



the Sisters in Crime Quarterly

Vol. 24, No.2

Reviewers unleashed

by Molly Weston

Reviews of mysteries written by women—or rather the dearth of them formed the foundation of Sisters in Crime. Our review monitoring project has remained front and center for years, and authors talk about the topic at every gathering.

To get a look at the other side of the subject, we polled five well-known reviewers to ask how they choose books, if gender bias in reviewing is real, and other questions.

How they came to review in the first place puts pause to the disgruntled, jealous writer argument fostered by many. Each of the reviewers admits to a tremendous love of the genre.

Wanting to add some writing to her work at the Fort Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel*, Oline H. Cogdill (tinyurl.com/4xlbwtp) offered to review a “couple” of mysteries. Since 1991, she has written for other publications including *Mystery Scene*, *Publishers Weekly*, and McClatchy Tribune Features which often distributes her work across the world.

Hallie Ephron’s (hallieephron.com) bi-monthly column has appeared in *The Boston Globe* since 2004, when the book editor asked if she’d like to take over from a reviewer who gave it up. She grabbed it! Hallie released *Writing and Selling Your Mystery Novel* before her two novels of suspense, *Never Tell a Lie* and *Come and Find Me*.

Jen Forbus missed talking about books with others after retiring as a high school English teacher, so she began “Jen’s Book Thoughts” (www.jensbookthoughts.com) about three years ago. She also reviews for *Crimespre*.

Although Art Taylor (www.arttaylorwriter.com) began reviewing all types of books, his first love as a reader was mystery and suspense. His freelance review work for the *Washington Post* moved him steadily in the direction of crime fiction. He has published numerous short mysteries and is nominated for the Derringer

Award for Best Novelette for “Rearview Window” in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*.

Sarah Weinman (offonatangent.tumblr.com/) began her blog, “Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind,” in 2003, when “literary blogs were being noticed by book editors at various newspapers.” Since then, her reviews and columns have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *National Post*, *Maclean’s*, *The Baltimore Sun*, the *Washington Post*, the *Barnes & Noble Review*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Daily Beast*, and others.

How do you choose?

All reviewers except Forbus have some books assigned for reviews. For their newspaper audiences, both Cogdill and Ephron give weight to local authors but added that additional factors influence their decisions. Cogdill looks for what “sounds good or different—or if an author is new,” and Ephron added, “one where there’s some kind of buzz building, a well-known author whose work I’ve never read, a great first page, a debut novel.”

Weinman added, “if I’m choosing for a column, a common theme helps, and knowing the audience and disposition of a particular publication absolutely helps. What works for the *LA Times* might not for the *Wall Street Journal*.”

Because Forbus is an independent reviewer, she can use other criteria. “First is time. I’ve had to turn down requests because I’m simply overwhelmed...next is the story concept...I won’t review books I can’t be mostly positive about.”

Given the opportunity to choose, Taylor generally “looked for diversity—stylistic, gender, geographical, etc.—and tried to represent a mix of publishers...small presses as well as the big New York houses.”

Does author gender matter?

Everyone except Weinman was emphatic in denial. Her response may surprise, “It shouldn’t but it does, and I do try as best as possible to

include women in an equal or disproportionately favorable manner...For the subgenre...I love best, hardboiled/noir, men still outnumber women. So when a female noir writer comes along, this is a godsend...”

Speaking of subgenre

Cogdill “gravitate(s) more toward hardboiled, but I love it all.” Taylor agrees. “I’m...as happy with a cozy as with hardboiled or noir.” Ephron’s favorites? “Don’t have one.” Forbus confesses, “I like gritty; I like social issues: and I don’t always expect a happy ending. So, I think it’s unfair to both me and the author to take a book that doesn’t have a chance of being the right fit for me.” Weinman’s views are widening from her hardboiled/noir preference. “I am growing to love what I think of as ‘domestic suspense,’ psychological novels about women...subtle, but scary books they are.”

Cover influence

Anyone who has read the 2010 SinC Mystery Readers Survey knows how readers feel about covers, but our reviewers are mixed. Taylor asks, “How can you *not* be influenced by covers...an eye-catching cover certainly grabs your attention, makes you want to see what’s inside. Sometimes you’re rewarded, sometimes not.”

Weinman differs but knows who to blame. “Subconsciously, I know a bad one when I see it, but I also understand authors get saddled with crappy covers through no fault of their own.”

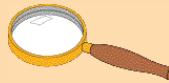
Forbus answers with one word, “nope.”

“Since many of the advanced copies I get have just a blue, green, or yellow cover with no pictures (or no cover if they come by e-book, the answer is no,” said Cogdill, however, “if the publisher has put no effort into the cover, then what is [inside it] probably isn’t worth it either.”

Ephron takes a wider look at the whole book, “Of course, also the quality of the binding, paper, and typeset.”

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Get a Clue



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Deadlines & Submissions

- Deadline for articles for the September issue of *inSinC* is July 15.
- Include name, email and mailing address, and phone number with submissions.
- Send columns, articles, high-res photos, ideas, praise, and story ideas via e-mail to **Molly Weston**

mysteryheel@mac.com
 919.362.1436

Docket

- Members' publications since this edition will be listed in THE DOCKET. Include publication dates when submitting.
- Honors, awards and events of great "pith and moment" should be submitted as short, separate notices without publicity/ promotion of individual members.
- Material for THE DOCKET is due July 10 and should be sent to

Patricia Gulley
 weycottage@yahoo.com

inSinc

the Sisters in Crime Quarterly

The mission of Sisters in Crime is to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry.

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|--|---|
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Presidents of Sisters in Crime

1987-88 Sara Paretsky	1995-96 Elaine Raco Chase	2003-04 Kate Grilley
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1993-94 Linda Grant	2001-02 Eve K. Sandstrom	2009-10 Marcia Talley
1994-95 Barbara D'Amato	2002-03 Kate Flora	2010-11 Cathy Pickens

Legend

In 2008, the board of directors of Sisters in Crime implemented a new strategic plan. Three goals emerged from this plan. *inSinc* articles will be marked with icons to represent the appropriate goal.



Advocacy, monitoring, and reporting



Professional education and career development



Membership growth, networking, and forums for members

Cathy Speaks

Sisters in Crime has many projects in the works! Beginning with “The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age” study (available on the SinC website, if you haven’t already seen it), we have been exploring the ways readers and books find each other.

- The annual Publishers Summit this year will descend on the American Library Association’s annual meeting in June, where the team (including Frankie Bailey, Barbara Fister, Nancy Martin, Molly Weston, and me) will interview librarians from different specialties (YA and adult reader advisory services, programming), publishers’ contacts, book reviewers, and others to learn how libraries find books and how they share those with their patrons. The final report will be available in the fall.

To see Publishers Summit reports from previous years, check the SinC website under Resources. Last year’s Summit reported on e-books and interviewed Google Books, Amazon, iBooks, and Smashwords.

- SinC has also signed on as a Library Champion, an American Library Association (ALA) program in support of libraries. Mary Boone,

our library liaison, is arranging for the booth at the ALA meeting, where we will promote SinC to librarians. We are located near both the mystery and food stages, which can only help improve the draw to our booth! Let Mary know if you’ll be attending ALA!

- Of course we’re continuing the SinC Monitoring Project, led by Barb Goffman, evaluating the amount of review coverage received by women mystery writers. This year, Barbara Fister presented an academic paper on SinC’s activities, including discussion of the monitoring project and other activities, at the Popular Culture Association’s annual meeting.

