

Special Women's Fiction Day Interview with Erin Bartels and Lyn Liao Butler

Sat, 6/5 7:31PM • 42:31

SPEAKERS

Erin Bartels, Maggie Lynch, Lyn Liao Butler

Maggie Lynch 00:14

Welcome to Dust Jackets: Conversations with Authors. Today I'm doing a very different show than I usually do. Instead of one author, I'm interviewing two. They're both women's fiction writers. And I've gotten to know them through the women's fiction writers Association. We're doing two sets of these interviews. One with these two authors, and another with another two later on. And we're doing this in celebration of women's fiction day, which comes June 8. Very soon. So, let me introduce you to the two women I have on the show today. Erin Bartels is an award-winning novelist currently with three books completed. Her debut novel, *We Hope for Better Things*, was a 2020 Michigan notable book, a winner of the 2020 Star Award from the Women's Fiction Writers Association, and the 2019 Christy award finalists. Her second novel, *The Words Between Us*, was also a 2020 Christy award finalist. Her third novel, *All That We Carry*, just came out in January of this year. I expect, given her track record, we'll probably be seeing some more awards mentioned for that one. She's also a poet and a short story writer. Lyn Liao Butler's debut novel, *The Tiger Moms Tale*, was scheduled to already be out; but the pandemic changed that. It will now release July 6th. I can tell you advance reviews are stellar, so you might as well get your pre-order in now. Her second book, *Red Thread of Fate*, is also available in pre-order with a release date of February 8, 2022. Lyn's day job is very different from writing. She's a Fitness Studio owner, where she's a personal trainer, a fitness instructor, and a yoga instructor. So, as you can see, we have two powerhouse women with us today. So my first question for each of you is: When you started writing, did you know that you were writing women's fiction? Or did you write what you felt like writing and then realized it fits into the women's fiction category? Why don't we start with you, Lyn.

Lyn Liao Butler 02:30

I had no idea what women's fiction was when I started writing. I just started writing in 2015. It was not anything I ever thought I was ever going to do. Because it's ... You see, I used to be a ballet dancer in New York City. And now a fitness instructor. But when I moved out of the city, up only like an hour north of the city, everybody thought I was living in the country. And they wanted to know what else do we do in the country. So I started a blog, just to keep people updated. And that first book came from the blog posts. So I had no idea anything about genre. I didn't know anything. I didn't even know that term, Women's Fiction. I just wrote this book that it just kind of came out of me. And then as I did research, I realized: You know what? It fits into that women's fiction genre. So that's where I learned that it's women's fiction.

Maggie Lynch 03:18

Yeah, I think that's a very common story, actually. How about you, Erin?

Erin Bartels 03:23

Yeah, um, well, my nine-to-five job has been in publishing for nearly 20 years. So I was quite cognizant of different genres and how you market a book and how you need to find some way to put it in a genre so that you can find a way to sell it. But when I was writing, I didn't feel I was writing it purposefully to be women's fiction. I think because it centered on female characters. My first book had three timelines, three female protagonists. And it certainly was not romance. It was part historical fiction and part contemporary. I think that the only thing that seems like it fit was women's fiction. And I feel like, if it had been male protagonists, or even a male author, it would have just been fiction. Right? Yeah. I do think I thought of it as an upmarket book, because it wasn't really commercial, but it wasn't really literary. So somewhere in between there, and it's a good Book Club, book. And it seems like women's fiction fits most book club books along those lines. I think, because they have a lot of issues that people want to talk about, a lot of things to unpack. And I think that they just really connect with Book Club readers who are primarily women.

