

A Word Please

A glimpse into the world of author Darcia Helle

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04 Karen McCullough Talks Sequels

OCT Author: Darcia Helle // Category: Literary Corner

Today I'm happy to present author [Karen McCullough](#), another guest from our [25 Years in the Rearview Mirror: 52 Authors Look Back blog tour](#). If you've missed the earlier posts, this project began as a tie-in to Stacy Juba's mystery book [Twenty-Five Years Ago Today](#). Stacy invited her author colleagues to answer the question "What were you doing 25 years ago?" The series of essays appeared on her blog, and is now all together in one ebook! Karen has written an interesting piece about her challenges with writing a sequel (which I can relate to!). Time for me to step aside and let Karen do the talking.

Writing the Sequel

A year and a half ago, my first mystery from Five Star/Gale Group/Cengage was released in hardcover. This past June it came out in paperback from Harlequin's Worldwide Mystery Library imprint, and it should be available in ebook form shortly.

A Gift for Murder is set at a Washington, D.C. market center, where a variety of trade shows, exhibitions, and business conferences are held. My heroine/detective is the assistant to the director of the center.

A Gift for Murder was intended to be the first of a series of "Market Center Mysteries." At the time I was writing A Gift for Murder, I knew what the title and plot of the second book would be. I already had ideas for a number of major incidents and turning points in the story.

Three years later it's still only half written, though I've recently gotten back into the story and have made significant progress on it. Considering how much I knew about plot and characters right after I finished the first book, the next one should have been easy. It hasn't been, but mostly for reasons unrelated to the story itself.

I can write in most circumstances. I started writing when my kids were in grade school. I was working part time then, so it wasn't like I had a lot of free time, but I wrote several novels during those years. I did have a five-year hiatus from writing when I had a full-time job and four teenagers living with me. My life wasn't exactly empty when I was finally able to return to writing, but I was at a point where I could manage to balance the demands of each.

Writing is important to me—very important—but my family means even more. When the needs of one are in conflict with the other, the family takes precedence. And for the last couple of years, I've had a lot going on, including one daughter's wedding, another daughter's divorce, and the first daughter's problem pregnancy that ended with her child being born ten weeks early.

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It's not just that family situations and crises take up all my time. They sap my mental energy as well. As I've gotten back into writing the sequel, which I've tentatively titled WIRED FOR MURDER, I've been reminded of how much mental energy I use in writing.

Yes, I already know the characters and the broad outlines of the plot, but the real work of writing a story is in the many small decisions the writer makes about details, actions and interactions on each page. Think about it. Every word an author writes is a decision. Every detail added has to be considered for whether it says something valuable and interesting about a character, the setting, or the plot. Plus every little piece has to advance the plot and contribute to the overall picture that the entire novel eventually forms.

It takes a huge amount of mental effort to keep all those pieces in mind and in order to make sure they all fall into place exactly where they should when the book is done.



Karen McCullough is the author of a dozen published novels and novellas in the mystery, romantic suspense, and fantasy genres and has won numerous awards, including an Eppie Award for fantasy. She's also been a four-time Eppie finalist, and a finalist in the Prism, Dream Realm, Rising Star, Lories, Scarlett Letter, and Vixen Awards contests. Her short fiction has appeared in several anthologies and numerous small press publications in the fantasy, science fiction, and romance genres. She has three children, three grandchildren and lives in Greensboro, NC, with her husband of many years.

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Blog: www.kmccullough/kblog

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/kgmccullough> or @kgmccullough



For fifty-one weeks of the year, Heather McNeil loves her job as assistant to the director of the Washington, D.C. Commerce & Market Show Center. But the Gifts and Home Decorations trade show, the biggest show of the year at the center, is a week-long nightmare. This year's version is being worse than usual. Misplaced shipments, feuding exhibitors, and malfunctioning popcorn machines are all in a day's work. Finding the body of a murdered executive dumped in a trash bin during the show isn't. The discovery tips throws Heather's life—personal and professional—into havoc.

The police suspect the victim's wife killed him, but Heather doesn't believe it. She's gottenglimmers of an entirely different scenario and possible motive. Questioning exhibitors about the crime doesn't make her popular with them or with her employers, but if she doesn't identify the murderer before the show ends, the culprit will remain free to kill again.

Her only help comes from an exhibitor with ulterior motives and the Market Center's attractive new security officer, Scott Brandon. Despite opposition from some of the exhibitors, her employers, and the police, Heather seeks to expose the killer before the show ends. To solve the mystery, she will havehas to risk what's most important to her and be prepared to fight for answers, her job, and possibly her life.

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Now let's take a look at the book that brought us all together:



This collection of poignant and uplifting essays is the perfect book to enjoy over your morning coffee. The stories will warm your heart, raise your spirits and compel you to examine your own life. As a tie-in to her mystery book *Twenty-Five Years Ago Today*, novelist and award-winning journalist Stacy Juba invited her author colleagues to answer the question "What were you doing 25 years ago?" Read about school days, quirky jobs, romance, raising a family, hard times, the writing journey, and find out what makes your favorite characters tick. This 30,000-word book will help readers to discover new authors for their to-read list, and inspire them to reflect upon the small defining moments that have shaped their own lives. As a bonus, readers are invited to interact with the authors and discuss the past and the future in an online forum, with details in the Appendix.

25 Years in the Rearview Mirror: 52 Authors Look Back is available in ebook format only. You can find it on [Amazon](#) and [Amazon UK](#) for Kindle, [Barnes and Noble](#) for Nook, and [Smashwords](#) in any ebook format you choose.



Tags: *25 Years Ago*, *25 Years in the Rearview Mirror*, *A Gift for Murder*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Essay Collections*, *Harlequin Worldwide Mystery Library*, *Humorous Essays*, *Inspirational Essays*, *Karen McCullough*, *Market Center Mysteries*, *mystery series*, *Mystery Series Authors*, *Mystery Series Writing*, *Twenty-Five Years Ago Today*, *Wired for Murder*, *Writing A Series*, *Writing the Sequel*

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**Stacy Juba** · 12 days ago

Great post, Karen! I totally relate to the juggling act of balancing writing with family and needing a special energy to be able to write. I was just telling someone today that I need to take a day or two off soon so I can refuel and get back into that creative mindset needed to write my new book. I love the title A Gift for Murder.

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**Darcia Helle** · 11 days ago · parent

Stacy, the balancing act definitely seems to be the biggest hurdle. I sure can't get it right!

I can absolutely relate to the sequel dilemma. I'm having my issues with book #3 in my series. I find a series requires more mental energy than a stand-alone. I think it's about keeping all the little quirks and character traits consistent. Plus, too many other voices are in my head competing. They figure these characters have had more than their fair share of my time!

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