- And of course we’re continuing the We Love Libraries Lottery. The lottery selects one library each month to receive \$1000 for book purchases. The number of libraries registered for the drawing hasn’t grown much in the last few months, but what library wouldn’t like the chance to win \$1000 to buy books? Registration is simple: Complete the entry form on the website and upload a photo of one or more library staff members with three books from their collection by Sisters in Crime members.



This is where we need your help! Ask your local librarians if they have registered for the lottery! Offer to help them select the books by SinC members for the photo! Tell them they can join SinC!

Plenty of other things are going on, too. As always, I hope you have a huge to-be-read stack of mysteries waiting for you and plenty of time to enjoy them. Happy reading!

Editor’s Note

by Molly Weston

Somebody, please—remind me I’m retired. Or, else—tell me how I ever held a full-time job. So much is going on in my life now I never have time to wonder what to do next. On the other hand, I rarely do anything I *don’t want* to do!

Sisters in Crime has a lot to do with how I spend my days now, and I rarely have a week go by without someone asking me how they can have my job. I won’t share that information yet, but I will tell you some of the exciting things I’ve done recently and more that I look forward to doing.

In February, I went to the Cape Fear Crime Festival in Wilmington. I was impressed with how many SinC members in North and South

Carolina were there—and how few I knew before I got there.

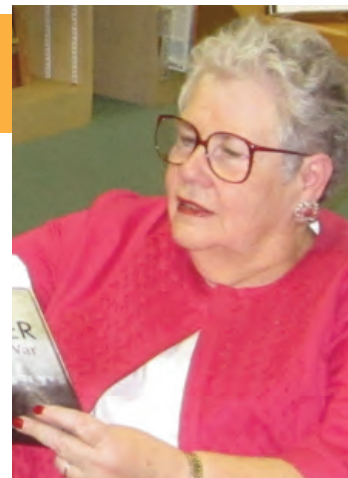
Just lately, I’ve had delightful visits from authors on tour, a weekend in Bethesda MD for Malice Domestic (where I spent time at the SinC presidents’ lunch, the SinC breakfast, and moderating a panel composed completely of SinC members). I was delighted to meet many more members and invited several readers and librarians to join SinC. Several assured me they would and I sincerely hope they have all joined by now. Welcome!

I was happy to be asked to join the SinC Publishers Summit team and attend the ALA Conference in New Orleans in late June. Cathy has put together a schedule that will give us the

opportunity to pick the brains of people in the know about how readers find books. (I’ve bought a new pair of comfortable shoes! We’re going to be very busy.)

Please enjoy this issue of inSinC. We’ve got great articles and I’m running out of space so I can’t mention them all here.

Here’s wishing you all a wonderful summer filled with good writing and excellent reading. That should make all of us very happy!



Chapter Highlights

Guppy Chapter

www.sinc-guppies.org

The Guppy Chapter is celebrating the publication of its first anthology, *Fish Tales: 22 Tales of Murder and Mayhem from the Rising Stars of Mystery*.

At 400-plus members, the Guppies—short for The Great Unpublished—is the largest and one of the most supportive SinC chapters. Many members have published their first fiction while a Guppy and have stayed in the chapter to keep sharing and learning with other writers.

In 2009, the chapter conceived its first anthology as a learning experience for its members and as an opportunity to introduce mystery readers to some promising new writers. More than 40 members submitted stories, each involving a body of water in which fish could be found. Each submitting writer reviewed and evaluated three other submissions, using criteria established by the organizing committee; ultimately, 22 stories were chosen. SinC member and freelance editor Ramona DeFelice Long worked with contributors to polish the stories; SinC member, editor, and Agatha-winner Chris Roerden wrote an introduction.

The contributors and committee then searched for a publisher, ultimately landing with Wildside, also the publisher of the Chesapeake Chapter's recent anthologies. Contributors are now learning about promotion first-hand, while drinking champagne (cyber and otherwise), eating chocolate, and firing up the kick line—all traditional Guppy methods of celebration.

Some members have published full-length mysteries, short stories, or nonfiction, while others are getting their first dip in the waters. The waters are so fine that the Guppies are now reviewing submissions for the next anthology, *Fish Nets*.

Fish Tales is available in print and electronic form. The full list of contributors is in The Docket.



Chapter Presidents Meeting

by Sandra Parshall

About 20 chapter representatives attended our meeting at Malice Domestic on Friday, April 29, to exchange ideas for celebrating SinC's 25th anniversary. There's some confusion about the exact date of the anniversary, since the founding members were getting together for several months before SinC was officially born, but everyone agrees that SinC became a real organization at Bouchercon 25 years ago, so October is the month designated as our anniversary month.

Beth Wasson reminded everyone that SinC grants are available to help cover the cost of special chapter events. The application form is on the national website in the Members Only section. Beth can also supply 25th anniversary banners and signs, and our new national membership brochure. (Please request at least a month before you need the materials.)

Possible chapter activities discussed:

An anniversary party, complete with cake, at a bookstore or library, with SinC authors on hand to meet the public and talk about the organization. Kris Neri, who owns the Well Red Coyote in Arizona, agreed to hold a party at her store.

A special chapter meeting, open to the public, with members talking about what they've published in the past year, no matter the publishing platform. This is a good opportunity to demonstrate the support and practical help SinC offers its writer members. If you have an independent bookstore in your area, invite the bookseller to handle print sales at the meeting.

A meeting, open to the public, with a "star" SinC member as guest speaker.

Chapters that regularly participate in book fairs, library conferences, etc., as the New England

chapter does, can use those events to bring attention to SinC's milestone anniversary and the importance of the organization to women mystery writers.

A series of library panels would take the SinC message to a wider audience and give authors in your chapter added exposure. Many chapters already do library events regularly. Those that don't yet have an organized speakers' project should reach out to local libraries, which are usually receptive to both traditional print authors and e-book authors. Contact the editor of your state library association's newsletter and ask to submit a brief article in the newsletter offering to arrange mystery programs for any interested libraries.

Kathie Felix, SinC's public relations director and managing editor of the SinC blog, encouraged chapters to publicize their events in the smaller community newspapers in their areas. Large papers will seldom be interested in chapter activities, but community papers may welcome announcements. Also reach out to mystery book discussion groups and aspiring writers' groups. Post announcements on Facebook and the national SinC listserv. Provide photos and articles about your events to the SinC blog (kathiefelix@aol.com) and to inSinC (mysteryheel@mac.com).

When the discussion turned to recruiting new members, Beth reminded everyone that the national website's member directory now allows for member searches by state. You can regularly obtain a list of new SinC members in your chapter area and invite them to attend a meeting, get to know everyone, and join the chapter. A personal invitation is often all it takes to bring in a new member.

I hope all of you will continue the discussion on this list and exchange more ideas about ways our chapters can celebrate SinC's 25th anniversary. Let us hear your ideas!



Chesapeake Chapter

www.chessiechapter.org

On the first Saturday in April, 23 Chesapeake Chapter super sleuths descended on the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in Washington DC. We woke our little gray cells and got to work identifying "whodunit" at the museum's "Forensic Lab: The Total CSI Experience" workshop. Not a single clue was overlooked as we sifted through the evidence, determined to ascertain how the murder was committed and by whom.