Maggie Lynch 04:38

I can tell you in my book club, 90% of the books we read are women's fiction. It's absolutely true. So, I'd like to get a little bit more into each of your books. I'd like to start with you, Erin. It seemed it's funny that you said upmarket fiction because, having not read your books, you know, just looking at the blurbs and the reviews that you have, that was the first thing I thought of was upmarket fiction. And both the blurbs and the cover designs make them feel very similar, although they are very different stories. And one of the themes, and again just based on the descriptions and reviews, what seems to be a thread was kind of that concept of you can't run away from the past. So you can either say, Maggie, you have no idea what it's about, or verify that. But I just wonder, you know, what is it that draws you to that theme? If it's true. And if there are, is there another theme that you think is actually more important in these three books that you have out now?

Erin Bartels 05:43

I think that you're right in a way that they all are dealing with something in the past, whether it's in the long gone past, or somebody's childhood or something like that. And I think the thing that interests me about considering people's past--now I have an extremely boring life with a very vanilla past. So I don't have an interesting past that I'm drawing from any of this. But I'm, I've always been interested in kind of cause and effect. Whether it's on a large scale, like, you know, a riot doesn't happen out of nowhere. A war doesn't happen out of nowhere. There had to be events and things leading to this. And I think that's true on a small scale in everyone's life. You are the collection of all the things that have happened to you. And you can't make them not have happened. And they develop you into the person you are now. And the person you are now deals with challenges and relationships and things in a certain way because of your past. So I'm very interested in how the things that happened to us, form us into the people we are and how that affects our relationships with other people and our own inner selves and the way we see ourselves. So I think that was an astute observation, even not having read them, they absolutely do focus on how the past. Even if there's pain, and even if there's negative things, you can

grow from that. And you can become better. And I think it's instead of bemoaning what happens to us, it's using it to become a stronger, better person.

Maggie Lynch 07:24

I agree with that so much. You know, I think that the past... as they say, if you don't understand history, it will continue to repeat itself. And I think it's the same about our past as well. And there's a lot of books that deal with the past. But it just was really interesting to me when they're very different stories, from what I can tell, but that was a thread. Yeah. Lyn, interestingly, your books also deal with the past in some way, but in a very different context in that, it seems--again, not having read them being as they're not out yet--that family dynamics play a really critical role in both of yours, and also in forming an identity from two very different cultures. As most of us know, cultures are very much driven by the past, by our ancestors. So can you talk about your characters and the road to identity, and how their cultures and their past causes such difficulty.

Lyn Liao Butler 08:29

So I was born in Taiwan, and moved here to the states when I was seven. So I was basically brought up here. But, because I was born there, I could still speak the language. I speak Mandarin and Taiwanese. And my parents are, you know, from Taiwan. And it was hard growing up here because on the outside I look Asian and Taiwanese; but on the inside, I felt like I was American. So it was always that pull, like when I'm home I'm trying to be the good, like the good Taiwanese girl, you know, who obeys the parents and respects elders and does well at school and, you know, does a million things. And then on the outside, you know, at school, I'd be like the American me. And it was just really hard to figure out who I was. Because I always felt like I was playing a part. Whether it's at school or at home, because I didn't fit in, you know. I, we, actually lived in a very predominantly white neighborhood when we moved here. And so I went to a school where I was only one of like, maybe three, like a handful of Asian people. So I wanted to look like Nellie Olson from Little House on the Prairie with the boingy curls, I call them. I thought that was the ideal, like I wanted curly hair, curls that you could go boing. And I didn't want black hair. I want blonde hair. So when I started writing, you know, obviously now as an adult, I've managed to marry the two together and kind of find where I belong in this world. But when I started writing, that's just a theme that always runs through. I think probably almost all my books so far is just searching for identity, whether you're a Taiwanese American or you were born here, but still having to deal with it. And that's why I created Lexa, who is my main character in the Tiger Moms Tale. She is actually half Taiwanese and half white. Her mom is white, her father was Taiwanese. But she was brought up with her white family. So she spends her whole life with a blonde family. Her stepfather's blonde. Her half sister is also blonde, like her parents. And so she's doesn't really fit in. I've always wondered, what would it be like to look Asian on the outside, but really be brought up in a white American family. And that's where she came from. And then, you know, having her to go search for her past and her identity. I guess it's kind of like, you know, that's how I was trying to like, figure out how I found my heritage. And it kind of runs through, it's a theme that runs through all my books. It either takes place internationally, like here in the States and also in Taiwan, and China, or there's a lot of cultural references.

