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# THE DAMES' DOCKET

*A Bimonthly Newsletter from Level Best Books*



Editor: Harriette Sackler

Production: Shawn Reilly Simmons

## GREETINGS FROM THE DAMES

When we sent you our last newsletter, who could have imagined how much life would change for all of us? We're all suffering the effects of this terrible pandemic, but need to remember that we're not alone.

Level Bests Books is continuing its work of publishing wonderful books and bringing new, promising authors on board. We've found that for ourselves as well as others, reading provides a tremendous escape from the anxiety and concerns of our lives.

To all the heroes who are on the front lines as first responders, medical personnel, mail carriers, supermarket and pharmacy workers, and other selfless people who are out there so we can stay at home and help flatten the curve, we sincerely thank you.

We hope you are all safe and well. One of these days, we'll have the opportunity to get together and celebrate all the good in our lives. Until then, stay in touch with us and let us know how you're doing.

Our thoughts are with you.

Harriette, Verena, and Shawn

## IN CONVERSATION WITH LIZ MILLIRON

### **Tell us a bit about yourself.**

Oh, what's interesting? I've always wanted to write, but I didn't get serious about it until I lost a long-time job in 2011. I started a novel back in 1997, pre-kids, but put it aside in the chaos of child-rearing and working. When the job disappeared, my husband suggested I take the summer off and finish the book. That manuscript went in a digital drawer (where it belongs), but in the process I met wonderful people, joined Sisters in Crime, got serious about the craft – all of which led me to eventual publication in 2018. Yes, I'm an 11-year overnight success story.

The kids are older now, one about to be a junior in college and one graduating high school (how did that happen?). I live in Pittsburgh, still married, and I added a retired-racer greyhound to my family in March 2019. I have a new day-job working as a technical writer. It allows me to work from home and provides the financial stability I need to pursue my fiction. I can play piano and violin, even though I haven't touched either in years. I sing in my church choir. Oh, and I'm a second-degree taekwondo Black Belt.

### **Liz, you're writing two series, *The Laurel Highlands Mysteries* and *The Homefront Mystery Series*. What was your inspiration for both series?**

There was never a doubt I'd write a mystery, because that's what I loved to read. That first manuscript (the one in the drawer) was a cozy, and I never quite connected with the characters. But then right after I joined Sisters in Crime, I went on retreat with my local chapter to the Laurel Highlands. We stayed in the town of Confluence and I kinda fell in love with the area. On that retreat, there was a note in the guest register, "Watch out for the Creeper." Well, what mystery author can resist that? I started thinking about that line and what kind of story could be built around it. Who would the characters be? I came up with state trooper Jim Duncan and public defender Sally Castle. I read a lot of police-procedurals, thrillers, and suspense, so I connected with these characters almost instantly and the series took off from there.

For *The Home Front Mysteries*, it was a bit different. I'd always written contemporary and said I'd "never" write historical. Well, never say never. When the call went out for the *Malice Domestic* anthology "Mystery Most Historical," I started thinking about what kind of short

story I could write (because I could do a historical short story, of course I could) and one of the first things that came to mind was my grandmother, who worked for Bell Aircraft in Buffalo during WWII. And I asked myself the magical “what if?” questions, wrote the story, and to my delight it was accepted. I never intended to write a novel though, until a couple years later. I’d been querying *Root of All Evil*, the first in The Laurel Highlands Mysteries series without much luck. A friend suggested trying my hand at something different and voila! there was Betty Ahern, right at hand saying, “I’ve got a story for you.”

### **What is one book you’ve read that you wish you had written?**

Oh gosh, just one? If we’re talking mystery, I think I’d have to say *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie. It’s just so perfectly plotted and while none of the characters are what you might call “nice people,” you want to follow all of them. I was in a panel during... Bouchercon in Dallas, I think, and I heard that book described as a pioneer in psychological suspense and I think that’s perfect.

If we expand to all genres, I wish I’d written the Harry Potter series. Yes, some people say it has flaws, but it’s lasting and magical, and I wish I’d written something that has that kind of staying power – not only maintaining its popularity with the original audience, but constantly garnering new fans.