We took fingerprints; examined splatter marks, pieces of fabric and handwriting samples; and, compared the whereabouts and statements of the three persons of interest. When it was time to reveal the perpetrators, more than a third of our group identified the correct person(s). We left the scene of the crime in good spirits and headed home, knowing that the world was a little safer—thanks to our astute powers of observation and excellent crime-solving abilities.



Sinc into Great Writing!

Mapping the New World of Publishing— Or, How to Succeed in a Business That's Really Trying

Sisters in Crime will hold the annual SinC into Great Writing! workshop on Wednesday, September 14, 2011, one day prior to Spirits of St Louis Bouchercon.

“Mapping the New World of Publishing—Or, How to Succeed in a Business that's Really Trying” will be held at the Holiday Inn Select, just two short blocks away from the conference hotel. Bouchercon registration is not necessary to attend this one-day workshop.

Sisters in Crime has discounted the workshop as a benefit for its members. The cost for the entire day, including dinner, is just \$50. The charge for non-members is \$150, so join Sisters in Crime and save money! Spots fill up fast and we can seat only 100. Register now!

David Wilk, CEO of Booktrix, will be the keynote speaker; his topic, “Planning for a Long Career in a Changing Industry.”

Afternoon programs include “Traditional, Small Press, Self Publishing, E-books, or ...? Making the Decision That's Right For You”; “Everything You Need to Know about Getting Your Book into (or Back in) Print and Were Dying to Ask”; “Look, Ma! I've Been Kindled: A Step-by-Step Guide to e-book Publication,” featuring Libby Hellman, Cathy Pickens, Marcia Talley, Ellen Hart, and other industry professionals whose participation we will confirm soon.

Our dinner speaker will be Meg Gardiner, *New York Times* bestselling author, whose topic will be “Lying for a Living.”

The after-dinner panel, “Brazen Hussies Speak Out: Marketing Your Novel in an Electronic World” will feature Gina Panittieri, president of Talcott Notch Literary and Debbi Mack, *New York Times* bestselling e-book author.



Wilk



Gardiner



Panittieri



Mack

Sinc into Great Writing!

Mapping the New World of Publishing—Or, How to Succeed in a Business That's Really Trying

Wednesday, September 14, 2011 ♦ 1:00 - 9:00 PM
Holiday Inn Select ♦ St. Louis, MO

\$50 for SinC members ♦ \$150 nonmembers.

Includes welcoming coffee, mid-afternoon snack break, cash bar and dinner.
Special dietary requests will be honored.

Keynote Speaker David Wilk, CEO Booktrix, “Planning for a Long Career in a Changing Industry”

Dinner Speaker Meg Gardiner, *New York Times* bestselling author, “Lying for a Living”

Register online at tinyurl.com/6l4x44j

The FOSS cure

by Ramona DeFelice Long

Does the thought of writing 75,000 words seem like a snap, but a word limit of 7,500 gives you claustrophobia? Does a single-digit cast of characters make you feel hand-cuffed? Does one setting, one story arc, one primary conflict send you into a panic?

If you experience any, or all, of these symptoms, you may be suffering from the writerly syndrome known as FOSS—Fear of Short Story.

Fear no longer, phobic writer. A three-step cure is dead ahead.

Step 1 – Understand the Fear

“There is good reason to be afraid of short stories as their brevity requires a neatness of plot and character that I find quite challenging.”

—*Roberta Isleib*

Phobias are about fear, and fear is borne of the unknown. Let’s get to know the short story form.

- Short fiction comes in graduated sizes: novella, short story, short short, flash fiction and micro-fiction.
- A short story is meant to be read in a single sitting.
- Short fiction requires the same elements as novels (character, setting, conflict, theme) as well as basic dramatic structure (set-up, rising action, climax, resolution) but in a compact space and with a smaller cast.
- Mystery shorts include the same sub-genres (whodunit, locked rooms, police procedural, noir, cozies, etc.) as novels.

For a novelist, writing short requires no new knowledge, but it may mean reconditioning. To begin this process, desensitize your nerves by reading lots of short stories. See how authors jump into conflict from line one. Note the spare number of characters. Pay attention to what’s not there (backstory, secondary characters, long descriptions). Study the simpler, linear plotlines.



Practice this immersion therapy until “How did they do that?” becomes “Hey, look how they did that!”

Step 2 – Embrace the Fear

Fear is a state of mind, but it’s also physiological. A daunting task or terrifying situation can freeze the mind—or it can trigger an adrenaline rush. Writing a short story is not that dramatic. You won’t need to lift up a car. You just might need to unhinge the brain lock and alter your mindset.

First, accept what’s worth your while. Why learn to write short? Because markets abound, both in print and online. Anthologies seek out submissions. Roberta Isleib, quoted above, wrote a story set in her home town to benefit Habitat for Humanity. As with any profession, the more tools in your skill set, the better.

To write a short, one must think short. A novelist’s mind is set for big pictures. Short story artists think in small snapshots. You can teach yourself to do either, or both. After the immersion reading above, start training on recognizing short story ideas.

“My short story ideas occur in intuitive little flashes, like headlines out of *National Enquirer*. An idea will hang around in the file cabinet of my psyche until I understand what realm it’s in—literary fiction or crime fiction or horror—and I feel the need to start writing. Or, someone will ask me to write a story and I’ll think, Yes, now’s my chance to write about the guy who thought he was Jesus and tried to kill me.”

—*Harley Jane Kozak*

Intuitive little flashes, news clippings, a grand notion that hits you in the shower—however it arrives, a story idea simmers until it’s ready to be fleshed out. This is a writer’s mindset. A short story artist will learn to whittle a big idea into a smaller format.

Let’s take a sample scenario: Young man breaks into a home. Inside is a man in a wheelchair. He’s called the cops. A SWAT team arrives. The neighborhood goes into lockdown.

This could be a novel—or five short stories. Why five? Because we have five characters: Young Man, Wheelchair Man, 911 Dispatcher, SWAT Member, Neighbor. Each has a personal history and a role on this day. Each has an experience. A novel might include all five experiences. A short story may record just one.



Practice picking apart big conceptual ideas into individual parts. Do it character by character. Strip away what’s not relevant to the one primary conflict. Choose a narrator and tell what happens to, or via, that character. Write outward—but not too far.

Step 3 – Conquer the Fear

“All you really need for a short story are a protagonist, a problem, and a solution. Anything else is optional. I prefer a twist at the end, too. Even better, a double twist.”

—*Kaye George*

Kaye’s pithy list says it all. Once you have a character, a conflict, and an ending, what comes in between is addressed by these three questions:

- What does the protagonist want?
- What is at stake?
- What gets in the way?

The twist is the fun. To have this fun, play the What If game. What if Young Man grew up in the house and he’s back to find something he hid as a child? What if Wheelchair Man pulls out a gun—or a samurai sword? What if it’s SWAT Member’s first day? What if Neighbor is one of Harley’s headlines, and thinks he’s Jesus?

Voilà!

Character, conflict, and an ending, with a twist as lagniappe. Address your fear, whittle down an idea, and write it out. Really, it’s as simple as that.

Ramona DeFelice Long is an author and independent editor whose short fiction has appeared in literary, regional and juvenile publications. She writes about her literary life at ramonadef.wordpress.com



E-Zine seeks submissions

Killer Nashville is seeking submissions for a new e-publication, *Killer Nashville E-Magazine*. The magazine seeks articles in many areas: book reviews of Killer Nashville authors; reviews of nonfiction books on writing or forensics; interesting mystery/suspense-related facts and activities; how-tos on forensics, writing, publishing, computers, getting published, research, publicity/promotion/marketing; genre how-tos on suspense, thriller, mystery; featured websites, Killer Nashville success stories; and author, agent, and editor interviews.

