

Creating a Detective



Creating a Detective by Karen McCullough

I'm sure there was a time in my childhood when I didn't read, but I can't remember it. By second grade I was reading Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys, initiating my lifelong love of mysteries and detective novels. A few years later I graduated to raiding my family's library and discovered Nero Wolfe, Archie Goodwin, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, among others.

There have been others since-lots of them. Stephanie Plum, Jack Reacher, Tempe Crabtree, and others have given me fascinating and fun adventures.

When I began writing, mysteries were a natural. In my career in trade publishing, I'd realized that a trade show would make a great setting for a mystery novel. The stakes are high for the exhibitors and attendees, the time is short, the place is constrained normally to one (large) building, and the cast of characters limited to a group of people who've often known each other for a long time.

The only question was: who would be my detective?

If this was going to be a series, it would likely need to be someone on the management staff of one of the large "market center" buildings or convention centers where trade shows are normally held. I knew I wanted my detective to be fairly young, but competent and confident. She had to be in a position where she could spend a lot of time with the exhibitors, where it would even be part of her job to handle "problems" that came up during the show.

I thought about making her the Center's director, but I felt that would actually constrain her with too much administrative work. I considered having her be the head of security, but that didn't seem to fit the personality I wanted for her. I needed her to be someone who would seem non-threatening to the exhibitors, someone they could talk to and share their problems, complaints, and worries. At the same time, she had to have some authority to get things done while using her judgement to solve problems.

I finally decided to make her the assistant to the director, the person the director relied on to handle problems because she was good at it.

That put her in a position to know the businesses and people she dealt with well enough to make her credible. It would also make it part of her job to solve the kind of issues that might lead to murder.

Finally she had to be intelligent and possess a strong sense of integrity and desire for justice. Thus was born Heather McNeil, assistant to the director of the Washington DC Commerce & Market Center, and the protagonist of *A Gift For Murder*, the first of my Market Center Mysteries.

About my guest:

Karen McCullough is the author of a number of novels in the romantic suspense, fantasy, and mystery genres, including *A Question of Fire*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Wizard's Bridge*, and *Witch's Journey*. Her novella "Heart of the Night" is part of the *Shadowed Hearts* series of Gothic romance novellas, and "Vampire's Christmas Carol" was published in the *Beneath a Christmas Moon* anthology of paranormal Christmas stories. More information on her books can be found at <http://www.kmccullough.com>.

The heroine of *A Gift for Murder*, Heather McNeil, is assistant to the director of the fictional Washington, D.C. Commerce & Market Center. In that role she gets to mediate disputes between feuding exhibitors, field complaints about dirty carpet, deal with malfunctioning popcorn machines, and generally provide a sympathetic ear to unhappy clients. Finding the body of a murdered executive during the biggest show of the year isn't part of the job description. Nor is trying to find the murderer, but from various things she's heard, Heather is pretty sure the authorities are off-base in their suspicion that the executive's wife killed him. If she doesn't identify the real murderer herself, the odds are that person will get away with it and possibly kill again.

A Gift for Murder is projected as the first in a series of "Market Center Mysteries," with additional books and stories to come. A website for the series is now open at <http://www.marketceintermysteries.com> for more information about the books, settings, and characters.

Thank you, Karen, for visiting today.
Marilyn

Posted by Marilyn Meredith a.k.a. F. M. Meredith at 3:02 AM 
Labels: *A Gift for Murder*, *A Question of Fire*, Karen McCullough

3 comments:



Jaden Terrell said...

I love to hear how other authors come up with their characters. Thank youm Karen, for sharing. And thank you, Meredith, for hosting.

January 10, 2011 7:26 AM



Marilyn Meredith a.k.a. F. M. Meredith said...

Hi, Jaden. I thought she did a great job telling us about her character choice. Thanks for commenting.

Marilyn

January 11, 2011 8:21 AM

Karen McCullough said...

Hi Jaden - :Waving furiously: Good to see you here! And Marilyn, thanks for having me and letting me expound a bit!
January 11, 2011 4:41 PM

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