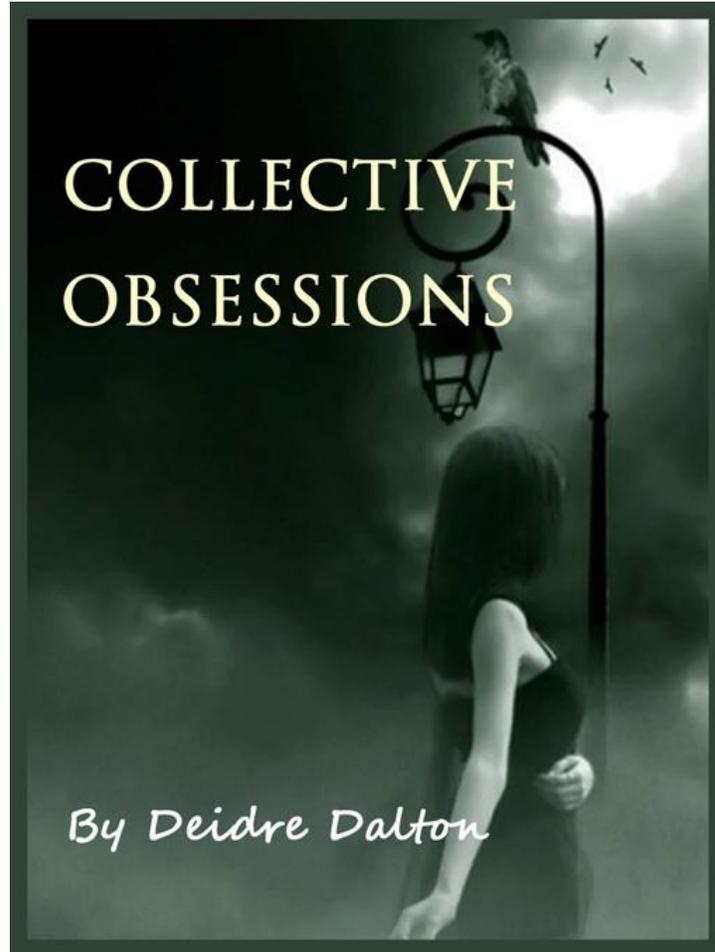


*Author's Note:*

# **Collective Obsessions Saga**

*The Writing Process by Deidre Dalton*



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“Collective Obsessions” is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author.

## ABOUT "COLLECTIVE OBSESSIONS"

Deidre Dalton (*aka Deborah O'Toole*) is author of the eight-part "Collective Obsessions Saga," which chronicles the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than 140 years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine.

*Follow the twists and turns of the Larkin and Sullivan families, who settle in America in the mid-1800s. John Larkin builds his vast business empire while daughter Molly and lighthouse keeper Colm Sullivan establish a connection that will endure for generations. Amidst murder, madness, perverse self-indulgence and avarice the two families struggle to free themselves from a dark legacy of secrets and obsessions.*

More than twenty-five years in the making, "Collective Obsessions" is a unique family saga set in the combined genres of mystery, the paranormal, historical romance, and dotted with a touch of the macabre and hints of classic Gothicism.

The eight-part family saga includes ***The Advent, Quixotic Crossings, The Twain Shall Meet, Entrallment, The Keeper's Journal, Hearts Desires, The Twilight*** and ***Megan's Legacy***.

For more, go to:

<http://deidredalton.com/>

The following "Author's Note" is included at the end of the *Collective Obsessions Saga* by Deborah O'Toole writing as Deidre Dalton, which details the twenty-seven-year writing process of eight serial novels.

### ***And so it begins...***

I've always been partial to lengthy book reads. Quick "airport novels" are not my style. I prefer abundant, well-written stories which carry the reader through several days rather than just a few hours. What's the point of settling down with a good book if you can't enjoy it for a period of time?