There is no payment for free web or newsletter displays. There is a payment for compilations or articles that are sold. Articles can be reprints or unpublished work. Writers do not have to have any affiliation with Killer Nashville. Writers retain all rights and can publish articles elsewhere, but Killer Nashville has unending reprint rights in print and on the web. Killer Nashville currently has about 4,000 subscribers so this is a great way to get the news out about your books, tours, or organization via your by-line.

You can learn more and find all the details (specifics, pay schedule, themes, etc.) online at www.killernashville.com/knmagazine.html.

Those interested in being a regular or occasional contributor, or if you would like to be interviewed for one of the issues, please contact the e-magazine as soon as possible at contact@killernashville.com. This is just one more way that Killer Nashville seeks to help writers and fans of great literature.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Another Loss

We're sad to report that Barbara Mooney, 84, a member of Sisters in Crime since 1999, died January 18 in St. Petersburg Beach, Florida. Barbara was a member of the Florida Sisters in Crime Chapter.

Barbara served on the board of The Friends of the St. Pete Beach Public Library as well as the St. Pete Beach Library Advisory Committee. She enjoyed running the library's book discussion group. Her service to the book club reflected her lifelong devotion to literature.

Barbara is survived by two daughters, two sons, and their families.

Briefly—from Beth

**Sinc into Great Writing!
Mapping the New World of
Publishing—Or, How to
Succeed in a Business That's
Really Trying**

Wednesday, September 14, 2011
1:00 - 9:00pm
Holiday Inn Select ♦ St. Louis, MO

\$50 for SinC members
\$150 for nonmembers

Includes welcoming coffee, mid-afternoon snack break, cash bar and dinner. Special dietary requests will be honored.

Registration Online Only
tinyurl.com/6l4x44j

25th Anniversary Celebration

Don't forget to let us hear about your chapter's plans for the celebration. If you need banners, grant funding, bookmarks, membership brochures, let me know a month in advance of the event. Contact me at sistersincrime@juno.com.



Who's watching our deaths?

by Jan Burke

In mysteries, we often see mention of medical examiners and coroners' offices (ME/C) without knowing the difference between these two terms or having a clear idea of what these officials do, who may hold these offices, or how they are trained. Our fictional notions of death investigation are usually far from the reality.

The truth is that death investigation in the United States is a mess. It is wildly inconsistent and often in the hands of the unqualified. In 2009, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) issued a report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. The section on death investigation said, in part:

It is clear that death investigations in the US rely on a patchwork of coroners and medical examiners and that these vary greatly in the budgets, staff, equipment, and training available to them, and in the quality of services they provide. No matter what the level of quality of other forensic science disciplines that are supported by a particular jurisdiction may be, if the death investigation does not include competent death investigation and forensic pathology services, both civil and criminal cases may be compromised.

Sometimes, the public's fears about the subject of death and misunderstandings about the work of death investigators cause us to lose sight of the fact that the work of ME/CS is for the benefit of the living.

Medical examiners/coroners work

The living need quality death investigation for a number of reasons. Most of us in Sisters in Crime are aware of the criminal justice side of this. It is in the public interest to know if crimes have been committed, and to find whatever evidence of those crimes is at death scenes and left on bodies. But that is just one part of what ME/CS do for us.

They notify families of deaths, often give grieving families important information, issue death certificates, and determine the cause of death. They decide which deaths may require further investigation, and how those investigations will be conducted—including whether or not there will be an autopsy. They identify the deceased, and if this is not possible, may arrange for information to be sent to NamUs (a national missing persons/unidentified remains database at www.NamUs.com). They arrange for the dis-

position of the remains of the unidentified and the indigent.

Information reported by ME/CS is used to determine public health risks and to discover which diseases are killing us—statistics that often affect how we fund medical research. This data identifies public safety risks of many kinds—product and automotive safety problems are among them. ME/CS determine how fatal injuries may have been received—investigating deaths caused by anything from workplace accidents to malfunctioning amusement park rides.

ME/CS respond in times of mass disaster, when a community may suddenly be overwhelmed with a large number of deceased. We depend on them to identify outbreaks of disease and any other factors causing a sudden increase in deaths in a community.

This is just a partial list of their responsibilities. And yet, in much of the US, their important work is woefully underfunded, carried out in utterly inadequate facilities, and undertaken by individuals who are not qualified or trained to do the job.

Problems revealed

Let's talk about a few of the problems highlighted by the NAS study and other recently-published research and investigations.

First, definitions for the terms "coroner" and "medical examiner" are not the same in every part of the country. The definitions and requirements for holding these offices vary wildly from place to place. Each state (and in some states, each individual county) defines the meaning of those terms in their jurisdictions.

In much of Wisconsin, for example, no medical training of any kind is required for someone to become a medical examiner. In some places, the medical examiner must be a physician, but not necessarily a pathologist, let alone a forensic pathologist. This means that obstetricians, general practitioners, and other kinds of doctors may become medical examiners—and are not required to have any forensic science training.

Compare this to the education of a board-certified forensic pathologist who typically has four years of medical school, three-to-four years of training in pathology, a one-year fellowship at an approved medicolegal investigation facil-

Sheri McKinley Photography (2010)



ity, and passage of a written and practical examination. Jobs in forensic science labs associated with the work of forensic pathologists (DNA analysts, toxicologists) often require a master's degree and additional training.

Training and requirements for coroners are also varied. Coroners are the overwhelming majority of death investigators in the US. According to a 2004 survey of ME/C offices by the Department of Justice, 80% were coroners' offices. In 1928 the NAS began recommending that the country should be on a medical examiner system run by forensic pathologists, but in the decades since, little has changed in the way of eliminating coroner systems.

Coroners may be elected or appointed. In some states, a person becomes the local coroner by holding another office—the local justice of the peace or the county district attorney, who may have legal but not forensic science training. Or the coroner may be sheriff, which may set up a conflict of interest when it comes to investigating deaths caused in custody or during law enforcement activities.

It is not unusual for the office of coroner to be held by an individual with no legal, forensic, or investigative training whatsoever. Being at least 18 years of age, a citizen, and having no felony conviction are all that is required in some states. Those that do require training may only need to take one 20-hour course.

Except in states which prohibit them from holding the office, coroners' jobs are often taken by undertakers, who sometimes steer business their own way. This can place families at their mercy for mortuary services. Coroners have also been known to hire their

See **Deaths**, p. 9

Deaths, cont'd. from p.8

children as deputy coroners. Not long ago in Indiana, a teenager in high school became a deputy coroner.

Many coroners are good people who work long, unpredictable hours and are on call 365 days a year. They face the emotional strain of viewing sometimes gruesome death scenes and of dealing with grief-stricken families. They often do so with inadequate budgets and little help. They frequently have no offices of their own, let alone facilities for storing bodies or conducting autopsies. Many have no refrigeration units available to store bodies. Many are still entirely on paper systems. Some are able to arrange autopsies only through pathologists working at distant centers and must find a way to pay for the transportation of bodies in addition to autopsy costs.

You may begin to sense that there is a strong potential for low-quality death investigation in poorer rural counties. The autopsy rate in these counties is also below that of larger jurisdictions; since autopsies may cost about \$2000, coroners in cash-strapped counties may order few of them.

