jones playing Raine, who she just did *Rogue One*, *The Star Wars* movie. But she doesn't have a British accent [laughs].

Debbi: That could be arranged [laughs]. That can be done. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Kristin: I don't know. I do have the third book in the series. That's going to be released, I'm going to go ahead and safely say early April, because we don't know how long my editor will have it [laughs]. So, early April and that one is called, *The Carbon Effect* and the experiment that it is based off of is the Milgram Experiment, which happened in 1963.

Debbi: Wow! So you get a history lesson on psychology experiments as well as a thriller with Kristin Helling.

Kristin: I mean this was fun.

Debbi: Yeah, it was great. I love doing this. I get to meet people and talk to them that I would otherwise never get to see and read lots of wonderful books [laughs]. So, thanks for being here. I really appreciate it.

Kristin: Thank you!

Debbi: And don't forget that Kristin is doing a giveaway of, I believe it was *The Altruism Effect*. You can find the directions for entering the giveaway on my blog under her guest post and until next time, I will talk to you later and happy reading.