

CLOBBERED BY CAMEMBER (A Cheese Shop Mystery)

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1. In ***CLOBBERED BY CAMEMBER***, we find Cheese Shop proprietor Charlotte Bessette setting up for the Winter Wonderland faire and hunting down a killer. What inspired Charlotte's character?

As a girl, I devoured Nancy Drew books and Agatha Christie novels. I think Charlotte might be an amalgam of Nancy and Miss Marple. She's young, but not too young (30's) and she's impulsive (but not too impulsive), and she's smart. Charlotte is also a mix-and-match of a number of people that I know, myself included. She lost her parents young and was raised by her paternal grandparents. They are loving, caring, adorable people. Charlotte has acquired the best of their personalities from them. Like her grandmother, Charlotte is a fixer by nature. She wants everyone to be happy and content. In the first book, she has taken in her nieces and cousin, whose wife up and left him and the twin girls. [Actually the nieces are cousins-once-removed, but that is a mouthful for a book, don't you think?] Anyway, she takes them into her home, and they become part of her extended family. Many of my friends and I enjoy this same set-up. We have extended families that consist not only of our own children, but stepchildren, nephews, nieces, coworkers, and more. One of Charlotte's coworkers, Rebecca, a transformed Amish girl who is into the Internet and all sorts of crime TV shows, has become a sister to Charlotte. When Charlotte's grandmother is suspected of murder in the first book, Rebecca urges Charlotte to get involved. How can Charlotte refuse?

2. What is your writing routine like?

I write for two hours every morning at the crack of dawn. When I wake up, there is nothing clogging my mind. No email. No distractions. I turn on quiet music and I set to work. I use an outline, so I usually revisit the paragraph or two that I have set for the upcoming chapter, and then let my fingers start typing. Often I will review what I wrote the day before to make sure that what I wrote made sense. If I don't "feel" a chapter, oftentimes I will skip a section, write FIX THIS and continue with the story. I can't edit something that isn't on the page, so my main priority is getting a first draft. After I've done my two hours, I take a couple of

personal hours to eat, exercise, do email, and then I return to the page for another two hours. If I find I'm distracted at home, I might go to a coffee shop. There's something about sitting in anonymity amongst a crowd of people that stirs my imagination.

3. What are some of your favorite mysteries?

I adore cozy mysteries written by Krista Davis, Julie Hyzy, Cleo Coyle, and Janet Bolin. I just finished Krista's *The Diva Haunts the House* and Julie's *Affairs of Steak* and loved both. In addition to cozy mysteries, I like reading more dramatic fare. I love Lisa Gardner's books. *Alone* is fabulous. And I recently read two superb books, one by Carla Buckley: *The Things That Keep Us Here*, and another by Hilary Davidson, *The Damage Done*. Well-crafted books that keep the tension.

4. What are your favorite cheeses?

I have so many!!! I can't believe how many new cheeses I've tasted in the past two years. At least two hundred. The first that I adore is Manchego. It is a nutty, firm sheep's cheese from Spain. I adore Delice de Bourgogne. It is a triple cream cow's milk cheese that is shamelessly rich. Some might liken it to Fromage d'Affinois, which I also adore. I recently made a baked Camembert (and shared the recipe on my blog Mystery Lovers Kitchen). It was so easy and so special for a party crowd. Delicious served with jam. And I crave St. Agur Blue cheese and Rogue River Blue, both are blue-veined cow's milk cheeses. Superb alone. Delicious melted into a fondue or incorporated into a grilled cheese sandwich or salad.

5. What do you like to do to unwind at the end of the day?

I like to finish my work, pour a glass of wine, and sit on the patio with my husband and talk about the day or our plans for the next day or week. Sometimes he will brainstorm with me. He's a very busy man, heavy into sports (he's a consultant), so often times we'll talk sports. We'll have a nice dinner, listen to the day's news, and then turn on the television and watch our favorite mysteries: *Castle*, *White Collar*, *Body of Proof*, *NCIS*, *The Good Wife*, *Blue Bloods*. Oh, yes, we watch them all. And our new favorite, *Homeland*. This show

has depth, flawed characters, and terrific pace. I'm jealous that I didn't come up with the premise.