Critical needs

Autopsies are essential to learning the true causes of death. In many states, there are no standards set for deciding when an autopsy should be required. Nationally, autopsy rates are rapidly declining; they are already far too low for any of us to feel confident in our death investigation systems. Add to this the fact that fewer than five percent of hospital deaths are autopsied—autopsy rates have also sharply declined in hospitals, where deaths of patients are seldom investigated by ME/CS—and it should be clear that in the US, we really don't know what is causing our deaths.

A study by Scripps Howard News Service in 2009 reviewed 4.9 million deaths in the US from



the years 2005 and 2006 found that more men than women are autopsied. These and other disparities in who gets autopsied have a “profound effect on how people understand the diseases that run in their families and how medical research is conducted.”

What about accreditation? Although standards are set by professional organizations, with no federal or other mandates to insist that ME/CS follow them, few offices meet those standards. Of the 2,342 ME/CS in the US, only 79 are accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) or the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners.

We are also facing a severe national shortage of forensic pathologists. At a time when the NAS has again recommended moving from coroner systems to medical examiner systems, fewer than 50 medical residents are enrolled in forensic pathology programs.

It is time to insist on the improvement of death investigation in the US.

Jan Burke's novels include Disturbance, The Messenger, Bloodlines, and the Edgar-winning Bones. She is also an award-winning short story writer. Burke is the founder of the nonprofit Crime Lab Project. Visit her at www.janburke.com.

What can you do about these problems?

1) Become educated. Watch *Frontline's* “Post Mortem” program online (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/post-mortem) and read the associated articles on the NPR and ProPublica Web sites.

Read the NAS study (www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12589), the Scripps Howard Autopsy Study (www.scrippsnews.com/node/45617), and the DOJ Surveys (bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=281).

Subscribe (to the Crime Lab Project's CLP News, which provides links to forensic science news stories every week. It's free—just send a blank email to clpnews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

2) Ask questions about your local jurisdiction. Find out whether your jurisdiction uses a

coroner or medical examiner's system, what the training requirements are, what the basic qualifications for the ME/C and staff are. Find out if the NAME “Best Practice Guidelines for Identifying Unknown Decedents” (available free from NamUs) is being used. If you can't get answers to your questions, try to interest local media in finding out what conditions are and what is needed for better death investigation in your jurisdiction. Let your legislators and other representatives know that quality death investigation is important.

3) Consider establishing local scholarship programs to send your area's death investigators to receive training at quality courses such as the St. Louis Medilegal Death Investigation course.

4) Tell Congress that the improvement of death investigation in the US should be a high priority. Ask it to establish programs to encourage more medical residents to become forensic pathologists.

5) Speak up about these problems! Talk about them on your blogs, on your social networks, and when you speak in public. If it works with your personal writing choices to include some of this information in your books and stories, you can help to increase awareness.

6) Volunteer to help find the missing on www.NamUs.com.

These are just a few of the steps that you can take to make a difference. Others can be found at the CLP blog crimelabproject.wordpress.com.

Writer Beware

by Victoria Strauss



Writer Beware is a publishing industry watchdog group co-founded by Victoria Strauss and Ann Crispin and sponsored by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Writer Beware provides information and warnings about the many scams and schemes that threaten writers.

In 1998, when Writer Beware first began warning about literary scams, the publishing world was in turmoil (sound familiar?). Conglomeration had melded many formerly independent publishers into a few mega-corporations. Layoffs had reduced the number of editors, while the number of published books continued to rise. With time-crunched editors no longer able to dip into their slush piles, publishers were increasingly adopting an “agented submissions only” policy, and relying on literary agents as gatekeepers.

Two of the major game-changers—print on demand (POD) technology and electronic books—were as yet just blips on the horizon.

Writing scams were definitely a problem in 1998, but variety was limited. With print publishing still the only game in town, most scams involved fee-charging literary agents. Complaints about dishonest agents outnumbered complaints about dishonest publishers by better than four to one.

Technology brings changes

Thirteen years later, POD technology is everywhere. After years as a niche market, e-books are poised to take center stage. These developments have made self-publishing inexpensive and practical for almost everyone and have spurred an explosion of small presses that offer an alternative to the big commercial houses. In 2011, authors have a bewildering number of alternatives to the agent-to-print-publisher route that was the main pathway to success in 1998.

Unfortunately, new opportunities for writers inevitably spawn new ways to take advantage of them. There are more literary pitfalls than ever before—and it isn't just scammers you need to watch for, but well-intentioned amateurs.

Fee-charging and/or unqualified literary agents are still a danger; however, with so many agent-free publishing options, finding a literary agent is no longer every author's default starting position. As a result, Writer Beware is seeing many fewer agent scams than in the past. Most of the complaints we receive these days involve publishers.

In some cases, these really are scams—publishers that claim to charge no fees but expect writers to pay for editing or publicity or cover art; publishers that call themselves “traditional” yet require authors to buy or pre-sell their own books; publishers that appear independent yet are actually part of a network of agencies, editing services, and marketing services that pass clients back and forth between them and profit every step of the way.

Pitfalls abound

Just as often, though, there's no deliberate scam. The power of the Internet, the cheapness of POD, and the ease of getting e-books to market have made it possible for just about anyone to set themselves up as a publisher, whether or not they have any qualifications for doing so. Inexperienced new publishers may not have the skill or resources to acquire, edit, and design books. They may offer terrible, nonstandard contracts. They may have a poor understanding of marketing and distribution, and their small budgets may severely limit any publicity efforts they do make. They may run into trouble and go out of business abruptly—possibly without releasing rights before shutting down. A bad experience with an amateur publisher probably won't rob you of as much cash as a scam, but other consequences are the same: a poorly-published book, minimal sales and exposure, and general disappointment.

Another new publishing pitfall: the many editing, marketing, promotion, and coaching services aimed at small press and self-published writers. Again, some are ripoffs—people who will take your money and do nothing for you. Others are run by unqualified individuals (inexperienced editors and publicists are everywhere). Others are just a waste of money. For instance, press release services that blast an email to thousands of addresses (mostly, these will be treated as spam), or marketing services that charge hundreds of dollars to post your book on a series of obscure websites or include it in a catalog supposedly taken to book fairs (many rights are sold at book fairs, but not from pay-to-play catalogs).

What to do

So, how do you protect yourself from scammers and amateurs in the ever-changing world of publishing?

- Know as much about your chosen field as possible. Before you start submitting for publication, educate yourself about the publishing world. The more you know, the less likely it is that you'll be taken in by scams, entrapped by amateurs, or seduced by hype. And start with a printed book, rather than the Internet—the Internet is an invaluable research tool, but it also contains a lot of myth and misinformation, and without some prior knowledge it can be hard to filter it all.
- Research before submitting. Be sure the agent or editor you're thinking of hiring has a respectable track record or, if new, has a relevant professional resume. Make sure the publisher employs qualified staff and puts some marketing effort behind its books. Check for complaints. This all may sound obvious—but many of the questions Writer Beware receives come

See **Writer Beware** p 11



We still love libraries!

The Sisters in Crime “We Love Libraries” program is still going strong! Each month, beginning in January of 2010, SinC has donated \$1000 to a library somewhere in the United States. Has your local library entered? It’s very easy.

Simply complete the entry form and upload a photo of one or more of your staff with three books in your collection by Sisters in Crime members. You can find a list of our members who are authors at www.sistersincrime.org and navigating to our left-side menu under “Resources, SinC Authors.”

