

Criminal Intent

Featuring: Janet Bolin

Interviewed by: Karen Blake-Hall



Janet Bolin is the author of Dire Threads, the first in the Threadville Mystery series. It has been nominated for the Agatha Award for best first novel and the Bony Blithe. Janet is a member of Crime Writers of Canada. She has been a member of Sisters in Crime for 13 years.

Q: How did you come up with the idea of writing a series of books about embroidery?

A: I blame my critique partner, Krista Davis, author of the Domestic Diva Mystery series. I was attempting a cozy series about other hobbies. Krista knew I loved to play with machine embroidery, and kept telling me I should base a mystery series on it. I kept saying, "Yeah, yeah, as soon as I finish this." Krista tends to be very determined. She told her editor, who was then at Berkley, that she knew someone who wrote mysteries and could turn a photograph into an embroidery design. The editor said she'd like to see a proposal for a series about machine embroidery. I didn't need much persuading to write that proposal . . .

Q: When I read your story I want to buy an embroidery machine and join in the fun. Have other readers told you the same thing and how hard is it to capture the fun of the craft in your stories?

A: Other readers have told me that. And those machines and what they can do are fabulous. I could spend hours, days, in shops that sell them. Capturing the fun of something one enjoys probably isn't difficult. We can't help being enthusiastic about our hobbies. Coming up with ways to make a hobby important to the plot can be difficult, however. Fortunately, there are lots of great hobbies in Threadville.

Q: I grew up in a small town, and you have a fabulous cast of characters, in the wonderful town of Elderberry Bay, nicknamed Threadville. Did you base Elderberry Bay on a real place?

A: Thank you! I grew up in a small town, also, and after years in cities, I now live in a rural area surrounded by small towns. Conflict in small towns can be more personal than in cities, but we can all identify with the sorts of personal tensions that grow into major problems. Ontario is just full of cozy towns—Stratford, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Paris, St.

Jacobs, to name a few. I combined several of them and put them on the Pennsylvania side of Lake Erie, not too far from where my parents spent their last days. And then I added people whose goals don't exactly mesh.

Q: You address the small town atmosphere versus a development. Have you experienced this in your own life?

A: I think we've all seen what happens when one faction sees change as beneficial while another wants to keep things as they are. In Threadville, Willow and her friends see replacing boarded-up buildings with thriving stores as progress. Other people, one in particular, don't like the way the village is being taken over by crafty women, and want to turn Elderberry Bay into a destination for ATV and snowmobile riders. Willow and her friends naturally don't think that noisy, smelly machines will improve the village. I guess you can tell which side I'm on. Fabrics aren't noisy, and they usually smell rather good. And the toys available for playing with fabric, thread, and yarn are amazing! But no one can sit on them and ride around at great speed, so they're not popular with everyone.

Q: *Dire Threads* has been nominated for the Agatha Award, and the 'Bony Blithe' Light Mystery Award. When you started writing this book did you ever imagine these awards and how has it affected writing the next book?

A: When I started writing *Dire Threads*, I was petrified. I'd sold it based on a synopsis and the first three chapters, and I was afraid of not being able to finish it! Holding my published book in my hands for the first time was amazing. The whole process has been amazing. The nominations were a thrilling surprise. Except for my final proofreading of the galley proofs, my second book, *Threaded for Trouble*, was in the hands of my publisher when I found out about the nominations. And I'd already written my third manuscript and was revising it. So I didn't spend much time being petrified.

Q: Your next book, *Threaded for Trouble* is coming out soon. What can the readers expect from Willow and the rest of the characters of Threadville?

A: In *Threaded for Trouble*, a ðkillerö sewing machine lives up to its name. Unfortunately, the killer sewing machine (and its killer successor) came from Willowö shop. Willow and her friends want to clear the machineö good name (if it has one.) They snoop around by bringing casseroles to the bereaved family, joining the volunteer fire department, dining in an upscale restaurant, and running around in peculiar disguises at the Harvest Festival.

Q: Do you have a day job or are you able to write full time, and how do you find time to write with your family?

A: I write full time, but do spend a lot of time with family and friends--and with my dogs who are mysteriously similar to Willowö dogs.

Q: You went for an agent and traditional publishing instead of e-publishing. Why?

A: I had a dream of being published by a major publisher. It was a challenge that required persistence and many years of learning the craft--and of learning about rejection. Finally, my dream came true. My books are sold worldwide as paperbacks, e-books, and in large print versions. My agent is a wonderful support, my editor is brilliant, and Penguin takes care of all the little details so I can concentrate on writing. The traditional route may not work for everyone, but itö perfect for me.

Q: How has being a Sister in Crime affected you?

A: Iö not sure Iö have ever learned enough about being published if I hadnö joined Sisters in Crime and the Guppies chapter back in, oh, about 1999. I had just moved from the Toronto area to a New York City suburb. At NY chapter meetings, I met agents and editors and discovered they were approachable. Soon after I returned to Ontario, I joined the Toronto chapter. Since I no longer live in the Toronto area, attending meetings can be a problem, but when I do, I love the information and the camaraderie.

For more information about **Janet Bolin**, visit: <http://threadvillemysteries.com/>

Crime Scene, the newsletter of the Toronto Chapter of Sisters in Crime, is published every two months.

We encourage reprints, but only with credit to the articleö writer(s) and the Toronto chapter, and after notifying the Newsletter Editor at newsletter@torontosistersincrime.ca

© 2015 Sisters in Crime ö Toronto Chapter. All rights reserved.