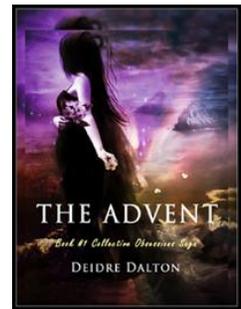
The "Collective Obsessions Saga" was originally hatched from my first full-length novel titled "Larkin" (now book three in the saga, known as *The Twain Shall Meet*). I wrote the story in its initial form in 1984. Over ensuing years, the tale took many different directions.

More than two decades after the book was finished, I had the seemingly impossible notion to continue the family saga. Some of the characters cried out for more - *closure if you will* - so I went back and created the beginning.

### ***Evolution of the "Collective Obsessions Saga"***

In essence, more than half the "Collective Obsessions Saga" was already written with the likes of *The Advent*, *The Twain Shall Meet* and *The Keeper's Journal*. These books turned into "parts" in the saga with their corresponding time periods in the storyline. However, since I was never too thrilled with the book titles (one of which was out of my control), they were changed for their appearance in the saga. The "missing years" also have new scenes and characters, most of which were created as I went along.

The series begins with *The Advent*, which runs from 1865 to 1920. John Larkin emigrates from Ireland to America and settles his self-named township in Maine. John builds a wealthy empire and grand estate, becoming one of the richest merchants on the Eastern Seaboard. Hiding behind the wealth and social position are quirky English servants, the effervescent family chef Claude Mondoux, John's paranoid-alcoholic wife Anne, their steadfast son Roderick and their mercurial daughter Mary Margaret, also affectionately known as Molly. Perhaps the blurb says it best: *Forbidden love and dark secrets haunt two Irish families hacking out a new life in 19th-century America. When Molly Larkin's father discovers her affair with lighthouse keeper Colm Sullivan, his reaction pitches her into madness. Yet the legacy forges a bond of blood that will endure for generations...*



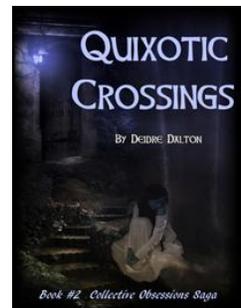
The book was originally known as *Passion Forsaken*. Quite frankly, I always disliked the title *Passion Forsaken*. However, through various publishers over the years, the moniker was beyond my control. The book is not a steamy romance in typical Harlequin fashion, nor is it a fluffy piece about unrequited love. The story launches the "Collective Obsessions Saga," which follows two Irish families from their arrival in America to the present day. It is the beginning of a somewhat twisted family saga that has nothing to do with happy endings or white-picket fences. The books weave through more than one hundred forty years of

fictional family history filled with avarice, madness, murder, mystery, paranormal activity, romance, self-indulgence and macabre Gothicism. It's hardly light reading.

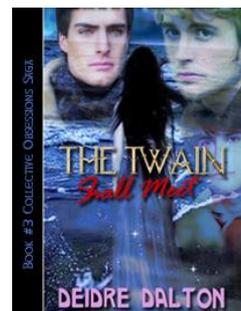
Larkin family chef Claude Mondoux is one of my favorite characters in the "Collective Obsessions Saga." Although he only appears in the first two novels – *The Advent* and *Quixotic Crossings* - his exuberance for life, fluid intuition and deeply-felt compassion leave a lasting impression. Claude was an unusual and striking figure of a man. Tall and slender, he had blond hair and blue eyes, with a stylish gold earring stud in his left earlobe. He was energetic, forthright, effervescent, naturally friendly and slightly effeminate, but not the least bit subservient. His sexuality remained a deliberate mystery throughout his tenure in my imagination. I used the last name of "Mondoux" for Claude in tribute to my maternal grandmother Irene Mondoux, who was French-Canadian.



