

*I've been interviewed many times over the years,
for the Berkley Prime Crime newsletter,
on my blog tours, for magazines.*

Out of the many, I've created a single interview. I hope you enjoy the answers.

By Lori on Escape with Dollycas blog (2015)

What has been the hardest thing for you as a writer and all-around creative person?

Rejection. It's crushing! No two ways about it. You pour your heart and energy into a project, and then you hear from agents (publishers, readers) that it just didn't rock their world, and you wonder if you have it in you to write something else. It's difficult to sit back down at the computer and start a new project knowing the last was rejected. But you do. And you keep going. And you find the inspiration to keep at it. Perseverance. It takes work and grit. Even harder is when you hear (from an agent/publisher) that they "loved" the character and the writing and you and your vision and the *fill in the blank*, but they don't want it, and then follow up with this question: "What else do you have?" Like inspiration is pouring out of you in droves! Gack!

Do you come up with the recipes in your books or is there a 'ghost' chef?

I come up with all my own recipes. Sure, I might search cookbooks or the Internet for inspiration, but when the recipe is finalized, it's mine. I've baked it, tweaked it, worked out the kinks. I love to cook. I always have, unlike Jenna in the *Cookbook Nook* series who is learning as she goes. She never had to cook. Her mother did it all. Now she's digging in and enjoying it. She really likes recipes with five ingredients! If you haven't checked it out, come to the blog where I post recipes every week: Mystery Lovers Kitchen, a collective of authors who love to cook up crime. As for recipes with cheese, I had to learn all about the cheese before I got started in that direction. Cheese is a vast world and one I love to explore.

While visiting your website recently I had an "aha moment". You always looked familiar to me and now I know why. You were an actress on television. Mystery shows I loved to watch and popular commercials. Can you tell us a bit about your television experience? Both as an actress and a screenwriter.

After graduating college, I wanted to be an actress. I headed to Los Angeles, and I quickly found work. I was one of the lucky ones. I made a living doing, primarily, commercials. I had that girl-next-door face. You might have seen me pitching Diet Pepsi, Milky Way, Jell-O, Wonder Bread, and more. Cracking into film and television roles was a bit more difficult. I acted on "Murder, She Wrote." Angela

Lansbury, what a talent and what a lady. I won roles on hits like “Dallas,” “Hart to Hart,” and other TV shows, and I got close to nabbing a couple of series regular roles...but didn’t, and I soon realized I needed to write a vehicle for myself if I was going to have a bigger career. At first, I focused on television. Again, I was fortunate enough to come up with the idea for a TV show called “Out of this World,” which became successful in syndication. Then I turned my sights back to film. Writing the long-form screenplay really intrigued me. I loved telling a complete story. I loved writing dialogue. I wrote a few mysteries and thrillers. I wrote a couple of romantic comedies, too, that I felt were perfect for Julia Roberts and Meg Ryan. I was working on networking those possibilities into realities when...my husband was offered a new job across the country working for ESPN. Because my career had not yet soared, and even though I was still making a living as an actress, we decided that the move was right for our family. We had a young son. I turned my attention to writing novels.

Was it a difficult transition to cozy mysteries after writing screenplays?

No. Screenplay writing helped me see the overall structure of a story. When I gave up writing screenplays, I took novel writing classes. I read some fabulous books by Chris Roerden and Hallie Ephron that helped me understand how to enhance my plot, my prose, and my characters. While screenplays are visual, novels are internal. A reader wants to know what the protagonist is thinking and feeling. Learning how to “show” these aspects and not “tell” them was the hardest thing for me to learn.

In a Q&A on the Berkley Prime Crime Newsletter (2015)

You write cozies under 2 different names, Avery Aames and Daryl Wood Gerber. What made you decide to do so?

Avery came first. The publisher wanted a series about a cheese shop. I was not yet published. My agent put my name to the editor, and I auditioned and got the job. That is considered a work-for-hire, where the publisher owns the original idea. I get paid like all other writers, but it’s theirs in the long run. I had to choose a pseudonym so that, in the event the publisher wanted someone else—heaven forbid—to write the series, they could, using that name. Sort of like Carolyn Keene for the Nancy Drew series. I write under Daryl (my real name) because I came up with the idea for another series, the *Cookbook Nook* mysteries. My publisher loved the idea and bought three (to start). It’s confusing having two names, but I think my fans are getting used to it.

In a Q&A on the Berkley Prime Crime Newsletter (2014)

The Cookbook Nook mysteries are set in the fictional town of Crystal Cove, California, which is located somewhere below Santa Cruz and north of Monterey. Why did you set it there?

I am a native Californian, and although I've lived all over the United States, I adore my home state. It has so much to offer as far as weather and variety of terrain. I also adore the beach. So I decided that if I was going to spend a number of years with a new series, I wanted to set it where I'd like to vacation. Crystal Cove is very similar to the darling town of Capitola, which is south of Santa Cruz, not far from where I grew up, but my town is not a direct rip-off. In fact, it's an amalgamation of Capitola, Santa Barbara, and Newport Beach. It has its own flavor. Also, while developing the town—I create a city map, add stores, roads, and all the fun things to do—I fell in love with a landscape painting of Tuscany and decided that Crystal Cove would resemble that famous Italian area. Imagine all the red rooftops rising up the craggy mountains. It's so quaint and inviting.

