



Q&A WITH STARS IN THE NIGHT AUTHOR

CARA PUTMAN

The glamour and glitz of 1942 Hollywood meet Murder on the Orient Express.

You have a passion and gift for writing historical fiction. What was your inspiration for setting this book in Hollywood during WWII?

Growing up I loved all things 1930s and 1940s. The music. The movies. The glamour and glitz. I also am a student of WWII. That made it natural for me to look for the untold stories of WWII when I started writing novels. It was through the hunt for a real event that occurred in Hollywood during the war that I got the what if for *Stars in the Night*. The actual Victory Caravan was filled with A list stars of the time when it took off. Those stars included Bing Crosby, Abbott & Costello, Grouch Marx and many more. The papers at the time commented that if anything happened on the train, the stars would go out in Hollywood. With that real event as my inspiration, I created a second Hollywood Victory Caravan, filled it with B-list stars from my imagination, and added a *Murder on the Orient Express* feel. The result is *Stars in the Night*.

Authors have different methods for how they write their books. You spoke about sitting in a Panera as the ending neared. Is this how you typically write your books, and why was this method chosen?

When I started writing, I had to be the queen of stealing moments when I could because I had young children. This often meant writing after 9 p.m., but on rare occasions I'd find a babysitter for a couple hours of writing during the day. By the time I was writing *Stars in the Night* I had four children, was homeschooling, teaching law at a university, and writing with a little law on the side. It was intense, but that meant when I had a babysitter and some daylight hours to write, I would leave the house to get some space to create.

Since we didn't have a coffee shop nearby, I'd head to Panera and pound away on my laptop for a couple hours. It was during one of those writing bursts that I realized I was reaching

the end of my word count and wasn't sure who was behind the murders. I called my writing buddy Robin Miller and talked through the plot hunched over my phone in Panera. I'm still surprised no one called the police to report a conspiracy to commit murder.

How do you balance all the roles you have along with being a writer?

My husband calls me the most disciplined person he knows. What that means is that because writing is important to me, I've cut other things from my schedule in order to create space for writing. I don't know what's current on TV. I've read books about *The Office* and other shows, but I've never seen them. The time that used to go into watching TV is now and has been devoted to writing since 2005. Pursuing my dream of writing was more important to me, so I made it a priority. There have also been seasons I didn't get a lot of sleep so that I could get my word count in and finish books.

Which character did you enjoy developing the most and why?

Audra was an interesting character to write because she went to law school at a time that the few women who graduated had a difficult time finding work as attorneys. She also is the non-Hollywood person thrust into the middle of the studio world. It was fun to imagine what it would be like to go from reading about the stars in LOOK to rubbing shoulders with them.

Due to technology the number of Indie writers has drastically increased. What do you enjoy the most about being a hybrid writer, one who works with traditional publishing houses and then releases books on your own? Is there advice you would give for those who are looking to break into self-publishing?

I've been blessed to work with some great publishers and hope to continue to do that in the future because I appreciate the partnership aspects of working together with them on editing, marketing, and sales. Frankly, I never expected to stick my toes in the indie publishing world, but then I started getting the rights back to my early books. I love my books, and so I decided to rerelease them to the world of readers. I hired proofreaders and cover designers and learned the process with the help of my friend Lacy Williams.

There are so many layers to indie publishing, but I think there are a couple of keys. First, don't short cut on editing. I've written three novellas for indie novella collections, but for each

I've hired a friend who is an editor to make sure the story is the best it can be before I include it. If you don't take the time to make sure the story works, the characters are ones readers will connect with, and the grammar is correct, you'll lose readers.

Second, there are so many indie books being published, it is difficult to find an audience. You'll need a presence on social media – start with one and master it – and marketing will consume time.

Third, know why you're writing. Do you have a story that won't leave you alone? Feel a passion to interact with readers or write the book you wish you could read? If you don't know you're why, it will be daunting. But if you love it start with 500 words a day and keep writing. In a year you'll have a finished novel you can start editing.