

ML BARRS

MYSTERY AUTHOR

AUTHOR BIOS

BIO 100 WORDS:

The oldest girl in a family of thirteen children, I dropped out of high school and ran away from our single-wide mobile home. Homelessness quickly grew old. I earned my GED, graduated college, married, and had two children, while launching a career in TV news. I started as a reporter, then moved into management. I ran television newsrooms in markets large and small, leading teams covering everything from terrorist attacks and devastating storms like Katrina, to major elections and sports. I later moved on to become a General Manager, before deciding what I really want to do is write mysteries.

BIO 197 WORDS:

ML Barrs ran TV newsrooms for years, guiding and managing the content and production of more than eight hours of live newscasts a day. In her debut novel, *Parallel Secrets*, protagonist Vicky Robeson shares that kind of experience as well as the author's passion for justice, especially when it comes to the safety and well-being of children and other vulnerable people.

ML Barrs grew up one of thirteen children—the first girl, with three older brothers—a birth order she believes shaped her essence by the time she was eight. A girl's gotta be a bit pugnacious to get along in that environment. Amid the chaos of fourteen people living in a mobile home (not a double-wide), she turned fifteen, dropped out of school and ran away from home.

Being homeless, then working minimum wage jobs quickly grew old. She earned her GED and went to college, where she met and married the father of their two grown children. After a successful career as a television news director and general manager, she decided that what she really wanted to do is write mysteries. *Parallel Secrets* will be published September 25, 2023, and its sequel is in the works.

BIO 563 words

My name is Maria Lynn Barrs, writing as ML Barrs. Writing mysteries is a natural culmination of my life experiences. Like my protagonist, Vicky, I started as a TV reporter, then ran television newsrooms in markets large and small. TV news is adrenaline-fueled, constantly changing, charged with conflict and emotion. I led teams covering everything from the September 11th attacks and devastating storms like Katrina, to major elections and sports championships. Our focus was always on how people were affected. The hardest stories for me were those that involved harm to children.

At the heart of my debut novel, *Parallel Secrets*, is a search for belonging amid tragedy—and the heavy toll secrets take. As Vicky unearths long-hidden secrets in her search for a kidnapped girl, she is forced to face the searing pain of her own past. She became fiercely independent at an early age, which now leads to struggle in her budding love relationship with the enticing Pete Harris.

ML BARRS

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BIO 563 words (CONT)

Everyone's past lives within them. I'm one of thirteen children. My mom was a fervently Catholic immigrant from the Philippines, my father an artist who grew up in a hardscrabble West Virginia coal mining community. I'm the oldest girl, with three older brothers. Trust me—that's not an enviable birth position. From the time I was a child, I was responsible for housework, changing diapers, and caring for my many younger siblings. My escape was reading, my favorite place the library.

In the late 1960s, my parents had a printing business in South San Francisco. We older kids all had jobs. Mine included sorting type—placing metal letters in their proper little section of a wooden tray. Forming words, letter by physical letter, ingrained in me the importance of detail. Vicky has the same compulsion, though she grew up without family.

My family was emotionally and financially devastated when the printing business failed. Later, we traveled the country in a converted school bus, looking for a better place to be. When it broke down in South Carolina, we lived in an old wooden shack built on stacks of bricks, its only heat a woodstove made of an old 55-gallon drum. That was a miserable winter.

A couple more moves, and we were back in California, fourteen of us living in a single-wide mobile home. It was an enormously stressful time. When I was fifteen, I ran away from home and dropped out of school. Being homeless, then working minimum wage jobs quickly grew old. By the time I was twenty I'd called nineteen places home. I was ready to make a better life. I got my GED and went to college, where I met and married my husband, father of our two amazing grown children.

Having lived most of my young life feeling like an outsider, observing others, perhaps it's natural I was drawn to a career in journalism. Since I was desperately shy it may seem odd that I chose to work in television news, but I was fascinated by the fast pace, the excitement, the noday-the-same reality of it all. Perhaps that was related to the chaos of my upbringing.

After thirty-plus years covering stories—big and small, devastating or joyous, complicated or simple—I know that everything comes down to understanding people. What drove me as a journalist is what drives Vicky—a deep longing to find truth, and to understand why people make the choices they do. There's always more to the story, especially when it's your own.



AREAS OF EXPERTISE/INTEREST

TV news reporting, news and station management, journalism, carrot cake, writing & publishing journey, later-in-life career changes, grandchildren, travel, large families, Wordle & Spelling Bee