Maggie Lynch 11:09

That's really interesting, to me it's a very interesting journey. And I am going to be really interested in reading your books. I have a lot of friends who have adopted Asian babies, who are white, and there is a, you know, they do struggle, particularly if you're living in an all white area, which most of Oregon is, I have to say.

Lyn Liao Butler 11:33

My son is actually adopted from China. And we know a lot of people who are white and adopted, you know, a Chinese baby. And we kept in touch with them and friends of them. So my second book, Red Thread of Fate, is actually based on that journey. So they do go to China to adopt a child.

Maggie Lynch 11:50

So, Lyn, it sounds like you are writing from your personal experience right now.

Lyn Liao Butler 11:56

Yeah, I'm taking stuff from my life. But all those stories are completely made up like Erin does. I like to make up things for my characters, like stuff that I would normally not do. But the basis is from my background.

Maggie Lynch 12:11

Well, and I think that's true of most writers. I mean, if nothing else, we write about emotions that we understand and that we've experienced. So, speaking of characters, thank you for that great segue. Erin, all of your reviewers talk about your characters, and how real they are and how much they relate to them. So I'd really like to know how you approach writing them. Are they composites of people you know, or are they developed, you know, to serve specific things in your stories, specific themes or types or is it something in between,

Erin Bartels 12:45

I feel like it's not quite either, I, I have very rarely thought of a real person. When writing a character, I can think of one for the my next book that's going to be coming out. There's one character based on a real person.

Maggie Lynch 13:02

Erin Bartels 13:05

They're not quite introduced to serve the plot, either. I'm not 100% sure how they all materialize. But I think that a lot of it has to do with the things that I, as a writer, or I, as a person, feel like I need to deal with or I need to think about this. I want to think through this issue. I want to deal with this feeling or whatever. I think they arise from that sort of swirl of emotion and personal history, and then they're never me. But they're always going to be addressing things that I am concerned about, or I am interested in. And, as you you develop that main character, the people who come into their lives come into their lives as people who are going to be challenges to them, or people who are going to support them, or people who don't understand them, all these different things. And I feel like they just kind of materialize out of the the process of writing, because we have all of those people in our lives. And

those people exist, I guess, as types in a way. But I'm not looking for like, Okay, I need a sidekick here. Or, you know, I need a wise old man here or something like that. So I really don't have a great answer for that. I think that the reason that people connect with the characters is because I think it's maybe twofold. One, I really try, even with characters who are antagonists or people who you don't really like in the story, I really try when I'm writing them to write from their perspective. Even if they're not the point of view character, but to write them as if they were almost, you know. Because every antagonist is the protagonist of his own story, you know. Everybody makes their decisions and thinks that they're logical. Otherwise you wouldn't make that choice. And so, to write them kind of empathetically, I think, is why people I think seemed to connect with them. And I think that maybe the other the other reason is that I really try not to make anybody wholly good or wholly bad. Because I don't think that those people exist. And I want them to be complex, and to sometimes do things that maybe don't make sense to you, but maybe call to mind a time when you did something that didn't make a lot of sense.

Maggie Lynch 15:43

Oh, absolutely. I agree with you, 100%. No one is wholly good or wholly bad. And certainly, all of us have flaws. And in fact, that something they teach in craft is that, you know, your character has to have a flaw. And that flaw is going to play a big role in, in what happens to them, maybe stopping them on their journey for a while until they can get over it. So, Lyn, it's hard for me to know much about your characters other than the fact that they're multicultural. But what is your approach to writing characters? Do you plan them all out in advance? Or do you kind of go along and see what problems they get themselves into and have them meet the people they need to meet?

