

## Elizabeth J St John



## Mary Ann Bernal | A Journey Along the Crusader's Path

When I first chatted with author Mary Ann Bernal, I knew I had found a friend – someone else who writes listening to Gregorian chants, Carmina Burana and Bob Seger! Here's more of my interview, as we talk about Mary Ann's fascination with the dark ages and the joy of serendipity.



### What music do you listen to when you write?

As with the actor who becomes the character, so should the author become part of the world being created. With *The Briton* and the *Dane* novels, I chose period music, immersing myself in the Ninth Century. Movie soundtracks from the *Vikings* (the 1958 movie, not the TV series) and *Alfred the Great* (c 1969) and *First Knight* (c 1995) set the mood along with instrumentals such as *A Treasury of Gregorian Chants* and *Carmina Burana*. [Listen and watch here](#)

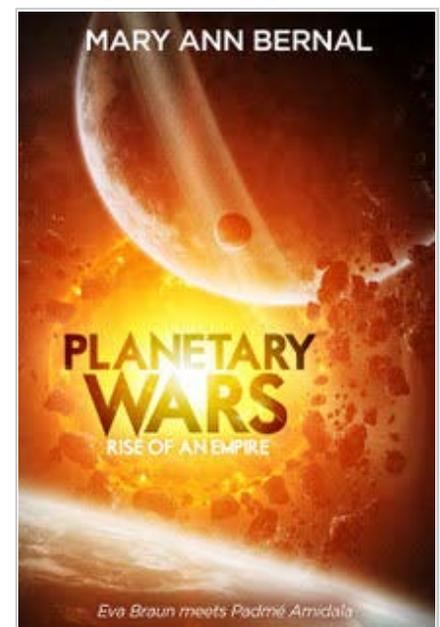
For my contemporary short stories, I chose Choral Classics and Classical Thunder, including my favorite, *Dies Irae* (Verdi).

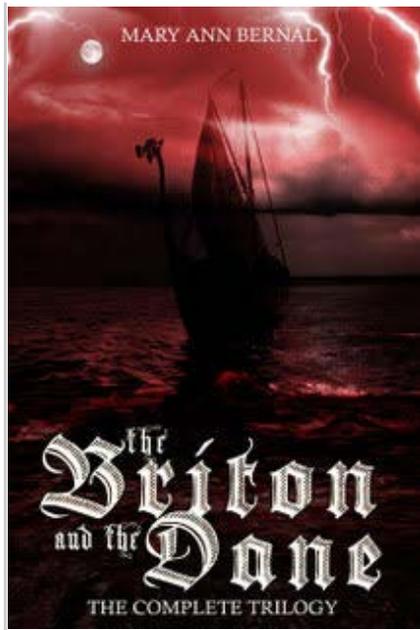
What better way to write science fiction than listening to the best of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* in my dedicated science fiction room with memorabilia from *Star Trek The Original Series* to *Stargate Atlantis* covering the walls, which included a photo of myself on *Voyager's* bridge, standing next to Captain Janeway.

Once again, I chose period music while writing *Crusader's Path*. In addition to the Gregorian Chants and *Carmina Burana*, I added *The Castle of Fair Welcome* and *The Pleasures of the Royal Courts*. But when back into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there's nothing like *Old Time Rock N' Roll* (Bob Seger).

**Do you want each book to stand on its own, or are you building a body of work with connections or themes between each book?**

Since High School, I have always wanted to write my Erik the Viking story after seeing a multitude of period films throughout my impressionable years. The big screen did not disappoint with heroic knights defeating the Norse invaders and fair maidens finding suitable husbands.





With this background, and years of devouring every book I could find on the Viking era and Anglo-Saxon Britain, I chose the reign of Alfred the Great for the setting of my story. Initially, it was supposed to be one novel with Erik, the Danish Prince, in the lead role with the Saxon Gwyneth, the female counterpart. As the story evolved, the supporting characters' subplots thickened, and they demanded more time. One book became three. Each book in the trilogy's back story lets the reader enjoy the adventure without having to start at the beginning. The final two novels in the franchise, *The Briton and the Dane: Concordia* and *The Briton and the Dane: Timeline*, are stand-alone.

After spending five years in Anglo-Saxon Britain, I chose to write a collection of

contemporary short stories. Before heading back to the historical past, I delved into the realm of science fiction. But my love of historical fiction beckoned as did an interest in the Crusades after watching *Knightfall* on the History Channel. *Crusader's Path* is set during the First Crusade, a different theme from my previous work.

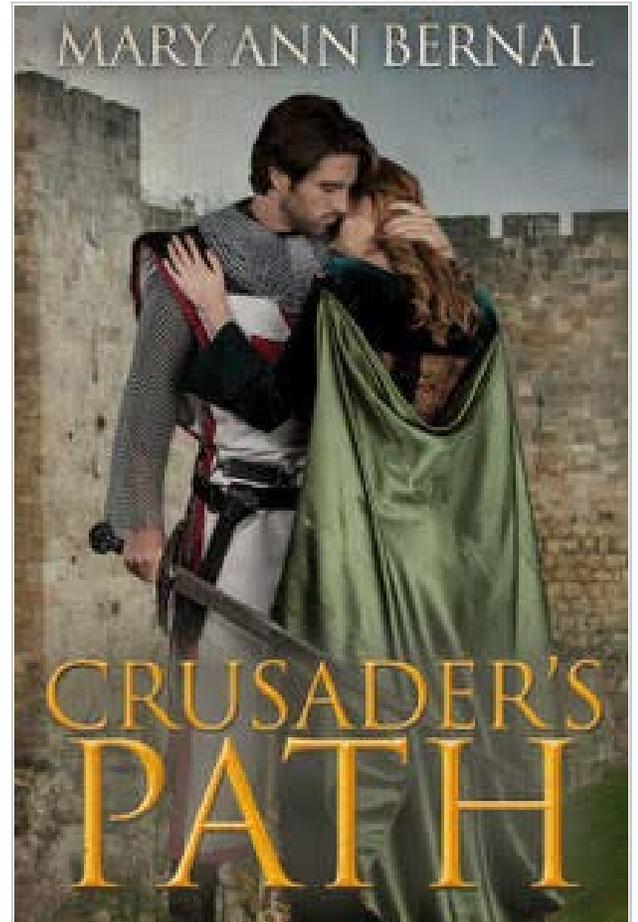
#### **How do you select the names of your characters?**

