



## A Q&A WITH MARY BURTON, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE SEVENTH VICTIM*

**Mary, welcome! Thanks for joining us.**

**THE SEVENTH VICTIM is your latest suspense novel. Will you tell us a bit about it?**

*The story begins as Texas Ranger James Beck returns to duty after three weeks on administrative leave, earned by his refusal to drop his investigation of the politically well-connected suspect he believed killed ten-year-old Misty Gray. He's soon on the scene of another murder. This one sets off alarms when Beck notices the similarities between it and the unsolved case of six women killed in Seattle. All blonde, the victims were strangled, wore white dresses, and each had a penny in her hand. The seventh victim survived.*

*I also introduce Lara Church, who's recently returned to the Austin area, having inherited her grandmother's house, where she'd spent all of her childhood summers. She had plans to sell it but hasn't been able to do so. It's too nice to be back and settled in among comforting memories. Lara's been on the run for seven years, rarely staying in one place long, never expecting to again have a home, and having given up hope of regaining memories of the night she escaped death at the hands of the Seattle Strangler.*

*When Beck shows up demanding her help, she refuses. She's tried desperately to recall that night. Now that she has a chance at a normal life, she's determined not to be dragged back to the hellish world of shrinks and crime scene photos.*

**Why Austin?**

*Austin is the state capitol, a university town and site of the central office of the Texas Rangers, which means my investigators have access to sophisticated forensic science. It's home to musicians and artists, so it's a perfect place for Lara to try to make a go of her photography. It's rich in history and San Antonio and the Hill Country, which are very different from Austin, are close. I also have the freedom to move between them if needed to advance the plot or just to change up the setting a bit if I want.*

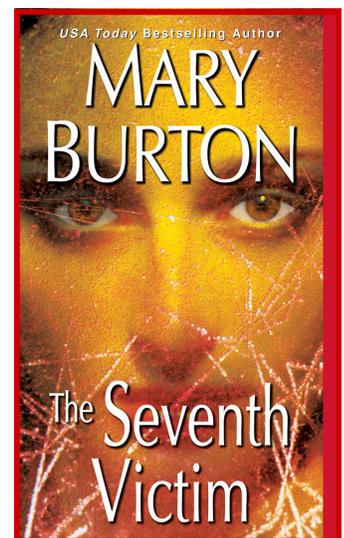
*Plus, Texas has hundreds and hundreds of lonely open miles with lots of places for a killer to roam. I also liked contrasting Austin against Seattle, home to detective Mike Raines. Whereas Seattle is known for cold dreary days so Austin is known for hot, dry sunshine. Raines underscores the differences between these cities as he searches Austin for a "good" cup of coffee and complains about the dry heat.*

**Is it common for a victim of a violent crime to have memory lapses, confusion, or even amnesia about the event the way Lara does?**

*Memory lapses can happen in the case of a concussion. While I was working on the details of *THE SEVENTH VICTIM* and trying to figure out how Lara could have lost her memory, I met a young lacrosse player who talked about a head injury he'd suffered. He said he couldn't remember the three days before the injury. Memory loss and concussion do occur. Once I was sure of that, this critical plot point fell into place.*

**Why does Lara use such an old fashioned camera? Is it something contemporary artists use today?**

*You still see modern artists using this method of photography. It was most common during the Civil War. It's very hands-on and requires a great deal of attention and introspection. Lara uses a bellows camera, with glass negatives that must be prepared one at a time. It's called wet plate photography. It takes a skilled hand to prepare the negatives with silver nitrate and it takes lots of patience to take the images. I think the images are beautifully moody and rich.*



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**In THE SEVENTH VICTIM, the police had never found the Seattle Strangler, even though it was seven years later. Are there a lot of open cases with suspected serial killers that have never been solved?**

*I think there are quite a few open murder cases out there. The Seattle Strangler killed women who worked the streets, who are at a very high risk for violence. Their cases often aren't high profile and don't always get the attention of very overworked detectives.*

**What makes a killer a serial killer?**

*I don't think anyone really has the answer to that. Some are driven by evil whereas others see themselves on a righteous mission. It's something I think about a lot when I craft killers.*

**How hard is it to introduce a romantic relationship amid the violence?**

*The relationship for me starts the moment the hero and heroine first see each other. It's not love at first sight but there is a tension between the characters that doesn't exist anywhere else in the book. And as the plot deepens and the romance grows, I like it best when the romance and the mystery are at cross-purposes. Each adds conflict to the other. As the killer grows more violent and the love between the hero and heroine grows, the danger jumps, as do the stakes.*

*What I love about romantic suspense is that solving the suspense gives the reader a sense of justice whereas the romance leaves the reader with hope that in the end good wins over evil.*

**What do you need to know when you begin a new suspense novel?**

*I always start with motivation. The killer's motivation is the most important to me because he is the driver of the story. If not for him, the hero and heroine might not ever meet. Why does the killer do what he does? It colors so much of the story. And then I turn to the hero and heroine. Once I know their strengths and weaknesses then I can turn the killer loose.*

**Your recent novels have been set in your home state of Virginia--in fact six of them, three in Richmond and three in Alexandria. Are you just tired of your home state?**

*LOL. No. I love Virginia but I've turned six different serial killers loose in the commonwealth and it's time to give the good folks of Virginia a break. Plus, setting is a character in my mind. Setting literally sets the stage and drives so many elements of the book. It was time for a new setting to change things up a bit.*

**You've been getting very strong reviews for your novels over the past several years. Does this go to your head? How does it affect the way you write or your intuition about what readers would like to see?**

*The reviews have been great compliments and I appreciate them all, but I don't dwell on them. In fact, I only worry about the story that's in front of me right now. I'm always trying to raise the bar and find new ways to surprise my reader.*

**What's next?**

*NO ESCAPE comes out in November 2013 and I put the Rangers to work again in that one, as I do in a third Texas based romantic suspense, which is finished but doesn't have a title yet. I'm working on a new book right now—a romantic suspense—and loving every minute of it.*

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