Lyn Liao Butler 16:33

I started out that way. I had no idea what a plotter or a pantsler was when I first started writing. And I literally just had this idea, and I sat down and then I just let whatever happened happen. And so some of these characters came out of just like people I knew. But not like, they're not based on anybody. But they're like, either things I heard in the news, or something I heard somebody say, and I'd be like: Oh, what happens if this person did this, and then the characters started coming to me. But now I do plan out my characters. And I actually think about them all the time. So even when I'm not writing, I'm making up you know, their character traits. Or like, you know, who they are, what they do, how they interact with the main character. And I actually talk to them too. So sometimes I'm sitting there, like talking, you know, talking out scenes in my head. So I do a lot of it in my head. Like, before I write anything down, I've already thought about what drives them. Like what kind of friend they are, or what kind of antagonists they are, and why they are the way they are. And a lot of it is taken from just stories I hear in my life. Or, like, for example, in Red Thread of Fate, the story opens with a woman. They're about...her and her husband are about to adopt a child from China. And right before they get their letter of agreement, he gets killed in an accident with his estranged cousin. And that actually came from my husband, who is a FDNY fireman. He came home one day and told me about this horrific call that they had to do, as it was an accident. A beverage distribution truck ran over a woman while she was on the phone with her husband, and she got killed while she was on the phone with him. And I was like: Oh, can you imagine if that happened? And so that's kind of that character came out of that story that I heard. So, that's what happened in the story. She was on the phone with her husband and then, you know, he gets in an accident. And then she has to decide what she's going to do. And so it kind of builds from life, I guess, things I heard in life and then I make up stories about them. And I realize I

have a pretty active imagination. Because sometimes I can't tell if a character is real or not when I first wake up. Sometimes I think a character is real. And then I'm like, wait, no, I made that up. It's just not he's not a real person. Or she's not a real person. So yeah, I have a pretty active imagination.

Maggie Lynch 18:58

I have that problem myself. Because sometimes I'll be talking to my husband about someone and he'll say: You've never talked about her before. And it's like, oh, yeah, she's not real. Exactly. I understand that. I'd like to just stay with you for a minute Lyn, because one of the things that intrigues me about your books is that they also seem to have a really strong sense of place. You know, one, it seems in the first one that your character goes back to Taiwan, right, for some period of time. I don't know if in the second one she does. Does your character go to China? And you said that you have been to both of those places yourself? So can you tell me just how that sense of place plays out in in your books?

Lyn Liao Butler 19:48

Well, because I wasn't born here, and I have so much so many family over there. And because we did travel to China to adopt our son, for me, different places is always very important to try to bring into my writing as a Taiwanese American because I find that I haven't found many books written by Taiwanese Americans; or even Taiwanese writers. Or that has a Taiwanese protagonist. And actually, my editor at Berkeley said to me, when we had our first phone call, she's like: in I think it was like 25 or 30 years that she's been working in publishing, that my book was the first book she has ever gotten on submission that had a Taiwanese protagonist, which I found really interesting cuz she's with a, you know, a big publisher and that she's been in publishing for 25 to 30 years, and she's never once had a POV from a Taiwanese person. So for me, that's really important to bring that culture in, because I think--especially with all the anti-Asian hate that's going on in the country right now, the more people read about cultures like mine, and different cultures, I think the more they can understand it and see that, you know, hey, we are people, too. We are just as American as everybody else.? You know, we didn't bring this Coronavirus here, or whatever it is that they said. So it's very important for me to bring this culture in to my books so that they can see what exactly Taiwanese is. Because people still think when I say: Oh, I'm from Taiwan. They're like: Oh, I love Thai food. I'm like: No, no, not Thailand. Taiwan. So and I don't blame them. I mean, if you didn't grow up knowing the difference between Taiwan and Thailand, of course, you're gonna get confused. So that's why it's important for me to bring that in. And so I did go back to Taiwan, with my family, and did research for this first book, because half of it is set in Taiwan. So I wanted to be, you know, just remember everything. And then when I was in China, adopting, I was already researching for the second book, which is actually the first that I actually wrote. I wrote the second book before I wrote Tiger Moms Tale, but that one didn't sell. So Tiger Mom's Tale was actually written After Red Thread of Fate. So I had already done the research. And then, when I sold Tiger Mom, they bought it as a two book deal. So then my editor took that first book, too. But yeah, that's why a sense of place is so important to me, because I really want to get more perspective out there. And because not every Taiwanese American is going to agree with my book, because this is my perspective. Which is why it's so important to get more out there because I shouldn't be responsible for all Taiwanese perspectives, because I was only there till seven. There was one critique that said: Oh, her Mandarin is so stilted in the book, I'm like, well, yeah, because I was seven. I have a seven year old Mandarin vocabulary right now. So I talked like a seven year old. So, of course, my Mandarin is stilted, because I wasn't brought up there. Whereas somebody who might have

