

Murder and mayhem rule in Deborah Crombie's *Where Memories Lie*

DEBORAH CROMBIE'S ROSE-PAINTED, circa 1905 historic home is nestled in downtown McKinney, but England is where her heart is, and it is the setting for all 13 of her classic detective novels, including #12 in the Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James series, *Where Memories Lie*.

Published by HarperCollins, the 295-page suspense thriller takes readers to the streets of London where Superintendent Duncan Kincaid and Detective Inspector Gemma James are caught in a web of deceit that leads to murder.

When Gemma's friend Erika Rosenthal, a Jewish German woman in her 90s, discovers that a double-drop diamond brooch has turned up at a London auction house, she asks Gemma to investigate its provenance. Erika is certain the brooch is an heirloom, made by her father, a famous Art Deco jeweler, that Erika lost during her escape from Berlin in 1939. So where has it been and how did it end up in London? Simple questions lead to a complex investigation where Erika's past comes back to haunt her and kill those connected with the brooch.

England is the setting of all of Crombie's murder mysteries because, according to the author and her predecessor, P. D. James, who was recently

inducted in the 2008 International Crime Writing Hall of Fame, a structured society contradicts a complex murder. Said Crombie, "I've always been a P. D. James fan, and she once said that the British society tends to have more rules, and so the contrast between its structure and violent crime is more shocking."

Crombie added, "Another interesting thing, particularly for crime writers, is that the classes are much more defined and there are infinite variations. More classes offer more opportunities for conflict."

But conflict, to Crombie, doesn't mean riveting crime scenes bleeding off the pages. "I don't go for messy murders that are bloody and shocking. I think death is shocking enough in itself," she said.

What the author is more interested in is the emotional impact her crime scenes have on her characters. "I work hard to find some way my detectives can have an emotional investment in the case. I think that makes it a lot more interesting for the readers."

For example, in *Where Memories Lie*, Gemma agrees to investigate the brooch's provenance because Erika is her close friend. Erika doesn't actually appear in the Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James series until book five, *And Justice There is None*, but the author said, "Erika is one of those characters that just came to life."

All of Crombie's novels are character driven but this one, she said, is more emotionally intense, and that's no lie. Practically every character in *Where Memories Lie* is going through some personal crisis. For example, Gemma's mom is diagnosed with leukemia, and readers sympathize with her. Readers become emotionally attached and not just to this novel, but to the series.

Of course, that is the author's motive. Every book in the Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James series stands on its own, but Crombie hopes that her readers become so attached to the characters that they will go back and read the first book if they begin the series with *Where Memories Lie*.

Growing up, Crombie never thought about becoming a published crime writer, but her first clue was she loved reading British crime novels. "I read voraciously by the time I was 4 years old, and they were my favorite thing to read. I was an Anglophile when I was a little kid."

A second clue came when she visited England for the first time. "I just..." she paused, "absolutely loved it. I felt like England was where I was meant to be and that feeling has never gone away."

That visit didn't come until after she graduated from Austin College and endured a rather "checked-out" educational career, including dropping out of high school at 16. Later, the author married her first husband, a Scot, and they moved to Edinburgh, Scotland, and then to Chester, England, and lived there for several years.

When they moved back to the States and returned to England on a trip, Crombie realized England's potential as the setting for a good crime novel. "At the time, I was really homesick for England, so I decided to write a novel."

Perhaps Crombie got the writing gene from her uncle, a relatively famous Texas writer, who was posthumously inducted into the Texas Literary Hall of Fame. After all, it only took six months before she sold her first novel, *Share in Death*. Of course Crombie credits luck as opposed to talent. "I was



Author **Deborah Crombie**.
Profile photo

really lucky. I worked really hard at it, but I was really lucky."

Charles Scribners and Sons, which today is owned by Simon & Shuster, picked up her first five books. (Crombie noted that they published Hemingway.) Then, Bantam bought the following three books, and now she is writing her fifth book for William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins, which is # 13 in the Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James series. Her novels are published in North America, Japan, Germany, Italy, France, Norway, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Romania, Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

Although Crombie doesn't plan on moving to the UK any time soon, she spends about two months out of the year there plotting her next book. "I do a lot of what I call front-loading, working out detailed life stories for the characters."

She always resolves what happens at the end of each book but there's usually some conflict brewing in the lives of the continuing characters, like Duncan Kincaid and Gemma James. Said Crombie, "You want people to be dying to read the next book!"

Crombie's next book, *Necessary as Blood*, will be available this summer. In the meantime, pick up *Where Memories Lie* at your local bookstore, and visit deborahcrombie.com.

— BRITNEY PORTER

excerpt

From *Where Memories Lie*

Erika Rosenthal woke, her body jerking from the whump of the bomb, the flash of light from the incendiary flickering against her closed eyelids. She threw back the scratchy wool blanket and had half reached for David to shake him awake when she realized the night was silent.



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