Since there was a forty-one year gap between *The Advent* and book three *The Twain Shall Meet*, I wrote a new second part for "Collective Obsessions" titled ***Quixotic Crossings***, which takes place between 1926 and 1958 and involves more about the characters of Claude Mondoux, Phoebe McGarren and Colm Sullivan. Molly Larkin also makes several ghostly appearances in *Quixotic Crossings*. Certain early scenes in the book include dialog and settings in Paris, so I boned-up on the area in which they took place. I find it ironic how a writer will sometimes endeavor to achieve location authenticity even though the story takes place in a work of fiction. A turn of a phrase or a visual often makes me think about a particular story I'm working on or inspires a new idea. One time, I heard the word "porcine" and immediately thought about the character named "Gerald Frazier" in *Quixotic Crossings*. Frazier is an attorney for the main family in the story, and also conducts himself rather luridly in his private life. In my working spreadsheet for the book, I described Frazier as a "short man with a rounded middle, all but bald with square spectacles perched on his bulbous nose." Because of his physical appearance, I included the words "porcine mouth" in one of the scenes where Frazier is entertaining a friend under dubious circumstances. Frazier is basically a decent guy in character, but he is still immensely repulsive at almost every turn.

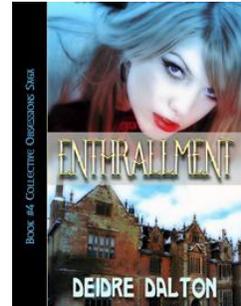


"Larkin" was renamed ***The Twain Shall Meet*** (running from 1961 to 1975). The book was actually the first story I wrote in the saga, which mainly focuses on Shannon Larkin and her relationships with Mike Sullivan and Scott Page. Mike almost didn't make his debut as planned. I was inches away from a major character re-write before the final draft of book was settled, much to my alarm. I had to zealously pitch the character of Mike Sullivan to my editor, who was of the initial opinion he was far too young to have feelings of intense love and incapable of the emotional temerity to methodically stalk Shannon Larkin. I managed to convince my editor otherwise, so Mike's character remains unchanged in *The Twain Shall Meet*. As he is an integral part of the story, especially in the beginning of the book, I'm relieved the artistic hurdle was overcome. And yes, I did base Mike's character on

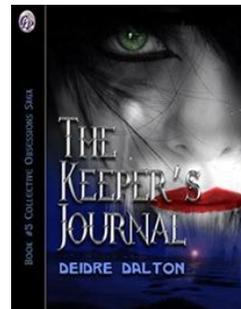


a "real" person. This particular fellow was someone I knew many years ago, and we did have a romance of sorts. However, the "real" Mike was not a demented stalker and we remained friends long after our summer fling. He read bits and pieces of *The Twain Shall Meet* and was tickled by the embellishments I chose to weave into his character.

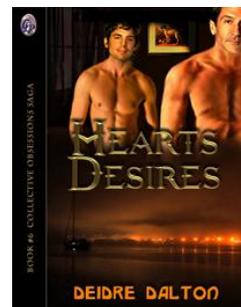
Book four ***Enthrallment*** (1980-1992) brings to light the origins of Carly O'Reilly and her relationship with the unknowing Liam Larkin. The late-in-life reunion between George Sullivan (*aka Ben Webb*) and Susan O'Reilly is revealed, and the gentle romance between Sean Larkin and Dana Maitland is explored. Jack Sansovino makes his debut in *Enthrallment*, the fiendish character becoming a dramatic part of the saga finale. A disturbing rape also takes place in the book. Writing the scene was particularly difficult. I was surprised by my emotional reaction as I wrote specifics, with anger and disgust being at the forefront. Second only to animal cruelty, sexual abuse and violence ranks high on my intolerance barometer. Rest assured, I didn't add the salacious content for shock value. However, the scuffle was necessary in the development of the loathsome Jack Sansovino, who reappears in *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*.



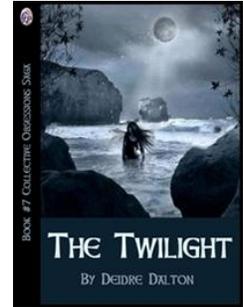
"Fall of the Curtain" is next (renamed ***The Keeper's Journal***), which takes place between the years 1994-1995. Shannon Larkin's daughter Angie Page discovers Colm Sullivan's old journal in the lighthouse keeper's cottage. The diary sheds light on the history between the Larkin and Sullivan families, but may be too late to stop Carly and Sara - the sisters of Mike Sullivan - from wreaking vengeance on the Larkin family for sins of the past. I developed the idea for *The Keeper's Journal* in 1998, when I lived in a crappy little trailer on the outskirts of Chubbuck, Idaho. My personal life was literal misery as my second marriage ground to a halt and financial resources were non-existent. Submerging my mind into a fictional world was the only way to deal with stress at the time, but in the end it proved fruitful on a creative level.