moved over when they're in their 20s, for college, their Mandarin is going to be a lot more fluid than mine. SSo that's why it's so important for me.

Maggie Lynch 22:51

Really good points, Lyn. So, speaking of setting, Erin, your last book seems to be almost all setting. Or it sounds like it could be because you're hiking in northern Michigan and can you--again, having not read it--can you talk about how that plays a role? You know, why did you choose going on this long hike and how much, you know, the setting plays in that.

Erin Bartels 23:25

So in *All That We Carried*, it is a hiking trip in The Porcupine Mountains, which are in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Michigan's Upper Peninsula is the best part of the state. It absolutely has the most gorgeous scenery. So it's fun to write about. And I think that people who like traveling through books, enjoy that sort of thing. Because it's not really a different culture you're experiencing. Because it's out in the woods, there's not a lot of people; but it's a different setting than maybe you would go into yourself. I think that there's a lot fewer people who actually live close to nature or make the effort to get to nature, in order to experience it. Maybe a little bit more over this past year when people needed to get out of the house and find something to do that didn't involve a lot of other people. But all of my books so far, and the ones that are coming out next, take place in Michigan. And one of the reasons is because I'm from Michigan, so it makes it really easy to research. My parents are from the Detroit area. And so my first book was set there. And my second book was set in a fictionalized version of my own hometown, which which was really, really fun. And I think made it a really evocative setting because I know it so well. But the great part about the hiking in wilderness is that you force these characters, which in this case are two sisters who haven't really spoken in up 10 years, to deal with their issues because there's nobody else there to talk to. And you have nothing else to do you on a hiking trip. You walk and you talk and that's about it. And so the the setting in that case, on one end it forces them to do certain things because they have to make decisions about what they encounter. But also, it kind of gives the reader a little bit of relief in a way because the setting is really beautiful and peaceful. And those sisters are not. They are not peaceful with each other. They're often bickering. They have these deep seated issues they haven't dealt with. So it's a nice kind of juxtaposition. And I think it gives the reader a little bit of a little bit of a relief. And also, it's a little ironic in a way that you have all of this beauty around you. And inside your still kind of rotten, and you got to deal with that or you can't experience the beauty around you.

Maggie Lynch 25:43

Really interesting. I like that juxtaposition. Now I have to read your books. Just endless, it is endless. My TBR pile already is like 100 books long.

Erin Bartels 25:59

This past summer I managed to read a book that was recommended to me by my college roommate almost 20 years ago, and I finally got to it.

Maggie Lynch 26:07

I don't feel bad now. So, Lyn, one of the things that you mentioned, and Erin mentioned this, too, is dealing with grief and loss. And certainly in the one about the Red Thread of Fate, because, you know, the woman's husband dies, right at a really critical moment for them. Is that a common theme in both of your books as well? Or is it just that one?

