## Sara Stamey

## Book View Café Interview by

## Katharine Eliska Kimbriel

"Sara Stamey's journeys include treasure hunting and teaching scuba in the Caribbean and Honduras; backpacking Greece and New Zealand; operating a nuclear reactor; and owning a farm in Southern Chile. Now resettled in her native Northwest Washington, she teaches creative writing at Western Washington University. She shares her Squalicum Creek backyard with wild creatures and her cats, dog, and paleontologist/geologist husband Thor Hansen."

Sara Stamey's *Islands*, now in ebook from Book View Cafe, is set in the Caribbean and packed with both adventure and intricate characters and plot. It's also romantic suspense with a drop of psychic wonder. "An archeologist investigating petroglyphs ends up diving for sunken treasure and investigating a cult murder."

1. **Islands** is advertised as mystery/romantic suspense, and your SF novels from Ace books were billed as science fiction. Welcome to Book View Cafe, where we blend genres like impressionistic paintings! Where did you start creating a novel like Islands? Which came first, the location or the characters?

A: That's just one reason I'm glad to have found a home with Book View Café—I can follow my muse in storytelling without worrying about a strict category niche. I wrote an early draft of *Islands* when I was living in the Caribbean, working as a scuba instructor and guide, so the location was definitely the inspiration for the story. It competed for role as "main character" with my fish-out-of-water archeologist from the Pacific Northwest. Susan Dunne's character then drew a lot from my own culture shock, moving from a cool, laid-back clime to the hot, revved-up pace of a St. Thomas-like tourist island. Then I realized that the demolishing of her preconceptions would be a big part of the plot. And when I stumbled upon evidence that the Vaudun (Voodoo) was active in areas of the island, we were off and running.

2. Have you explored all of the world of Islands yet? Could there be more tales for these characters?

A: I originally wrote *Islands* as a stand-alone novel. Susan and other characters insist there is more to tell, so I've started a sequel set in Belize and Guatemala, where I've also spent time. I'd love to hear from readers if they're interested, and want to take part in a drawing to name a new character.

3. You've been writing for a while—how has your work changed since the first story you wrote? A: I recently found the original version of *Islands*, which sat in a box for years before I resurrected the novel idea. I barely recognized the story and style! So, happily, my writing has evolved—chiefly, in deepening my characters and themes. What I hope I haven't lost is the passion for an exciting story. I'm still a fan of adventure, exotic locales, and romantic tension—I confess a weakness for roguish, hunky guys my female characters just can't resist. Sparks do fly! My new novel coming out in October, *The Ariadne Connection*, combines those elements but takes a new direction for me in alternating the intimate points of view of three very different characters: Ariadne Demodakis, scientist/healer; Peter Mitchell, American soldier AWOL from Gulf War Three and now a smuggler; and Leeza Conreid, neuroporn media celebrity.

4. What have you learned from your own writing? To what concepts, intentional or not, do you think you've exposed your readers?

A: Research for me is essential, and essentially creative. When a story idea takes hold, I love to dive into research, most of which never finds its way into the novel, but which helps me flesh out the worlds. Over the years, I've learned about such topics as geomagnetism, African religion, Caribbean Vaudun, bioelectronics, colonial shipwrecks, shamanic healing, and much more. Beyond collecting information, research fuels the "what if" questions that help create plot and more.

For example, when writing a novel based on my time homesteading on a remote Southern Chilean island, I collected tales of regional mythology and history, and later took an oil-painting course because my main character needed to be a painter. Mixing oils was a revelation about perception and color, and led me to read up on alchemy (painters historically ground minerals for their paint colors, and believed some materials contained alchemical properties). That aspect became a major plot and thematic element.

As for concepts in my writing, starting with my early science fiction series from Ace/Berkley (to be reissued by Book View Café), I've been examining the effects of new technology on human culture and values. I'm still fascinated by the issues raised—there's always a tradeoff when new ways are adopted to replace older traditions. In *Ariadne*, I take the current "connected generation" to its next step and imagine the consequences of media saturation, both biologically and culturally. But don't worry—I keep the story and characters in the forefront, and let these ideas emerge from the context.

