

Interview with Dollycas, 2015

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Did you have a mentor that encouraged your writing early in life?

I had a teacher who told me to give up writing forever. Kid you not! My seventh grade teacher. He said I didn't have talent. At the time, I had written a short story that he didn't like. Who was he to dash my dreams? All of you budding authors, don't buy into this kind of dialogue. However, I did believe him and I put my pen aside for a long, long time. It took the desire to write a screenplay to bring me back to the page. And I battled self-doubt (still do on occasion...) for many years. Rejection by agents didn't help. But I am nothing if not persevering. I won that award during high school. I'm not quite sure why. Hmm. I guess I was resolute even then. LOL

4. What do you draw on for inspiration when you sit down to write the Cheese Shop Mysteries?

Cheese. Ha-ha. Actually, I start with a theme, then ask myself "what if" and I go from there. I try to listen to my protagonist, Charlotte, and see what story she has to tell. I ask her about her feelings. I consider what challenges she must face. I also consider the play that Charlotte's grandmother will be putting on at the local theater because often that production will influence what happens in town. In *TO BRIE OR NOT TO BRIE*, Grandmère is putting on "Hamlet" in the Village Green, open-air. As it says in the blurb for the book, *Revenge, secrets, murder. Shakespeare has arrived in Providence*. I love Shakespeare. Thinking about his drama stirred all sorts of intrigue in my mind.

5. When you pick up a book to read just for fun, what type of book do you like to escape into?

I love reading thrillers as well as mysteries. It truly depends on my mood. I love to read my fellow authors on both of my blogs, *Mystery Lovers' Kitchen* and *Killer Characters*. All are wonderful writers. However, I love to escape into a Lisa Gardner, Meg Gardiner, or Jamie Freveletti action- or suspense-packed novel, as well.

6. What are your reading right now?

I'm judging a contest for Thrillerfest, a thriller conference held each year, so I am reading a ton...literally a ton...of debut novels. Some have been great. Some were mysteries (and terrific), but they were not thrillers. Many didn't grab my

interest. When I'm done with this commitment, I have a Jamie Freveletti thriller and a Julie Hyzy cozy waiting on my night stand. Yay!

7. You are writing a new series coming out in July. Would you like to tell us a little bit about it?

Oh, yes, please! It's called A COOKBOOK NOOK MYSTERY. The first title is FINAL SENTENCE, a tribute to the "book-ish" theme of the series. Get it? Anyway, this is so much fun. I'm writing under my "real" name, Daryl Wood Gerber. The story is set in the fictional seaside town of Crystal Cove, California (sort of between Monterey and Santa Cruz). It features Jenna Hart, a foodie and avid reader and former ad exec, who helps her aunt open a cookbook store and café that should have opened thirty years ago. Like my Cheese Shop Mysteries, the books will include recipes. I've been cooking up a ton of cookies! I've always been a cook, and I have a great collection of cookbooks, but I am learning so much more as I explore the world of cookbooks. I was inspired to write the series after visiting a darling cookbook store called Salt & Pepper in Occoquan, Virginia. The owner was selling not only cookbooks but culinary mysteries (like many of those from Mystery Lovers' Kitchen authors), fictional foodie mysteries, and knickknacks. I got lost in the store and knew I could get lost in this series. My editor is very excited. She loves the new world.

8. If money was no object and you could escape to anywhere in the world to write, where would you go and what do you think the book would be about?

Great question!! I would escape to Lake Tahoe. I spent all my summers there as a girl, and it's still the most inspirational place in the world to me. The lake is incredibly beautiful. The scent of the pines stirs my soul. I love to swim in the icicle-cold water, take hikes, and meditate. I have written a number of suspense and thriller novels set in Lake Tahoe, so I would like to rewrite all of them and get them published. I also have one thriller, a work-in-progress, set in the San Francisco Bay Area that I would like to finish, as well. Oh, and there's a women's fiction story—magical in nature—that I'd like to write, too. So much to do...lots of time!