

The prosecutor is a novelist

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Christine McGuire insists that Kathryn Mackay, the fictional heroine of her just-published crime novel, "Until Proven Guilty," is not a thinly disguised reflection of herself.

Sure there are similarities, like their names for starters.

Mackay is a prosecutor, juggling motherhood and murder cases for the distict attorney's office in Santa Rita, a fictional Northern California beach town. She is a petite pistol of a woman who drives an apple-red Mazda, holds her own in the male-dominated world of law and whose love life is a mess.

McGuire is the real thing — a senior deputy for the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office who's tried more murder cases than she can easily count. Chances are good that if you're charged with homicide in this

county, McGuire will be seeing you in court.

She's an aggressive (some local attorneys say abrasive) can-do prosecutor who, like Mackay, does a balancing act between career and motherhood. And she drives an apple-red Mazda.

Unlike Mackay, she's happily married to a former cop whose spirited support kept her going during the four years it took to write "Until Proven Guilty" during stolen moments.

"Sometimes I was absolutely sick of it, but Richard kept me going," McGuire said of her husband, Richard Standridge. "And his background as a police officer really helped when it came to authenticity of the dialogue."

"Until Proven Guilty," a nail-chomping thriller about a district attorney working with investigators to stop a serial killer, was released in hard cover

this month by Pocket Books. McGuire is co-author of a best-selling true crime book, but this is her first foray into fiction.

It's right in keeping with a public lust for the authenticity of crime novels by attorneys-turned authors, like John Grisham and Scott Turow. A frequent lecturer at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., McGuire paid particular attention to making sure the forensics investigation central to the plot was faultless. "I didn't want my peers walking around with the book saying, 'Look here. This is wrong,'" she said.

McGuire's book is unusual in the genre because it's written by a woman attorney, and she takes great delight in portraying prosecutors as the good guys, for once.

The novel reflects McGuire's love of being a prosecutor, a job

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Law books form backdrop for Christine McGuire.

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she said is "mostly working long hours for low pay." The book is dedicated to "Prosecutors Everywhere: The real public defenders."

"Perfect Victim," McGuire's 1988 book, (co-written with writer Carla Norton) was about the ordeal of a woman held hostage as a sex slave for seven years by a Northern California couple. The book, which has been translated into several languages for foreign distribution, topped the New York Times non-fiction best seller list at one time.

McGuire was fresh out of law school and had barely hung her shingle as a civil attorney when she decided criminal law was her calling. She quit practice and signed on as a year-long Vista Volunteer, working as an attorney on Indian reservations in Nevada.

"We rode circuits, like in the Old West," recalled McGuire, a native of Ohio. "I worked in tribal courts and in state court representing Indian clients. It was tough, grueling work with clients who lived in extreme poverty. There was such a need, and it confirmed for me that I wanted to work in the public sector."

In 1980, McGuire was hired by the Tehama County District Attorney's Office in Red Bluff as its first woman prosecutor. She started with misdemeanors and

gradually worked her way up.

She became the DA in charge of cases involving domestic violence, child molestation and rape. She said the experience gave her an abiding empathy for and deep insight into the trauma and psychological abuse of battered women, which shows in her new book.

Then came the 1985 sex slave case, which drew nationwide attention and thrust her into the spotlight.

"It was not a slam dunk case," McGuire recalled. "It was not a case that came packaged and ready to go from the police investigators. We had to work together to build the case, and when it came to trial we had to deal with complicated issues of brainwashing; why the victim didn't leave when she had the opportunity. At the time, the only other case that had dealt with this issue was the Patty Hearst case."

McGuire is now visiting her native Cleveland on a book promotion tour, where she is staying with her mother. "It's really special," she said. "It's like hometown girl makes good. My biggest concern was what my mother would think, because the topic is pretty rough and my mother's a nice Midwest woman." She needn't have worried. "Mom loved the book, especially because it gave her real insight into what my job's all about."

McGuire is scheduled for a book reading and signing at the Capitola Book Cafe July 14.