Writer Beware - Cont'd from p.10

from writers who are checking on an agent’s or publisher’s reputation only after receiving a contract. Even a bad contract offer is harder to refuse once it’s in hand.

- Get to know the watchdogs. There are several groups that follow and report on publishers, agents, etc., both good and bad. They’re a good place to start your research.
- The Writer Beware website (www.writerbeware.com) and blog provide information and warnings about a wide variety of literary scams and schemes. If you write to us (beware@sfa.org), we’ll be glad to share information from our huge database of complaints and documentation on questionable agents, publishers, and others.
- Predators and Editors P&E (www.pred-ed.com) is a vast listing of agents, publishers, editors, contests, and other writing- and publishing-related professionals and services. “Not Recommended” and other warning notations indicate those about which P&E has received complaints.
- The “Absolute Write’s Water Cooler” (absolutewrite.com/forums/index.php) “The Bewares, Recommendations, and Background Check” forum at this popular writers’ community includes hundreds of discussion threads about agents, publishers, etc. If there are complaints—and compliments—they are likely to show up here.

Victoria Strauss is the author of eight fantasy novels for adults and teens. Passion Blue, a YA historical fantasy is coming in 2012. The Writer Beware website www.writerbeware.com has links to its blog. Victoria welcomes visitors to her own website www.victoriastrauss.com.

After the random drawing on the last business day of the month, the winning library will be contacted and announced. All branches within a large system may enter; however, once a library in the system has won, no other libraries within that system can win the grant. Those not successful in one month will automatically be entered for subsequent drawings. Grants must be used to purchase books and may not be used for general operating expenses. Book purchases are not restricted to the mystery genre or to those by Sisters in Crime members. There is no cost or obligation other than allowing us to post winners’ photos on our website.

All libraries are welcome to enter.

Winners to date

- Kingstowne Library, Alexandria VA
- Kraemer Family Library, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs CO
- Pineville-Bell County Public Library, Pineville KY
- Cresco Library, Cresco IA
- Seminole County Public Library, Casselberry FL
- Bertram Trail Regional Library, Washington GA
- Newton Falls Public Library, Newton Falls OH
- St. Joseph township-Swearingen Memorial Library, St. Joseph IL
- Yuma County Library District, Yuma AZ
- Cary Memorial Library, Lexington MA
- Lenox Township Library, New Haven MI
- Seymour Johnson Air Force Base Library, Goldsboro NC
- Folsom Public Library, Folsom CA
- Pecatonica High School Library, Pecatonica IL
- Hastings Public Library, Hastings NE



Cary Memorial Library, Lexington MA

Semour Johnson Air Force Base Library, Goldsboro NC



Sisters at...

Agatha Nominees

SinC Members are in bold. Winners are listed first.

Best Novel

Bury Your Dead, Louise Penny

Stork Raving Mad, **Donna Andrews**

The Scent of Rain and Lightening, Nancy Pickard

Drive Time, **Hank Phillipi Ryan**

Truly, Madly, Heather Webber

Best Non-Fiction

Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks 50 Years of Mysteries in the Making, John Curran

The Poisoners Handbook Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York, Deborah Blum

Sherlock Holmes for Dummies, Steven Doyle & David A Crowder

Have Faith in Your Kitchen, **Katherine Hall Page**

Charlie Chan The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History, Yunte Huang

Best Children's/YA

The Other Side of Dark, **Sarah Smith**

Theodore Boone, Kid Lawyer, John Grisham

Theodosia and the Eyes of Hours, R.L. LeFevers

The Agency Spy in the House, Y.S. Lee

Virals, Kathy Reichs

Best First Novel

The Long Quiche Goodbye, **Avery Aames**

Murder at the PTA, Laura Alden

Maid of Murder, **Amanda Flower**

Full Mortality, Sasscer Hill

Diamonds for the Dead, Alan Orloff

Best Short Story

"So Much in Common," **Mary Jane Maffini**

"Swing Shift," **Dana Cameron**

"Size Matters," **Sheila Connolly**

"Volunteer of the Year," **Barb Goffman**

"The Green Cross," **Elizabeth Zelvin**

Luminaries

Guest of Honor, **Carole Nelson Douglas**

Toastmaster, **Donna Andrews**

Lifetime Achievement, Sue Grafton

Malice Remembers, **Lyn Hamilton**

Poirot Award, **Janet Rudolph**

Fan Guest of Honor, **Anne Murphy**

SMP/Malice Domestic Best First Novel,

Linda Rodriguez

William F. Deeck-Malice Domestic Grant for Unpublished Writers, **Robin Templeton**



Linda Rodriguez was the happy winner of the St. Martin's Press/Malice Domestic award for best first novel. Toni Plummer, her smp editor was all smiles too.



Anne Murphy was fan guest of honor.



Janet Rudolph, winner of the Poirot Award.



Frankie Bailey makes a point at the SinC board meeting.



Guest of honor Carole Nelson Douglas was guest of honor.



Bride Deborah Sharp drafted lots of bridesmaids at the wedding panel Sunday morning.



Sally Goldenbaum and Goddess Nancy Pickard paused for a glass of wine.

...Malice Domestic 2011



Goddess Eve Sandstrom, aka Joanna Carl



Short story Agatha winner Mary Jane Maffini and Rhys Bowen presented a lovely tribute to their friend Lyn Hamilton.



Avery Aames is all smiles after winning the Agatha for best first novel.



Sarah Smith seemed nearly as happy chatting with Toni Kelner as accepting the Agatha for best ya novel.



Donna Andrews served as toastmaster.



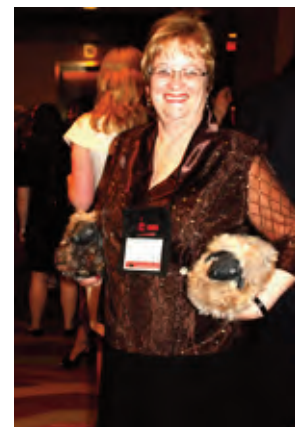
Sasscer Hill, Ellen Byerrum, and Patricia Gouthro enjoyed a pre-banquet chat.



Teresa Inge and Becky Bartlett Hutchison were all ready to party!



Malice really is a family affair!



Elizabeth J. Duncan brought two guests to the banquet.

Edgars Honors Sara Paretsky

On Thursday, April 28, Mystery Writers of America presented its Grand Master Award to Sisters in Crime founding sister Sara Paretsky at the annual Edgar Awards banquet.

SinC President and MWA board member Cathy Pickens introduced Sara at the ceremony. Their speeches are below.

From Cathy Pickens

In 1980, with the visionary thinking we know to expect in publishing, 13 publishers rejected The first V. I. Warshawski novel "does not meet our needs at this time," they said. Visionary indeed.

Fortunately, V. I. hit the streets of Chicago and bookshelves in 1982, breaking the barriers that said women in mysteries could be only victims or vamps.

That would've been enough, creating a body of work that does what the best of fiction should do in keeping the genre alive and relevant.

But social justice can't always be sought only on the pages of a novel. In the mid-1980s, Sara Paretsky saw that, while women wrote one-third of the mystery novels published, they were receiving less than 10% of the review space. So she gathered a group of like-minded women mystery writers and began monitoring reviews and educating reviewers.

Today, women write roughly half of the mysteries published. The gap in review coverage still exists, but it is much smaller than it was. And it is significantly smaller for mysteries than the recently publicized and debated gap that exists in the reviews of literary fiction.