***Hearts Desires*** (1996-2000) follows, interweaving the next generation of Sullivan and Larkin families, as well as the lives of Brose Larkin, Jamie Page and Angie Cimarelli. Jack Sansovino also resurfaces, his influence heavily felt by Jamie. *Hearts Desires* is the first and only of my books to be classified in the LGBT genre. Throughout all eight books in the "Collective Obsessions Saga," there are two central gay characters in relation to the Larkin family (Jean-Claude Sullivan in *Quixotic Crossings* and Jamie Page in *Hearts Desires*). This wasn't something I did on purpose, but rather the characters just happened to blend into the storyline with their lives already written in my imagination. In other words, the two specific characters simply - and inadvertently - worked out that way. They are also related by blood (second cousins twice removed), but never actually meet as they appear in different time periods.



*The Twilight* is part seven of "Collective Obsessions," covering the years between 2001 through 2004 and detailing the surprising death of a long-time character. Let me qualify that *The Twilight* (named such about sixteen years ago), has absolutely nothing to do with vampires and the like, but rather the sunset years of a long relationship. It was a difficult part to write because I killed off one of the main characters, much beloved by his fellow fictional counterparts despite some ugly facts that came to light after his death. A much-needed dash of humor appears as the brash and grumbling Kevin Larkin finally marries his long-suffering girlfriend Mariko Woods.



The last part is *Megan's Legacy*. The idea to include a serial killer in the storyline came to me like a lightning bolt one winter evening as I wrote the final book. The direction became an integral element of the saga's conclusion. Megan Larkin - daughter of Carly O'Reilly (*Enthrallment* and *The Keeper's Journal*) and Liam Larkin - is forced to discover the truth and to set herself free from a legacy of family secrets and obsessions. The process brings the storyline full circle. *Megan's Legacy* ends in 2008 fictional time, signaling the coda for "Collective Obsessions."



Considering I began writing the "Collective Obsessions" storyline a few decades ago, I'm stunned rather speechless that it's finished, once and for all. Even better, I'm very happy with the way the story ended. I envisioned agonizing over the finale, but it didn't happen that way. I knew exactly where I wanted to go, and that's where I took the story and its characters.

### ***The Writing Process***

Part of the long writing process with the "Collective Obsessions Saga" involved killing off some of my favorite characters in the storyline. It's only natural as people age with each additional story. They cannot live forever. It might have been easier to leave the saga at four books, with some of the characters remaining immortal because I hadn't written proper endings for them. In creating the new book parts, I was forced to look at existing characters that were obviously aging. Some of them were "killed off" while others died naturally. I did away with some of them kindly and gently, while others met insidious endings.

I'm ever-watchful for inconsistencies, such as locations, physical characteristics, nick names and other generalities. For a series of eight books the size of "Collective Obsessions," the task becomes magnified. I mapped out a detailed family tree so as to avoid inconsistencies throughout the "Collective Obsessions Saga" and created spreadsheets for every part of the book to track character quirks and descriptions. The books became one enormous project which involved more than twenty years of writing and research, with several pit-stops in between as I carried out my own life.

Since I'm a writer often inspired by images, my character spreadsheet for "Collective Obsessions" became naturally larger as time progressed, but also included thumbnail pictures of people I felt represented my fictional characterizations. The images were not indicative of true personality traits of real people by a long shot, but rather a general idea of what I envisioned as the "outer shell" of each character. For instance, I based John Larkin's appearance on actor David Selby, who portrayed Quentin Collins in the *Dark Shadows* television serial. The physical aspects of Mayor David Azoulay, who appears in *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*, was inspired by Mark Feuerstein, star of the USA Network series *Royal Pains*. Colm and Mike Sullivan, who are described as closely resembling one another in the various storylines, are based on Jason Connery as he appeared in *Robin of Sherwood*.