Lyn Liao Butler 26:42

So I knew, I didn't realize this, but someone always dies in every single one of my books. Even in the rom com that I just wrote, for some reason, I think I'm very influenced by Liane Moriarty. She's like my idol. She's like the one. I read her books during a really bad period of my life. And they're, you know, basically what saved me. And I think that's why I wanted to write. Because her books really took me out of my life and made me feel better that there are people out there who might be experiencing something similar or you know, understand. And that's why I wanted to write. To start writing is to hopefully reach other people, and help them the way her books helped me. And for some reason, I realized that I think every, like in every one of her books somebody dies. And I guess, subconsciously, that kind of carried over to me. And so now someone dies in every book. I actually had someone who was supposed to blurb my first book, *The Tiger Moms Tale*. As she started reading it--in that book it opens with the protagonist finding out that her estranged father, Tony, dies. And she couldn't keep going because she had just experienced a death in her family. And I was like, please don't read it. I don't want to trigger you. And then she's like, I'm so sorry. I will blurb your second book. I'm like, I don't think you want to blurb my second book, because the husband is that one who dies. And she's like, I'll blurb your third book. I'm like, No, somebody dies. So yes, I think because for me, I'm dealing with grief and loss. I've been very lucky, I haven't had very many people close to me die. And so I think for me, it's that subject is just really fascinating to me. Like how do people come back from a loss like that? And how do you go on when something you know, happens? So I guess I'm, in a way, I'm kind of fascinated by it. Maybe it's my way of dealing with grief. And you know how I would handle stuff. So, yeah, that is a common theme in all my books.

Maggie Lynch 28:45

Well, and I think, again, in women's fiction, it is often a common theme. It's funny, you know, talking about someone trying to blurb your books that way. I was in a similar situation. I was writing the third book in my women's fiction series. And, and her father is dying at the beginning of the book. And I started it that way. And about halfway through the book, when I was really starting to deal with all those emotions, my father died. I couldn't write anything for six months. But it's important. It's important to do it because not only does it help you, but like you said, it helps other people because we're all gonna die. And we're all gonna have people in our life who die. So Erin, now that we're all depressed, tell us about your book.

Erin Bartels 29:37

Oh, lots of people die. Especially my first book. Lots of people die.

Lyn Liao Butler 29:42

Yes. I read it. I know.

Erin Bartels 29:46

In the second book, there is a there's a death but... Oh, no, somebody does die. Nevermind, I thought it was just in the background, but there's another one. And the third one starts out with people dealing with grief. And I actually have had people ask me about All That We Carried, if I had had a parent die, or a close person in my life, and I, like Lyn, have had a blessed life in that way. The only people in my life who have died, who are family, were very old at the time and in poor health, and it wasn't surprising. But I am a pastor's wife. And I deal with death a lot, and a lot of different kinds of death. And you see, when you're on the sidelines, you see how different people in the same family react very differently. And death can either bring people together, or it can bring up all these old unresolved wounds and arguments and rancor. And I think that I drew on that experience of just watching other people grieve. And also, I think, because it's a book that focuses on sisters, and I have a close in age, sister, I also drew on all of that sort of angst that you have when you have a sister and you don't get along for a really long time. We get along great now, but I mean, I pulled from all of that, to think of how would we have been if this had happened to us. And I could see us going in these directions. And and so that's , yeah, I think that you're right. That's a part of our everyday lives. And we, everybody, has to deal with it at some point. And I think that's probably why it's a common theme. And it also sets up characters who are maybe more vulnerable or raw than they would have been otherwise. And it's just a, it's a good way to set up conflict or set up somebody's backstory that they they dealt with or didn't deal with a death very well.

Maggie Lynch 31:47

Yeah, really good point. And after all, women's fiction is about the emotional journey. What's more emotional than having someone die? Yeah. Well, let's kind of get to a nicer topic, I hope. I'd like to know from each of you, you know, what's coming up next for you in terms of other books that maybe you have sitting there with a publisher or just in the back of your head. What you're tackling next? You know, and what are they about?

