

Kathleen Delaney writes the delightful Ellen McKenzie mystery series. The series is part traditional, part cozy—a combination I define as taking on contemporary social issues while the main character serves wine and cheese by a lit fireplace in her house, nestled in a small town where everyone knows everybody. Kathleen’s background as a real estate agent gives credence to her main character’s profession. But I thought that Kathleen would live in a similar California town as her main character. Not the case. Welcome to WWK, Kathleen, and prepare for my nosiness.

E. B. Davis

Do you have a plotting method?

Not exactly. I usually start with an idea. When I decided to write *Dying for a Change* I was living in a small town in California that was about to get a Wal-Mart. The town was in an uproar, some for, some against, and the conflict gave me the idea for the book. The rest sort of grew, and that’s how it happens with each of them.

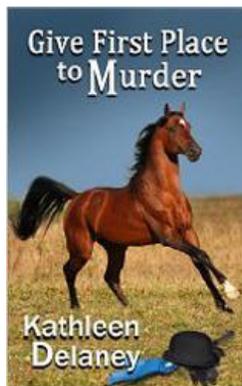
Unlike the rest of your series, your latest release, *Murder By Syllabub*, takes place in Williamsburg, Virginia. Was there any particular reason why you decided to take your cast there?

I took a chance on that one. I love Williamsburg, having been there several times. That period in our history, the formation years and all that lead up to it fascinates me. I have long wanted to lay a story there, but I didn’t want to set it in the eighteenth century. Moving Ellen and Aunt Mary there for one mystery seemed a good idea, and it worked out.



To research the book, you learned about colonial hearth cooking, which I loved reading. What is syllabub, and was there anything you learned surprising?

Syllabub is a colonial dessert drink. It is made with lemon, sugar, white wine and cream. Today we whip the cream, back then, I’m told they milked the cow right into the drink, which doesn’t appeal to me at all. What was surprising was how similar some of our food is to what was prepared then. My spinach salad looked a lot like the one prepared in the Peyton Randolph house and we frequently cook meat on a spit over a fire, only we use a barbeque.



In the first book, *Dying for a Change*, Ellen is a woman in transition. Why did she stay with her awful ex, Brian, so long?

Ellen, like a a lot of women, stayed for several reasons. Her daughter, economics, and plain not knowing what else to do. He was verbally abusive, but she wasn’t worried he’d kill her, so it took longer to work up the courage to call it quits.

Are lawyers the root of evil?

No, I don't think so, at least not all of them. Some of them are avenging angels to some women. Especially the female ones.

Susannah, Ellen's daughter, doesn't seem to be cautious about relationships. Did Ellen keep the truth about her first marriage from Susannah or is she just young and in love?

She kept the truth from her for a long time, but as Susannah grew, she also started to understand what kind of man her father was. She and her mother were close, her father indifferent, so it wasn't much of a choice who she would live with, and she really likes and respects Dan.

Santa Louisa seems to be a small town that could be located anywhere. But, it is on the central California coast. Why no beach or boating scenes?

The town Santa Louisa is very loosely patterned after is Paso Robles, where I lived at the time. It is somewhat inland from the coast, and grows tons of grapes, some cows and horses, and has lots of rolling hills and huge old oaks. They've gone over the hill for dinner, but don't live near the water.

Ellen and Dan don't seem to fight. Will they ever go head-to-head?

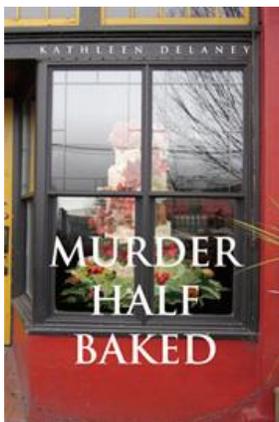
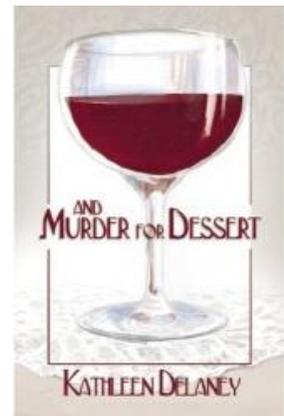
Like the old Spencer Tracy/Katharine Hepburn movies? No, I don't think so. Spats, misunderstandings that they will be able to solve, but on the whole, they understand and respect each other and bitter fighting just isn't in their relationship.

Everyone should have an Aunt Mary, did you?

My mother was as close as I got to one, but she was wonderful. I could talk to her about anything and she had a pretty clear-eyed view of the world.

You've had many dogs. Will Ellen and Dan get a dog?

Jake won't allow it but I'm planning on giving Aunt Mary one.



Of all the places you've lived, which have you liked best?

That one's tough. I lived in Paso Robles where I wrote the first three books. I loved it, but when it came to retire from real estate I wanted to try somewhere I'd never lived before. The south had always fascinated me, the mountains, the small towns, the history, so I moved to S. Carolina. Am now in Georgia, which is beautiful but the traffic around Atlanta is as bad as LA.

In *Murder Half-Baked*, you return to the theme on women in transition. But this time, it's not Ellen. Playing a central part in this mystery, Grace

House, a charity, serves women who are going through transition from whatever those transitions may stem, divorce, spouse abuse, alcoholism, etc. What is it about transition that interests you?

I think everyone goes through many transitions in their life but some women end up going through all of the things you mentioned. I have met a number of them, some were friends. I did a lot of research on this before I wrote the book, and continue to be particularly interested in women who can get themselves out of pretty awful spots.

You switched from Poison Pen Press to Camel Press as your publisher. Why?

I had contract with PPP for another book, but during the writing process I ended up in the hospital with an amputated leg. It took a while to get through re-hab and adjust to my new life. The manuscript I turned into them wasn't the one I wanted to write, and it wasn't much like the final version, but it took a lot longer to get to that point, and it seemed best for us to go our separate ways. They are a great press, and I am proud to have had them release one of my books, but Camel is also a great press with great people. I feel fortunate to be with them.

You've traveled, having mentioned traveling from coast to coast in this country and all around Europe. But which do you like better, beach or mountain?

Mountains. The beach is lovely, and I grew up in S Cal., so have spent a lot of time on it, but I love the beauty of the trees, the mountain springs, everything about the mountains. I'm near the Blue Ridge National Park and have visited it many times since I've arrived in the south.