In addition to the Cookbook Nook mysteries, you write the Cheese Shop mysteries under the pseudonym of Avery Aames. Is one series easier to write than the other?

The Cheese Shop mysteries, for right now, are definitely easier because I've known these characters for such a long time. I know all of Charlotte Bessette's likes and loves. After writing five books—the sixth is in the hopper—I have created full worlds for her grandparents, her nieces (who aren't really her nieces), her main squeeze, and her pals. However, because the Cookbook Nook mysteries are so new, the characters in them are always surprising me, which is so much fun for an author. It's like I'm with a whole new set of friends and we're cooking up crime...er, *fun!* Once I've started writing a book in one series, that is the story I focus on. I don't even think about the other series. I'm on a vacation with a bunch of my friends.

By Rocco on CatsBooksMoreCats blog (2013)

Tell us about your Cookbook Nook series. How did the idea for this come about?

I was scheduled to do a signing at a culinary bookstore in Virginia. The moment I walked into the store, I fell in love. There were not only cookbooks but fiction and nonfiction books about food. There were also culinary decorative items, foodie puzzles, aprons, and a whole section for children. Adorable! It was such a fun place to visit. I wanted to spend lots of time there. Now that I've set that as a setting in my series, I go every day.

From Bella on Cozy Mystery Book Reviews blog (2013)

How long have you been writing, as Daryl Wood Gerber and Avery Aames?

I started writing years and years ago. I began as a screenwriter and then, when we moved across the country, I started writing mysteries and thrillers. I became

officially published as Avery Aames (my pseudonym for the Cheese Shop Mystery series) in 2010. I became officially published as Daryl Wood Gerber (other than short stories) in 2013, with the launch of FINAL SENTENCE, the first in A Cookbook Nook Mystery series.

What are your inspirations?

I am inspired by so many things. People who persevere. My family. My friends. I love walking in nature and getting inspired by the beauty of trees, birds, flowers. I love listening to good music, which often acts as my muse.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to read, cook, garden, and take pictures. I golf, swim, and love to take long walks. And I adore visiting with family!!!

From an article by Susan Evans in the Sisters in Crime Guppies Newsletter (2011)

How has being an actress helped you create characters in your writing? What is your process in creating a character?

I love dialogue. I like to hear my characters talk. Often I'll stand on my feet and run through a scene. As for character, I like to build a character from the beginning. Where did she come from? Where are her parents? How many siblings? Was she a middle child, the eldest? Was she liked in school? What kind of student was she? Is she nosy (important for an amateur sleuth). Is she a perfectionist? What are her faults? All of this doesn't make it onto the page, but I try to offer bits and pieces in every book. Over the years, many of my protagonists have been too "perfect" and this has been a downfall for me. Many of my characters have been too "likeable." I need to build better flaws, weaknesses. I think a character can love too much, and that can be a flaw. A character can have dislikes; that's okay.

So what are the rules for a cozy? Is there anything you can say definitively?

A cozy needs a hook. Think: book cover. The publisher needs to know how its going to present the series to the world. How can it "hook" readers into the idea of reading this series? Janet Bolin's *Threadvile Mysteries* is a perfect example. It's new out in June and the cover depicts the town of Threadville, where tourists come to buy fabrics and notions. It's textured, it's alluring. In subsequent books, each of the covers will have something to do with embroidery or textiles. Readers that like these crafts will be drawn to the cover first. Lorna Barrett (Lorraine Bartlett's) Booktown series does the same thing. Krista Davis's *Domestic Diva mysteries* highlight a specific party or event the diva is planning. In the case of *A Cheese Shop Mystery* series, each book has cheese

somewhere on the book cover. A quiche, fondue, camembert . . . You get the idea. After that, winning characters and a good plot are required for cozies (like all books).

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.

How long does it take you to write a book?

If I do the outline in a month and it's approved, then I can write the book in 16-20 weeks, aiming at 2 chapters a week. But it's the outline that moves me ahead. I'm not a "pantser." I like a road map. I might go off-road occasionally and write a scene that wasn't in the outline, but in the end, I know who did it and why and how I'll get there. I love revelation moments, however, where a new clue or hint or red herring will come to me. Those are fabulous moments!

From Diane Morasco's blog, a couple of fun, quickie questions: (2011)

Favorite Holiday?

Christmas Day, the whole day. First, opening presents while having coffee and juice--the excitement is just too much for kids to sit down to a meal yet. Then we have brunch, usually go to a movie, and return to my favorite all-time meal, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (except now I have to make gluten-free pudding for myself...still yummy). I also love...and this is very special to me...saying grace before the evening meal, giving thanks for all that we have. I have been very blessed.

Favorite childhood toy?

I remember my doll, *Susie*. She was adorable with brown curls, a sweet smile, and eyes that opened and closed. About a month after I got her, she had to go to the doll hospital. When she came home, she looked a little different, but I loved her just the same.

Favorite childhood game?

Clue. Figuring out who was in which rooming doing what dastardly deed. Loved it. Still love it.