Lyn Liao Butler 32:25

Sure, so I, I actually finished a third book. It was supposed to be women's fiction, I had set in Hawaii. And we actually went there during the pandemic, and lived there for two months so I could research the book. I was supposed to go there last year. But you know, everything happened. And then this winter, I was like, I really need to go there and do some research. They were being so strict about who they let in because there's almost no cases on the island. So we just decided to stay. And that book is finished. But then when I came home, I was not happy with it. I was like something is off about this book. I don't love it the way I love my first two books. And so in the meantime, I wrote a YA book, a complete change. It's a rom com. And my agent, thankfully, also reps YA. So she was really enthusiastic about this book. She loved it. And so I wrote it. And then I went back to this book, and I was like, I don't like this book. There's something wrong with it. And I just recently had two writer friends who write thriller and thriller and suspense look at it. And they're like, this is not women's fiction. This is a thriller, a domestic suspense. And I was like, that's what's wrong with this. People keep dying. And like, you know, there's dark stuff. And like, I kept trying to make a women's fiction by trying to focus on the emotional journey and whatever. But it was creepy, and it was stalking and there was this, you know, all this stuff that was not women's fiction. And I came up and I wrote, rewrote the first five chapters, I came up, redid the synopsis over the holiday weekend, and I sent it to my agent. I know this is a crazy idea, but just keep an open mind. I really think this is thriller and domestic suspense. And at first it's like you

can't write another genre you're just starting out. Your books haven't even be published yet. You know your audience wants you as women's fiction writer. And now you just wrote a YA. And now suddenly you want to write domestic. People are going to be confused you know. We can't go on sub to three different publishing houses. You can't be with three different publishing houses so early in your career. She's like, how about a pen name? I'm like I really don't want to write under a pen name. So anyways, she looked at it and she was like, you know, she read it. She's like, you're right. This is so much better as a domestic suspense. So now we are at...I can't talk about it because, obviously, things are happening. But she liked it as domestic suspense. So that book has now become a suspense story. And I actually, over the weekend, wrote three chapters and a synopsis for my third women's fiction, which she really liked as women's fiction. So I've got my hand in a couple different genres right now. Because my agent says I write faster than traditional publishing works. So it's doable, but we have to be smart about how we juggle this.

Maggie Lynch 35:18

Good for you. And I think, I mean, I think agents are starting to learn that what worked for them 10 years ago, you know, is really not the case today. And a lot of independent publishers, you know, do write in multiple genres, and some of them do really well at it, and some of them don't. But I'm really glad to hear that she obviously loves your writing.

Lyn Liao Butler 35:43

Yeah, and she, and I'm really thankful, because I thought she was gonna be like: Lyn, no, no, stop. And she just, she was just like, completely 100% behind me. I was also lucky that she reps all three of these genres so that she could guide me and tell me, yes, this is domestic suspense. And so I love her. I'm so happy to have her on my side.

Maggie Lynch 36:06

So what are you working on next, Erin?

Erin Bartels 36:09

Well, I guess, later this month, I'm getting edits back on my fourth book, which is called The Girl Who Could Breathe Underwater. And that is a story that is really personal to me. It's definitely the most personal thing I've written. It involves a woman who, who based her first...now this is not the personal part. She based her first book on something that really happened in her life. And she did not fictionalize it enough. And she has been criticized about how she portrayed the antagonist. And so she's kind of returning to this, this lake that she spent all of her summers on as a kid. Her grandfather has died, and she has the cabin now. And she's going to go back there. And she's going to confront this person, who's the brother of her best friend, who she hasn't seen in a long time. They kind of drifted apart. And so it's the story of her figuring out if she told the truth in her story, and realizing that things are a lot more complex than she thought. But there's also, the aspect of it that's based more personally on me. It is the experience that she had with the antagonist. So the thing that she wrote about in her first book. So I'm really excited about it. I think it's going to be, I think it's the best thing I've ever written. I don't know how it will land with people. It's a little darker. It's not domestic thriller, but you know, not that the things that I've written before were fluffy, I think they all kind of deal with kind of difficult issues. But, um, the book that I'm writing right now is, is actually really fun. I'm writing a book that I've set in 1990.