And that would've been enough. But Sara and this band of Sisters in Crime didn't think it was enough. They set about educating writers about what it means to be a professional in this business, and they encouraged and mentored and shared their wisdom.

I remember poring over my copy of *Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies* (you've got to buy a book with a title like that! It's now available in its third edition). And I've learned much from countless Sisters who have become my mentors and friends.

Sisters in Crime has grown to 3,000 members, an inclusive group of writers and readers, booksellers and librarians, women and men, who continue to encourage the professional development of writers.

So, as a reader, I thank you for V. I. Warshawski, who has shown us how tough women can be and how we all should be, fighting for things that matter.

As a writer, I thank you for the mentoring, education and support.

And, as the 24th president of Sisters in Crime and on behalf of MWA, it is with delight that I present to Sara Paretsky this much-deserved Grand Master Award."

From Sara Paretsky

I went to my first Edgar dinner in 1982. I watched the icons of my reading life talking and joking, but I was painfully shy and didn't try to introduce myself to anyone. I was seated at a table at the outermost reach of the Sheraton ballroom, and the high point of the meal was when a waiter slugged one of my tablemates for not relinquishing his salad plate on schedule.

I'm amazed, and grateful, to join the company of Grand Masters whose work I have long admired, but it is unsettling to realize how quickly 29 years have passed.

Many people helped me reach this point. Stuart Kaminsky, whom we mourn, mentored me as I wrote my first book. My agent, Dominick Abel, agreed to represent me all those years ago; he has never faltered in his support.

Thanks to my editor, Chris Pepe, and my publishers, Putnam, for their hard work, and their presence at the banquet. (Although the company is known as GP Putnam's Sons, it was George Putnam's daughter, Mary, who was a leading 19th century writer and feminist. It seems fitting that my novels bear the name of the woman who forced England to accept women as doctors.)

I have been fortunate in the friendship of Dorothy Salisbury Davis. Her advice as a writer, and her guidance in the business of living, have been my lodestar for many years.

Above all, I thank my husband, the distinguished physicist Courtenay Wright, who has listened to 29 years of fears and self-doubts; his steadfast support has kept the wind beneath my sails. To him and to Dorothy, this award and these remarks are equally dedicated.

The world of books has seen major changes since my first Edgar dinner. It had been hard for me to find a publisher for a woman PI in America's heartland; now, as a result of the revolution I helped start, detectives of all stripes and locations are commonplace.

I was lucky: In 1982, there were many more publishers to approach than exist today.

We live in a world of conglomerated publishers and distributors; we writers are often told that we are not creating stories or characters, but brands, as if the chief difference between our stories and toilet paper is that you can't upload Charmin to your iPad. At least, not yet. In such a world it is hard to remember that we are storytellers, not accountants, marketers or vending machines.

This is not a new problem. When Melville published *Moby Dick* in 1851, the reception by both public and critics was hostile: he had left his brand, his travelogue novels. During Melville's life, this astonishing masterpiece sold 500 copies.

Melville lived through times as turbulent as ours—slavery, the Civil War, the changes wrought by indus-

trialization. But ours is also a time that thrives on slick one-liners, and on lies, made easier to swallow because we devalue literacy.

Today, close to one in four American adults can't read or write well enough to handle a job application, let alone read a novel.

It took a 12th-grade vocabulary for Melville to follow the Lincoln-Douglas debates, but our most recent presidential debates use the language of sixth graders. Some candidates have devolved to the pre-school level.

We writers owe a duty to our gifts. We've been given the gift of language, and we need to dig deep into words. We need to relish wordplay, not rely on clichés as we stumble toward the marketplace, or settle for the slick, repackaged street-talk we pick up from rap and TV.

And we owe a duty to our other gift, our stories. In the cacophony of sound that fills our broadband waves, amid the lies and shrill self-promotions, it is essential that we writers return to Melville's silent grass-growing place and find the truths that fiction can lay bare.

Our fictions are myths, of course, not histories: they show heroes vanquishing monsters. Theseus versus the wicked Minotaur, Marlowe versus the wicked temptress, V. I. Warshawski versus the wicked corporation, they're all the same story.

But these fictions tell essential truths, about our emotional lives, what we fear, what we want, what we need. Writing is a form of auto-surgery: the closer we cut to our own bones, force ourselves to emotional truth, the more authentic will our voices become.

As the poet Sappho wrote, more than 2600 years ago,

Although they are only breath
Words, which I command
Are immortal.

What we remember from Sappho's time, and from Melville's, are not brand names or spreadsheets, but poets. For in the end, it is that word which is only breath which endures.

This article first appeared on the Sisters in Crime blog (Sisters-in-Crime-SinC.blogspot.com) on Saturday, April 30, 2011.

Matt Peyton Photography



Reviewers - Cont'd from p. 1

Approaching a reviewer

Everyone interviewed agreed that lack of time is a huge factor in their work. How then, does one get consideration—and what works and doesn't?

"Just be sure I get a copy at least a month before the pub date," said Ephron. "I'll consider anything that gets distributed through standard channels from publishers who take returns."



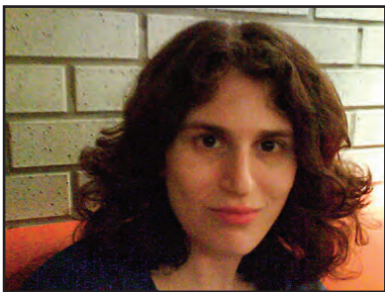
Ephron

Taylor works through his publications' editors, but he does receive review copies or email press releases "to call attention to certain books." He considers that "just part of the job." When contacted by authors "who ask me personally about being interviewed [on his blog], ... it's awkward."

"I prefer authors to let their publishers and/or publicists contact me via email," said Cogdill. As for having received gimmicks with the books, she said, "the entire package, book and all, went into the trash."

Forbus dislikes the overbearing. "I don't want to see an email full of blurbs because I don't care about them. I don't want to be contacted a million times to see if I've read the book."

Weinman is emphatic. "Let's just say that if you pitch me a book on Twitter, I will block you and ignore you for life." On the other hand, she suggests, "Be professional and polite. I'm happy to take a look but can't promise anything beyond that. Timeliness is crucial, too."



Weinman

Reconsidering an author

Sometimes the first book one reads by an author just doesn't garner a favorable opinion. Often, too, an author has a strong backlist. How do these reviewers handle these situations?

Backlist is important to Weinman for essays, "because I want to talk about an author in a considered and informed way." She'll give an

author a second chance, "although I like to let a few books lapse before I do so."

Taylor said, "I try to get a sense of an author's previous books...before approaching a new release." As for a second chance, "absolutely."

The backlist "depends on the author," said Ephron, and, "I don't review an author's new one if I reviewed their last."

Forbus continues reading authors whose work she enjoys. "If they have one bomb, I'm willing to give them another chance—or if they veer out of their normal genre." For second chances, "Typically if the first thing I read is really bad, then no."

While Cogdill pays no attention to backlists, she hopes to see improvement, "all the time. One negative review doesn't mean that author will get only negative views". She quickly cited the converse.



Taylor

books. Some want sheer escapism...while others might want some degree of seriousness and education...but, yes, I think we still want to be entertained and even enthralled by a book, to fall in love with a novel and get lost in that feeling." Ephron continued Taylor's idea, "We all have different tastes in our personal reading...when I read *as I reviewer*, I'm looking for books I think readers will enjoy." Cogdill summarized the answers with, "I think so—a good story, good writing, characters who are believable, and a plot that grabs you and doesn't let go."