Each major character had a snapshot. That being said, I would like to emphasize that all books in the "Collective Obsessions Saga" are works of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Larkin City, Maine is entirely my own creation, although in my mind it exists between the real cities of Searsport and Stockton Springs. People assume I chose the locale because of Stephen King's predilection for the place, but the selection was actually a result of my childhood fascination with the TV serial *Dark Shadows*, which was set in the fictional town of Collinwood, Maine.

Experience Larkin City and its environs...

Get little-known facts about the Larkin estate and the family's imposing mansion overlooking Banshee Point Lighthouse. Learn how John Larkin settled in Maine, turning his self-named village into one of the most popular destinations on the Eastern seaboard. Discover how the harbor town went from an obscure New England hamlet to a centre for education, commerce and leisure.

Visit the *Banshee Point Winery* to taste the exclusive *Larkin Cognac*, which comes in an elegant periwinkle bottle containing the perfect flavor bouquet of nuts, fruits, spices and flora. Make a reservation at the *Silver Tassel Restaurant* to indulge in sumptuous fare, or try the *Amber Whale Tavern* overlooking the harbor for fresh seafood. *Bruno's Café* offers homemade foodstuff, with all the latest gossip served up by waitress Berty Soames. Take a walk in *Colleen Larkin Memorial Park*, or visit the beautiful student Quad at *Larkin City University* (LCU). The *Larkin Harbor Tour Company* will take you for a sail on the *Lady Banshee* to see the sights and hear the sounds. If water rides are not to your taste, try a day of shopping at *Azoulay Gems*, *Brickyard Square*, *Harbor Hill*, the *Larkin Co-Op*, *Nook & Cranny* or the *Wee Book Shop*. Wind down with a drink or two at the *Coven Nightclub* or *Suds Pub*, or enjoy a game of snooker at *Clyde's Billiard Hall*. If you're in the mood for a good scare, pay a visit to the *Larkin City Cemetery* for a chat with former locals.

Befriend a member of the Larkin family and tour their grand estate. The elaborate mansion attic holds years of secrets that might curl your hair, or bypass the bitter memories to view Larkin City from the breathtaking *Widow's Walk*. Stroll down to the Banshee Point Lighthouse to take a long gander over the Atlantic Ocean, or visit the keeper's cottage to relive the tragic romance of Molly Larkin and Colm Sullivan. Head back to the mansion to

take tea with the family in their drawing room, or wait until dinnertime to partake vittles in the imposing and opulent dining room.

After dinner, take a stroll in the eerie family graveyard, but be warned:

*Don't go alone or you might never come back...*

Even though I'm a fiction writer first and foremost, more than once I've integrated the physical appearance or character traits of real people into my writing. These people can be family members, friends or complete strangers who just happen to catch my eye during the course of a normal day. The aforementioned people rarely recognize themselves after I've written fictional accounts around their characters, unless I choose to tell them about it.

Animals and treasured pets also figure into the mix on occasion. Aside from his own fictional wonderland found in the *Short Tales Collection*, my late pooch Foofer also makes an appearance in *The Keeper's Journal* where he is discovered abandoned by Jamie Page. Jamie, who is also a veterinarian, adopts Foofer. The two become inseparable, exemplifying the master and devoted canine relationship. There is more to Foofer's seemingly casual presence in the book, which is scant when compared to the unfolding human drama in the storyline. Foofer is Jamie's vigilant protector in *Hearts Desires*, where he distrusts his master's new friend Jack Sansovino with spot-on canine instinct. However, Foofer's true purpose becomes quite clear in *Megan's Legacy*, the final book in the "Collective Obsessions Saga." My cat Kiki also appears in *Megan's Legacy*, where she is found abandoned by the main character Megan Larkin. Kiki is mentioned fleetingly throughout the book, but she is part of the dramatic saga finale albeit in subtle fashion.