### **Do you have one piece of advice to offer aspiring writers?**

Find your tribe. Whatever your genre, there is a professional writing group to support it. For me, that was Sisters in Crime. I learned so much from them about being a professional writer (as opposed to a dabbler). More importantly, I found people who could cheer my successes, and commiserate with my stumbles, and help me become a better writer. I would not be published without them.

## Bio

Liz Milliron is the author of The Laurel Highlands Mysteries series, set in the scenic Laurel Highlands of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and The Home Front Mysteries, set in Buffalo, NY during the early years of World War II. She is a member of Sisters in Crime, Pennwriters, and International Thriller Writers. Soon to be an empty-nester, Liz lives outside Pittsburgh with her husband, two children, and a retired-racer greyhound.

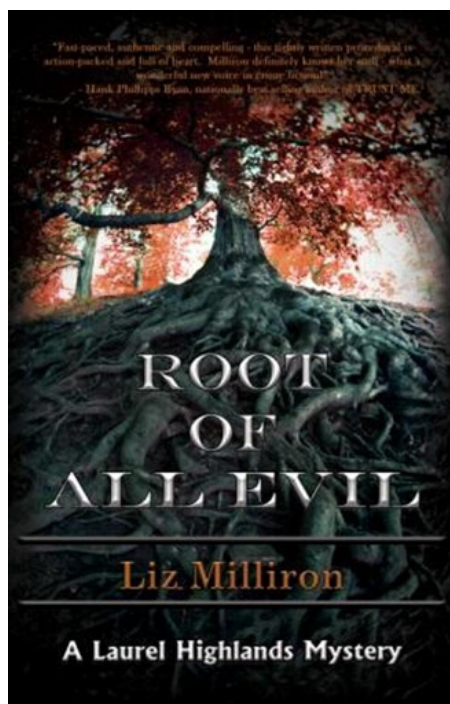
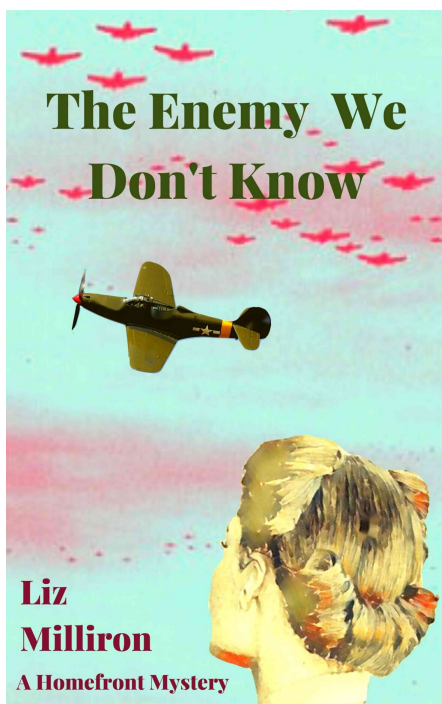
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# A New Author's Viewpoint

## The Power of Setting

by Carol Pouliot

Every author approaches writing differently. My style has evolved over the years. I've finally figured out what works for me.

When I'm penning a rough draft, I focus on plot and characters. I sketch out a detailed outline which includes the important scenes, where I'll plant clues and red herrings, and where I'll note background information on characters. I track all the actions that the police take so I know who is where, doing what, at every moment. I let this draft "simmer" for a week or two.

Next, I turn to the power of setting to make my world accessible and real. Location, weather, social and cultural conditions, use of the 5 senses, and atmosphere help readers enter this world. I especially need time travel to be believable and accepted as part of the daily life of my characters.

I've used Einstein's theory that time can fold over and reveal another time. In *Doorway to Murder*, Steven and Olivia first see each other on opposite sides of a doorway which acts as a time-travel portal. (location) This scene is set against the backdrop of a raging blizzard. The power of the storm matches the power of time revealing itself. (weather) To convince Depression-era cop Steven, 21st-century researcher Olivia dazzles him with what her laptop can do. He wonders why she lives alone in a big house and what it's like for a woman to own a business. (social and cultural conditions).