So it's been really fun to be in 1990. and just sort of remember a simpler time, and not have cell phones involved in the plot or anything. And it's about musicians, and the main character is actually a guy in his early 20s. And the main secondary character is a woman in her early 20s. And what's so fun about it is that I grew up with an audiophile Father. So a guy who spent a lot of time and money on high end stereos. He doesn't play an instrument. He can't sing. He can't even keep a beat. But he, I mean, I grew up with amazing sound in our house. Every room had speakers. Music was a really huge part of growing up for me. So it's been really fun to just be steeped in that world. And just talk about something that I absolutely love that I didn't even realize I wanted to talk about so much. And once I got started doing it, and the other really fun part about it is that I'm writing songs to go along with it. And, you know, I've never done that before. I've written poetry, but I'm actually, you know, writing melodies and playing guitar and all that stuff. It was really, really fun. And I'm going to be you know, we're going to be getting some people together to actually record songs. So it'll be part of the launch. We'll have some live music, you know, we'll give away CDs,

Maggie Lynch 39:22

Very Cool. Yeah.

Erin Bartels 39:25

I'm having a lot of fun with it. After writing some kind of harder stuff. This is a lot more fun. But it's interesting that you talk about, Lyn, what your agent or your editor is expecting because I had to pitch this book to my editor. And one of the questions for the editorial board was, well, why this book now? And I think it was they were a little concerned that the protagonist was younger, that he was a guy, you know, is this is this too happy of a book? And I'm like, Oh, no, no, no, believe me. I don't think anybody dies. Oh, no, somebody does die! (laughter from everyone) The issues that I feel like it deals with are, are the reason I wanted to publish it now. Because it deals a lot with whose opinion of you matters. And I think once you get a few books in, and people have certain expectations for what you're going to write next, you feel boxed in by that.

Maggie Lynch 40:21

Yes.

Erin Bartels 40:21

Or you can. And I don't want to write the same book. Right? Every time I write, I want to write lots of different types of books. And it never even occurred to me to write domestic thriller, but maybe I should. Okay, but you should.

Lyn Liao Butler 40:35

Especially since it sounds like you're just like me, somebody dies and all your books. We didn't intentionally do it, but it happens.

Erin Bartels 40:43

I'm having a lot of fun with it.

Maggie Lynch 40:47

Sounds really great. And I love books about music. My series is about music as well, an all women band. So, because my husband's a musician, I got to kibitz a lot. And we did write some music for the books together. But we weren't as organized as you, you know. You put them all out in advance. They're, they're coming out behind the book.

Erin Bartels 41:13

Yeah, I shared a few of them on Instagram, like, as I'm kind of working on them. But I think the fun thing, what I'd like to do and what I'm going to be talking to my publisher about at a meeting next month is like: Okay, how can we make it so that when you have the audiobook, you have the actual songs happen when they happen in the book?

Lyn Liao Butler 41:31

I like that.

Erin Bartels 41:33

I know.

Maggie Lynch 41:35

Absolutely. You can.

Erin Bartels 41:37

I want to kind of think outside the box on that.

Maggie Lynch 41:39

Yeah. Great. I think it's a great idea. Or the other possibility is do it as a special edition like a NFT.

Erin Bartels 41:48

Yeah.

Maggie Lynch 41:49

And charge, beaucoup bucks. (laughter) All righty. Well, thank you very much. It's been absolutely wonderful talking to both of you. And thank you for listening to dust jackets, conversation with authors. Don't forget to check the show notes for everything happening on women's fiction day, and a lot more information about how to connect with these two wonderful women.