For a writer, fictional characters come alive and take on characteristics of their own. I can't claim to hear my characters actually speaking to me, but they do develop faces and personas of their own in my sometimes unpredictable imagination. There were times I become daunted by the size of "Collective Obsessions," but because I know the characters and the story so well I never lost faith. The process was still very long, however. There were days I felt as if I was getting absolutely nowhere, but then there were others that moved quickly to boost my confidence.

As anyone who submits their own written work knows, the pursuit of a publishing contract is not the easiest of undertakings. Preparing samples, queries and multiple synopses' is a lengthy process, not to mention the work involved in writing and completing a book in the first place. Rejections are numerous, and frequent. The ego can take quite a battering as time marches on, and any sort of personal life is almost out of the question. Perseverance is a necessary component, no matter how many rejections and critiques come your way. Some days it's not easy to stay positive when the inbox is full of form-letter-declines and short shrifts. Then there is the added negative bonus of "friends" who roll their eyes every time writing is mentioned, in essence relaying the message: "Why doesn't she just give up and get a real life?" It's difficult to communicate the passion that often comes with writing, especially to family and friends. I've left several friends in my wake because they were

upset by the time I spent writing. When I'm focused I don't much care what people think, so needless to say the friends I've made over the years have sort of disappeared into the woodwork. It's sad, but I wouldn't change anything. If there is anything I can offer in the way of encouragement to aspiring authors, it is to *never give up on your dreams*.

I will never be blasé about receiving a publishing contract, whether it's for my first, eighth or fiftieth book. Each time it's exciting beyond words, and not to be taken for granted. I'm never likely to forget the years of hard work that came before the contracts, and the amount of work still to follow. I do give myself credit for maintaining dogged persistence, but I also believe keeping a positive outlook - no matter how desperate or unhappy life may seem at times - is an important factor. I decided to cut most of the negative from my life a long time ago, whether in relation to circumstances or people. It was the only way for me.

The completion of the "Collective Obsessions Saga" was bittersweet. While elated the story is finished I'm also a bit reluctant to let my characters go. They have frolicked in my imagination for so long, as if a part of my very being, that it was hard to turn that final page over, once and for all.

The writing process may have left me threadbare on a personal level, but it has been deeply satisfying in all the ways that truly matter to me.

### **Deidre Dalton**



<http://websdivine.tripod.com/collective/index.htm>

**Collective Obsessions**

*Trapped incandescent swirls;  
like raptly churning ocean waves.  
Through milky, translucent pearls  
and collective misty mind caves.  
Kith and kin disavow as one;  
twelve decades and seven of obsessive love.  
No one has forgotten, and no one has won;  
and yet forever dwell spellbound thereof.*

"Collective Obsessions" poem ©Deborah O'Toole.  
From the "Torn Bits & Pieces" poetry collection.

### ***Future Plans for the "Collective Obsessions Saga"***

My plan for the "Collective Obsessions Saga" is to eventually combine all eight titles into one volume. The idea has been in the back of my mind for several years, long before I finished writing the books. Because of my contractual obligations to Club Lighthouse Publishing, the "plan" will not come to fruition until 2016 or thereabouts.

I'm a huge fan of family sagas and gothic collections, but prefer the works to be contained in one volume. Frankly, I'd rather not buy several books when one will cover the lot. On average, the "Collective Obsessions Saga" as one book runs 1,471 pages with a word count of 820,454. Merging all titles will make for a very long read. However, surely I'm not the only one who likes big books.

Now that novels are quickly downloaded in e-book fashion, presenting all eight books together as one is not such a far-fetched notion. Printing and shipping costs are a thing of the past, neither of which are required with e-books. As much as print book-lovers might disagree, electronic reads are not a fad. In fact, they are far outselling their printed counterparts in today's market. E-books are not going away, which is a good thing. Think of all the trees that are being saved in the process!

The amount of writing and work (*research, editing, et al*) for the "Collective Obsessions Saga" is still mind-boggling to me. That it was created over a time-period of more than twenty-five years hits home for me on occasion as well. Where in blue blazes did I find the energy and motivation to keep pressing on to finish the books? Or keeping a common thread through so many words, scenes and dialogs?

