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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS LARA BERNHARDT, AUTHOR OF "THE HAUNTING OF CRESCENT HOTEL"

DECEMBER 13, 2018 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#) [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

AM: Lara, so great to have the opportunity to interview you about *The Haunting of Crescent Hotel*. Just to orient our readers: this interview takes place the week after Halloween. I wish I had done the interview earlier, so that it could run on or around Halloween, but among the many merits of this book is that it isn't seasonal at all. I should mention, as well, that this book is the second in a series: *The Wantland Files*. Let's start by having you tell readers a bit about that series, and then we'll dive into *The Haunting of Crescent Hotel*.

LB: Thank you for having me, Allen! I'm delighted to speak with you. The *Wantland Files* is a supernatural suspense series about psychic Kimberly Wantland, who investigates paranormal claims around the country. Kimberly's producer brings in a celebrity guest co-host, Sterling Wakefield, debunker of all things paranormal, to boost ratings. Sterling looks for scientific explanations while Kimberly conducts her own studies. Think of the series as *The X-Files* crossed with *Ghost Hunters*.

AM: I have a friend who was nominated by the president to be a federal judge, and it came out on his questionnaire for the Senate Judiciary Committee that he was once a member of the Tuscaloosa Paranormal Research Group. For several reasons, I've never asked him about this organization, but I bring up to suggest that there are serious people out there who take the paranormal seriously. Do you?



Lara Bernhardt

LB: I am endlessly fascinated by the idea of the paranormal and have been since I was quite young. *Poltergeist* was a favorite movie of mine before I even reached my teen years. I love watching shows like *Ghost Hunters*, where a team attempts to discern the cause of reported paranormal claims and am always delighted for the opportunity to explore a purportedly haunted location. So many people believe they have experienced paranormal activity—even people who weren't previously believers. I am startled and thrilled by how many have felt moved to share inexplicable experiences with me after learning of my books. I have experienced things in several locations I cannot explain. Like Sterling, I'd like to see some proof captured on a recording device. Is something actually causing these experiences? I'm not sure I'm quite there, but I want to believe.

AM: I associate the paranormal with isolated spaces, the wild, abandoned houses or buildings, rural settings, small towns, a superstitious nineteenth-century look and feel, and so on. I'm overstating, of course, but my assumptions about the genre's parameters are woefully limited. Kimberly and Sterling, however, are celebrities with a film crew in an age of technology and science. I wonder if you're repurposing the genre, broadening it in the way, for instance, that Quentin Tarantino toys with the gangster genre in *Reservoir Dogs*, which incorporates elements of the Western and samurai films.

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LB: What a great question. We are often told as authors to write the story we want to read. I read a lot of ghost fiction and paranormal suspense, much like the stories you're describing. And I enjoy them. But sometimes I find the stories missing an element I really wanted to see incorporated. In our modern world, when nearly everyone carries a camera in their pocket, wouldn't the story be more interesting if we expand the attention and chances of catching that illusive infallible proof on a recording. I wanted to read not the isolated haunting experienced by only one or two unlucky souls who happened onto the haunted house, but the haunting tackled by someone willing and equipped to challenge the paranormal disturbance, who could dig into the paranormal activity, determine what caused it, and resolve the issue when necessary. In the books, Kimberly has become the champion of those scoffed at and ridiculed by nonbelievers. I like that she listens and helps when no one else will. I do think I bent the genre a bit, and I'm enjoying it immensely.

AM: I'm glad you did. In an age when everyone has a smartphone handy at all times, the "ghost story" genre, as it were, must adapt. I've interviewed your husband, Bill, about his work. What's it like to be married to another novelist? Do the two of you critique each other's work? Do you run ideas by each other? Do you like the same authors and genres?

LB: It's nice to have someone who understands the frustrations and demands of being a writer. Bill likes to get up early in the morning to write, whereas I find I'm more productive at night, so we don't tend to write side by side. We both stay extraordinarily busy, but, yes, we read and critique each other's work, definitely. I don't think either of us would publish anything without the other's input. I run more ideas past him than he brings to me, but sometimes he discusses a current project or idea with me. We both read a lot and both enjoy a good story in any genre, but my two favorites are paranormal suspense and women's fiction, which probably aren't his favorite genres. I tend to read more contemporary works where he gravitates toward the older classics in literature—though he says I'm his favorite author. Bill sees so many manuscripts in his work teaching, mentoring, and editing and works with so many authors across genres. I think he can improve anyone's writing.

AM: The Crescent Hotel is an actual place. You say you fell in love with it.



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LB: Crescent Hotel sits just above the historic Victorian town of Eureka Springs, Arkansas in the Ozark Mountains, and I absolutely fell in love with it! The first time I stayed there, I was struck by the gorgeous location and the history of the area and the hotel itself, which is recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations. I loved steeping myself in the hotel's history as well as the ghost lore surrounding it as America's Most Haunted Hotel. Immediately my mind started churning with ideas for setting a story there. The rooms are modernized enough for guests to feel comfortable, but still retain a bit of history as well. I hope to return many times in the future.

AM: Would you discuss the theme of revenge in *The Haunting of Crescent Hotel*?

LB: A fan wanted to discuss this with me just a few weeks ago. He was so moved by the situation and felt it justified the actions

and behaviors of the spirit in the book—and he commented he believed anyone would respond the same way, ghost or living. I don't want to spoil the ending, but the ghost bent on revenge has become consumed with rage and hate. His vengeance has twisted him into something nearly unrecognizable from who he was in the living world. Kimberly must convince him to let go in order to transition to the next world. I think negative emotions do just that to us. If we remain focused on wrongs and hurts and anger that build and fester, I think it changes us. It holds us back and continues to hurt us—and the people around us. We have to learn to let go and move on or we remain forever stuck in a painful place. In *The Haunting of Crescent Hotel*, a ghost struggles with this. But as my fan pointed out, it applies to all of us.

AM: When did you realize you wanted to become a novelist? Was it all at once, the strike of an epiphany, or did you struggle with the idea over time?

LB: I can't remember a time I didn't want to write. I made up bedtime stories for younger siblings as a child. I made my own books, complete with construction paper covers, and allowed them to select from my "library" of stapled-together books. I continued writing as an adult. When I completed my first manuscript, I realized I needed instruction to move from first draft to novel. I joined writer's groups and

attended meetings. I started going to conferences, seminars, and workshops. I learned everything I could about the craft of writing and the publishing industry. I think it's fair to say I've always been a writer, but I spent many, many years learning and honing the craft. Putting the effort and work into our books is worth it. *The Wantland Files* was selected for publication by Kindle Press. And my agent sold that first novel (women's fiction) this past summer—due out summer 2019.

AM: Congratulations! I look forward to reading that. Thanks, Lara, for spending time with me to discuss your writing and *The Haunting of Crescent Hotel*.

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About Allen Mendenhall

Allen Mendenhall is associate dean at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center. His books include *Literature and Liberty* (2014), *Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Pragmatism, and the Jurisprudence of Agon* (2017), *The Southern Philosopher: Collected Essays of John William Corrington* (2017) (editor), and *Lines from a Southern Lawyer* (2017). Visit his website at [AllenMendenhall.com](#).

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