*Threshold of Deceit* opens on a warm spring day with the killer enjoying a picnic in a meadow. She feels the sun on her skin, delights in the birdsong in the trees, smells the fresh air and new grass. (the 5 senses) The juxtaposition of the pastoral scene and subsequent ruthless murder also creates an atmosphere.

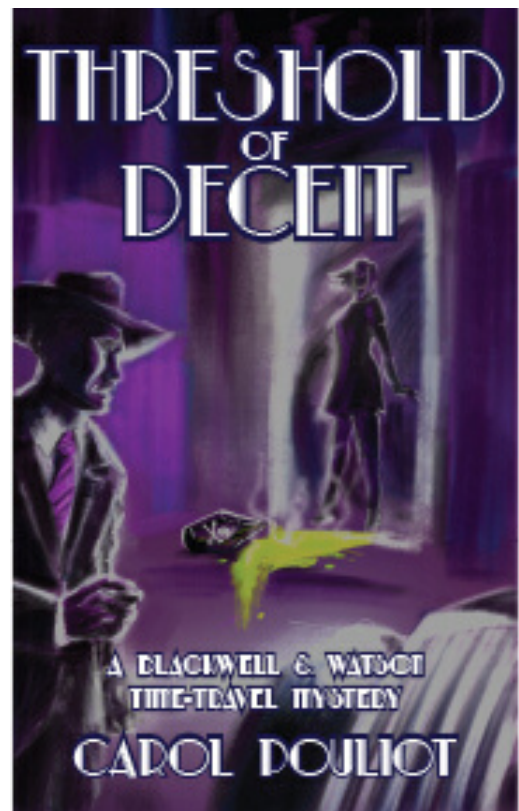
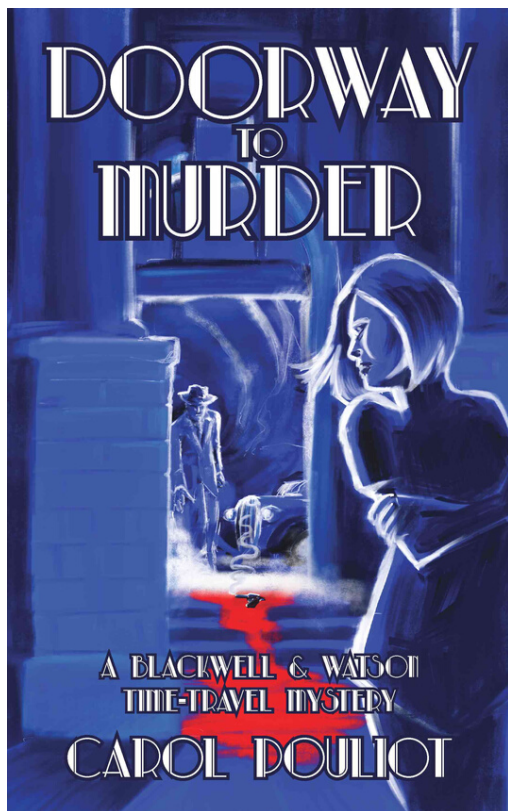
My books shift between the present day and 1934. To make it easy for my readers to know where they are, I use clothing, objects and activities in daily life, and language—enough details to create the atmosphere but not too many to slow the pacing. A fedora, listening to a drama on the radio, coffee percolating on the stove, and the expression "swell" tell you it's 1934. Leggings, texting a BFF, warming coffee in the microwave, and the expression "awesome" scream the present day.

A story may be plot- or character-driven but it's setting that makes it work.





Carol Pouliot is the author of The Blackwell and Watson Time-Travel Mystery series. She lives in Upstate New York, where the lake-effect snow reaches over twelve feet every winter. Visit Carol at: [www.carolpouliot.com](http://www.carolpouliot.com).



MARCH – APRIL

RELEASES FROM LEVEL BEST BOOKS

