

Criminal Intent

Featuring: Lisa de Nikolits

Interviewed by: Janet Costello



Lisa de Nikolits is the author of two novels, several short stories and poems, and the soon-to-be-released mystery, A Glittering Chaos. She is a member of Crime Writers of Canada. For the last year she has been our Sister.

Q: Your heroine, Melusine, does not speak English. What challenges did this present in writing a novel in English?

A: Quite a few, actually. I had to be really aware of tracking that in the story. She could be asked a question by someone in English, and I couldn't let her understand or answer, I had to present her narrative in a non-English voice as well. I'm half-Hungarian, so I'm aware there are certain intonations to English. It was important to keep the tonality and plot consistent to her German roots. To do that, I tried to picture myself as a German person. It took a lot of discipline, really; it was outside of the realm of anything I've done before.

Q: Talk about the most surprising way Las Vegas plays a role in *A Glittering Chaos*.

A: What was surprising was the natural environment. Melusine and Gunther had their encounter away from the city, and not in the middle of the casinos and sex shows. My husband and I were married in Vegas. It astounded me how extraordinarily beautiful it is in Nevada.

Q: Sex! You have some very steamy scenes in your writing. It's also mentioned in most of your reviews. How many purposes does it serve for you?

The funny thing is, this is the first book I've written with any sex scenes. *West of Wawa* had the main character get together with a boy, for sex, but when they got into it, I just faded to black. *Chatelaine* magazine had criticized me for that. I don't have a single genre I write in. This week I went to a reading given by writer Andrew Kaufman. He said he writes about things he's been grappling with and at the end he feels it's resolved. A light went on for me when I heard that. I had my whole thing wondering could I write sex? It's an aspect of Vegas—everyone knows there's a sexual side to Vegas. But what is erotic to people? And Melusine was reaching a certain age. How are you supposed to be a sexual being when you're older? I dealt with more than sex is love. When she connected with Gunther it was not so much about the sex as it was a glorious appreciation of her.

Q: Guilt is a very big motivation for your characters. Describe one technique you used to prevent this from taking the shine off of *A Glittering Chaos*.

A: Because the creative process wins over guilt. In life it's so easy to get trampled by guilt. The creative process is whether it's knitting, writing, painting, or

baking or can channel it. Yah! (Lisa has such a mix of accents!) Guilt can lead to the triumph of the creative process.

Q: You are a Canadian, via South Africa, Australia and the U.S., writing about Germans. The turning point for your characters takes place in Las Vegas, and plays out in Germany. Do you consider this Canadian literature?

A: Initially I wanted to bring Melusine to Canada. I was discussing the plot with Chris Bucci, of the Anne McDermid & Associates Agency. He said, no, you have a good story here as it is. My publisher and I feel it's a novel of empowerment. There's no direct Canadian link in this one, but I was very assured that it was not required.

Q: A favourite quote of yours is Albert Einstein's "There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle." Will this philosophy be instilled in a character in all of your novels?

A: Yes. I think that probably sums up my entire life.

Q: The crimes in *A Glittering Chaos* are so tightly woven into the characters' essences, in that they could be in different circumstances and still end up committing the crimes. Do you consider this to be a crime novel?

A: I do. A multi-layered crime novel. It took a lot of figuring out of the plot. I'm always intrigued by crime and real life. The level of crimes that could have been committed and those that were committed. I had to do a lot of research on German policing. I'm not experienced at crime-writing, so I wanted something believable, and not show my naiveté.

Q: Tell us about Inanna Publications, whose tag line is "essential reading for feminists the world over".

A: Inanna is out of York University. Luciana Ricciutelli is my wonderful editor and publisher-in-chief. We met when I was looking to publish *The Hungry Mirror*. They've been around since 1978. They publish everything—poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. They are unafraid of what they publish and they stand behind those women's voices. It's very liberating. When you read their books, it's a huge experience. I've met many of their authors. It's a wonderful environment and a lovely community.

Q: What is next in store from you?

A: Inanna has just accepted *The Witch Doctor's Bones*. I've never struggled that hard to find a title! Finally I came up with it. That same day, my father phoned from South Africa. He was talking to Caiphus who looks after the farm. Caiphus's bicycle had been stolen and he needed to borrow money for the witch doctor to throw the bones to find the bicycle. Isn't that incredible? This novel has a bunch of tourists in Namibia; it's very Agatha Christie-like. They start killing each other off. It's coming out in 2014.

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

A: I met Madeleine Harris-Callway at a book club. She

told me in May of 2010 about Bloody Words. That was a pivotal point in my writing career. At Bloody Words 2012, I joined Sisters in Crime. Even though I haven't been to a meeting, I felt part of the community immediately. The lunch they had after Bloody Words was great! Some groups in Toronto are judgmental or negatively competitive. Sisters in Crime is so supportive, and positive about everyone else's work. They are so happy when people do well.

Learn more about Lisa and her books by visiting

<http://www.lisadenikolitswriter.com/>

Inanna Publications: <http://www.inanna.ca/about.html>

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