For my historical novels, I choose authentic names of the period. I research the origin of the name and when it was first used, and check baby sites for popular names to consider for my contemporary stories. There are name generator sites for science fiction/fantasy, which is also helpful. My favorite name is Arista from *The Briton and the Dane: Birthright*. And I am partial to Etienne.

#### **What's the best thing a reader has said about or written to you?**

As a supporter of the U.S. Military, I was involved with *Soldiers Angels*, a non-profit organization, which had people writing letters and sending care packages to deployed soldiers. In addition to adopting soldiers for the duration of their tour, I also mentored new "angels" and was part of the Card Plus team.

I received this lovely message early on in my writing career:  
*I am a fellow Angel from Colorado. I wanted to let you know of a funny story. My son, Tyler, age 13, came home from school and said he was asked if he would be interested in reading a book that the librarian just found about. Ty couldn't remember the title of the*





*book, but it was about Vikings and knights. So when I opened up the Founder's Notes from Patti and saw your profile, I asked Tyler if The Briton and the Dane was the title of the book...I thought he was going to come out of the phone. I told him a fellow Soldiers' Angel wrote it, and now I just bought a copy and Tyler will tell the librarian*

*to get the book. Thought you would like Congrats again. Can't wait to read it now.*

#### **Quick Q&A**

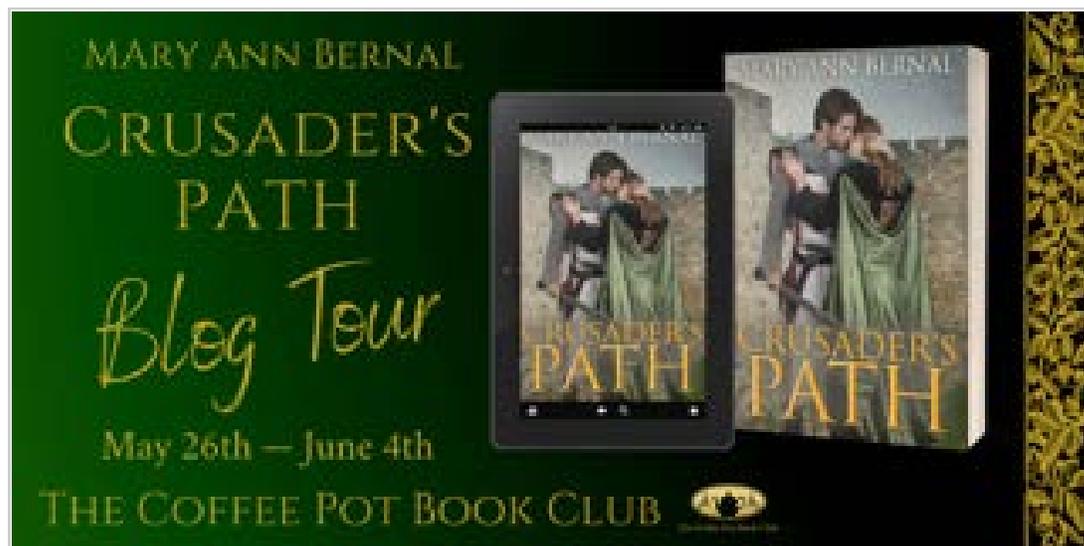
**Tea or Coffee** – Coffee

**Dark or Milk Chocolate** – Milk Chocolate

**When were you the happiest** – When I brought my newborn son home from the hospital.

**Favorite Children's Book** – Cinderella

**Favorite Adult Novel** – Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott



From the sweeping hills of Argences to the port city of Cologne overlooking the River Rhine, Etienne and Avielle find themselves drawn by the need for redemption against the backdrop of the First Crusade.

Heeding the call of His Holiness, Urban II, to free the Holy Land from the

infidel, Etienne follows Duke Robert of Normandy across the treacherous miles, braving sweltering heat and snow-covered mountain passes while en route to the Byzantine Empire.

Moved by Peter of Amiens' charismatic rhetoric in the streets of the Holy Roman Empire, Avielle joins the humble army of pilgrims. Upon arrival in Mentz, the peasant Crusaders do the unthinkable, destroying the Jewish Community. Consumed with guilt, Avielle is determined to die fighting for Christ, assuring her place in Heaven.

Etienne and Avielle cross paths in Constantinople, where they commiserate over past misdeeds. A spark becomes a flame, but when Avielle contracts leprosy, Etienne makes a promise to God, offering to take the priest cowl in exchange for ridding Avielle of her affliction.

Will Etienne be true to his word if Avielle is cleansed of the contagion, or will he risk eternal damnation to be with the woman he loves?

**Amazon.com:** <https://www.amazon.com/Crusaders-Path-Mary-Ann-Bernal-ebook/dp/B084F3PGRO>

**Amazon UK:** <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Crusaders-Path-Mary-Ann-Bernal-ebook/dp/B084F3PGRO>

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