5. Among your professions you both teach and edit. What have you learned from your students that has surprised you?

A: My students constantly surprise me with their creative visions, and I'm grateful to stay connected with their fresh young energy and different perspectives on the world. I value their openness to experience and experimentation, both in their writing and the way they live. My current crop of students seems concerned with challenging labels of identity and finding ways to navigate their "wired" world, which is fascinating. And they always know much more about computer programs and social media than I can possibly keep up with, so I get useful tips from them!

6. Do you live in your fiction? Is it a refuge, a delight—on some works, just a job? (You can close a book cleanly—a life, not so much.)

A: I call myself a "method writer," and do live out a scene as I write. During a particularly intense action or emotional scene, I'll break out in a sweat sitting at the keyboard—a real workout. When I take breaks for a walk or bike ride, I talk with my characters about what they're going to do next. I love it when I have blocks of time, as in the summer when I'm not teaching on campus, to really immerse myself in the world of my novel-in-progress.

7. What pushed you to travel so extensively? What were you looking for when you took the plunge and wandered off into the world?

A: Even as a child, I gave my mother gray hairs when I'd sneak out the bedroom window at night to wander the forest and lake near our home, soaking in the magic of the moonlight or a

storm. The urge for adventure was just too strong to resist. I've been told I have a "Hemingway complex," needing to travel and experience the active world in order to gather story material. Living in different countries and cultures has given me so much in terms of broadening my perspectives and filling my senses.

That said, I've now reached the point where I'm happy to have a home, garden, and special people/animal friends I share with my husband Thor. I still love to travel, but figure I've got enough story material for a while—now I need more time with rear applied to chair to get words on the page.

- 8. Do you think your "voice", the thing that stamps your writing as uniquely yours, changes from book to book, story to story—or can you already see themes that reoccur in your work? A: As I mentioned, I see that my voice has evolved over the years, and I hope it's the different voices of the characters themselves that dictate the tone. I do tend to create characters who are rebels against the norm, and who are outspoken—which I am only in my writing! In addition to the technology/human identity issues I circle around, I do tell stories strongly grounded in outdoor settings, so environmental issues inevitably creep in as backdrop to the characters' lives and choices.
- 9. I am looking forward to **The Ariadne Connection**, your forthcoming novel from Book View Cafe. It's a metaphysical, biomedical, near future thriller weaving politics, environmental issues, and myriad cultural threads into something new. What was the first thread you laid upon the loom on this story? I actually know energy healers, so I'll be interested to see where this tale leads.

A: *The Ariadne Connection* is my most ambitious novel to date, as it does weave together a lot of threads. The inspiration grew from an extended backpacking trip around the Greek islands and mainland that was a fulfilment of a lifelong fascination with Greek mythology and culture. I ended up falling in love with the rugged island of Crete, camping in the ruins of ancient mazelike settlements. I felt I was somehow channeling the spirit of Ariadne, who gave Theseus the thread to find his way from the labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur.

Ariadne became a near-future Greek scientist who discovers she has inexplicable healing powers and is dubbed "Saint Ariadne" against her will. I needed to learn about such healers, and was lucky enough to be taken on as a student by an anthropologist at our university who has travelled extensively to study and practice shamanism with native practitioners. In my hands-on practice, I had a lot of eye-opening experiences. I wanted to weave those spiritual/cultural practices into speculative science, which led me to studying the work of Robert Becker, a medical doctor who did research with the U.S. armed forces into bioelectric healing and pushed the boundaries between mind and matter.

The final thread pulled in research about geomagnetic reversals, another cycle of which the world seems to be moving into presently. My husband, a geologist at the university where I also teach, helped me get that aspect clarified. Basically, I'm headed toward territory explored by some philosophers and scientists: If there is an encompassing energy field that connects all life on earth and allows for interaction, how does that work? What are the consequences of our electronic emissions blanketing the earth and our bodies?

All of these ideas lurk beneath the active thriller plot, so I hope to entertain while raising questions.

10. Did any writers inspire you to become an author? If not, what sparked that desire in you? A: Before I was old enough for school, my grandmother babysat, and we often played a card game called "Authors." I was fascinated by the images of Wordsworth, Poe, and Shakespeare, and decided I wanted to be an Author, too. I was already driving my family crazy on car trips, making up stories and recounting every detail of colorful dreams. Now I hope to take my readers traveling with me!

Thanks, Kathi, for your thoughtful questions. And thanks to all the author members of Book View Café for their wonderful support.