I liken the writing style and theme to several sources, which influenced me throughout my life. The two most prominent are Dorothy Daniels and Marilyn Harris, with smatterings of Victoria Holt, Susan Kay, Bertrice Small and the late (but great) Kathleen Woodiwiss.

The many different literary styles somehow mesh and work together in my head. I'm not sure how, but I gave-up questioning it a long time ago.

### ***Honorable Mention: Characters in the Kitchen***

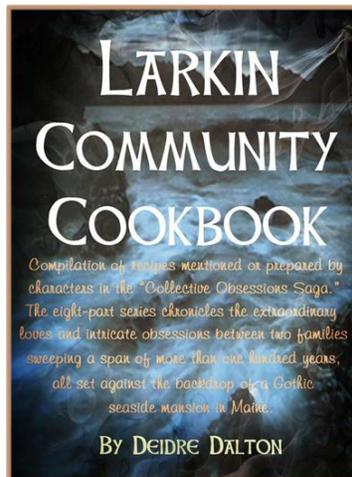
Many of the fictional characters in the "Collective Obsessions Saga" are exceptional cooks. It begins with first family chef Claude Mondoux (*The Advent*), and carries on with the ill-fated Nicholas Bertrand (*Quixotic Crossings*), the much-beloved Mae Jensen (*The Twain Shall Meet*), and the drunken Cora Ann Hogan (*The Twilight*).

The diabolical Amber Whale executive chef Jack Sansovino (*Hearts Desires*) is also a dab hand in the kitchen, where he brews more than just seafood specialties.

Various members of the Larkin family have culinary talent as well, including Shannon, Derek and Dana, who prepare mouth-watering dishes for family and friends. Derek Larkin (*Hearts Desires*) also becomes a professional chef and opens his own elegant restaurant in Larkin City, known as the *Silver Tassel*.

Before her grisly demise, Carly O'Reilly (*Enthrallment* and *The Keeper's Journal*) whips up imitative dishes for her highly successful Harbor View Catering Company, where she also sells homemade foodstuffs.

The characters and their recipes provided the inspiration for the *Larkin Community Cookbook*.



### ***Larkin Community Cookbook***

[http://websdivine.tripod.com/ddalton/books\\_cookbook.htm](http://websdivine.tripod.com/ddalton/books_cookbook.htm)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deidre Dalton is author of the "Collective Obsessions Saga," which chronicles the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than one hundred years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine. Titles in the eight-part family saga include *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*.

She is also author of the "Bloodline Trilogy," which follows the mysterious and magical journey of one family through time. Books in the trilogy include *Bloodfrost*, *Bloodlust* and *Blood & Soul*.

Deidre is author and editor of the *Larkin Community Cookbook*, which is a compilation of recipes mentioned or prepared by characters in the "Collective Obsessions Saga," and the electronic versions of *About Larkin* (companion guide to the "Collective Obsessions Saga"), and *The Private Journal of Colm Sullivan*.

Writing under the pseudonym Deborah O'Toole, Deidre is also author of the fiction titles *Celtic Remnants*, *Glinhaven* and *Mind Sweeper*, *Short Tales Collection* (juvenile fiction), and a book of poetry known as *Torn Bits & Pieces*.

For more, visit <http://www.deborahotoole.com>.

Using the pseudonym Shenanchie O'Toole, she also writes for the cooking/recipe web site Food Fare. She is writer and co-editor of the *Ambrosia Cookbook*, *Breakfast Cookbook*, *Community Garden Cookbook*, *Food Fare Cookbook*, *Furry Friends Cookbook*, *Larkin Community Cookbook*, *Quirky Snacks Cookbook*, *Recipes-on-a-Budget Cookbook* and the *Soups & Stews Cookbook*, along with more than forty e-book titles in the *Food Fare Culinary Collection*.

Deidre is a native of Greenwich, Connecticut. She has also lived in San Francisco, Tucson, Reno and Spokane, among other US cities.

For more, visit Deidre's web site at: <http://deidredalton.com/>.



**Deidre Dalton**