Ephron stops reading "if the story doesn't grab my interest, the characters feel cliched, the viewpoint slides all over the place, the prose is over-written so I'm more aware of the words than the story, sex and violence are over the top and don't serve the story, there is no character to root for—really just like anyone else!"



Forbus' blog

Taylor keeps a foot in both camps. "If I simply don't find the book fun, I'll generally just skim through, reading bits of it before setting it aside."

Why mysteries?

Simply put, all the reviewers love to read mysteries. Forbus said "I read first and foremost for pleasure. I review to share that pleasure with others and to help them find books they will enjoy. Weinman added, "If I didn't read for pleasure then reviewing wouldn't be pleasurable!"

When asked what was pleasurable about the genre, everyone had a different answer. "The secrets that surprise me; the plot twists; the way a good one comes together in the end in an unexpected way," said Ephron. Forbus said, "I love great character development, so series characters are among my favorites. I enjoy the challenge of puzzles...I look for depth...[and] smart humor."

Weinman likes that "they cover, channel and discuss the way we live now more than any other genre—plus the tension of order and chaos is pretty much unbeatable." Cogdill says, "Mysteries take us to new worlds, make us think about who we are and what kind of society we live in—besides, we all need heroes and heroines."



Cogdill

The future

Cogdill voiced a suggestion about the fact that too many newspaper book sections are being eliminated. Her suggestion is simple: Readers need to write or call their newspapers to tell them how important these sections are—especially mystery reviews. Don't accept this as inevitable—if no one says anything, editors will think there is no value to the book section.

Law & Fiction: Getting Facts Straight

by Leslie Budewitz

-What is a *pro se* litigant?

Pro se literally means “for one’s self,” and it means to represent yourself. Only lawyers can represent other people in judicial proceedings, although some tribal courts allow trained advocates in specified types of cases. But civil plaintiffs and civil or criminal defendants can always represent themselves. Alternate terms: *pro per* (used in Oregon and elsewhere) and *in propria persona*.

Why do it?

In civil cases, the motive is usually lack of money—or the unwillingness to part with it. Sometimes a *pro se* plaintiff has not been able to find a lawyer who believes in the case—and the cause it espouses—as much as he does.

In criminal cases, a defendant who can’t afford a lawyer is entitled to a public defender. But some choose to represent themselves for philosophical reasons. This occurred with some frequency in the late 1980s and early 1990s in states like Montana, Washington, and Michigan where anti-government types and militia members charged with crimes ground their axes by refusing to “cooperate” with a system they opposed.

In civil cases with a low dollar value, as in small claims court, self-representation makes sense. Judges in those courts are used to dealing with the parties directly. Think of Judge Judy’s court room, without the cameras and melodrama.

Drawbacks

But in larger-value disputes and criminal cases, self-representation can be a minefield. The biggest drawback is that lay people often don’t understand important legal points or some of the law’s finer distinctions. As a result, making cogent arguments can be tough. *Pro se parties* get more emotional than lawyers—a good potential source of drama for writers. Imagine a custody dispute where the parent pleading for a change of custody makes his own case, or a child welfare proceeding where a *pro se* mother argues that she’s conquered her drug addiction, is rehabilitated, and should get her children back.

Widespread cutbacks in county law libraries make research difficult, and official online

sources can be hard to navigate. Non-official online sources abound but are not always reliable. Some sources aimed at adherents of a particular philosophy perpetuate misinformation that resurfaces over and over. Persons representing themselves often don’t recognize the differences between states’ laws. They may not understand that a 1937 Vermont decision interpreting a then-current statute is virtually meaningless to a modern day court in, say, California or Florida, because the law has evolved and state statutes and precedents differ. Many state and local bars and law libraries now provide self-help centers, with staff who help guide *pro se* litigants to forms and resources, or provide information online.

Pro se briefs tend to be ramble, though they can be entertaining. My favorite remains a brief I read while clerking for the Washington State Court of Appeals. The case involved an easement and boundary line dispute. The only authorities cited were definitions from an antiquated edition of *Black’s Law Dictionary* and the Bible. Of course, many do consider Ezekial an authoritative source—but before a different judge.

Judges and *pro se*

Most judges will give *pro se* parties some leeway and guidance with procedural aspects of trial and pretrial procedure, but the substantive law is applied evenly. For example, the judge may point out that the questions a *pro se* defendant is asking his own witness are leading—which is not permissible—and suggest another way to phrase the question. A judge may suggest a followup question, or pose it herself, but is not likely to suggest a line of questioning the defendant hadn’t considered. Judges may caution a *pro se* party that the case may be more complicated than he thinks, and encourage him to consult with a lawyer; judges may continue—that is, postpone or reschedule—a hearing or trial to give a party time to find representation.

But no judge will ever tolerate a *pro se* party obstructing the proceedings. If your *pro se* story defendant disobeys a judge’s order and asks prohibited questions, raises his voice once too often, or blatantly violates decorum, a warning is likely, with a threat of contempt proceedings.



Most *pro se* defendants are well-behaved, though nervous and worried about missteps. Lawyers should take extra care communicating with *pro se* parties, and most do—but the seriously hard-nosed and the ill-intentioned could take unfair advantage of an unrepresented opponent. In a suit a *pro se* backhoe operator brought against our client, a homeowner who had refused to pay all of a bill triple the written estimate, I sat on a bench in the hallway outside the courtroom after a hearing explaining the details of the judge’s ruling. I wanted the man to understand why he had lost—and not attribute it to “a stacked system” or say “well, they had a slick lawyer.” The next time I saw him in town, in a coffee shop, he insisted on paying for my coffee.

Felony cases

In felony defenses, especially death penalty cases, courts often appoint defense lawyers to assist the *pro se* defendant. In *us. v. Massoui*, the defendant—better known as the 20th hijacker—initially accepted defense at public expense, then fired his attorneys. The judge held that Massoui was competent to represent himself—that is, he was mentally competent and of sufficient intelligence, understanding, and language skills—and appointed his former counsel to assist him. The lawyers could help him outside the courtroom with writing briefs and planning arguments and witness examination, but their role inside the courtroom was strictly limited. They sat behind him, not at counsel table. Hence the term “standby counsel.”

Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, also accepted public defense initially, but tried to fire his counsel when they insisted on presenting an insanity defense. Kaczynski

Illusionists and the Brain

by Katherine Ramsland, PhD



Cognitive psychologists have studied the way magicians exploit perceptual processing to work their tricks, and many of their “secrets” reveal why similar methods work for predators. It’s all about the way in which we—the audience or prey—respond to visual input. Try as we might to remain observant, some aspects of perception are beyond our control. A good trickster knows how to blind us.

As humans, we’re hardwired to focus, and we need to see important things rather than everything. In addition, our perception can be hijacked and manipulated. When we attend to something voluntarily, it’s “top-down,” which we direct. When something draws our attention, it’s “bottom up,” and we tend to follow whatever’s eliciting it. When the object or movement is particularly salient, our focus narrows, and this makes us vulnerable to tricks or illusions: As we focus, we automatically resist distraction from other parts of the visual field. This is called attentional shadows or inattentive blindness.

Inattentive blindness

Basically, visual input moves through our retinas and forms into patterns in the brain. Different cortical regions extract information, so that we can perceive objects as lines, surfaces, textures, colors, motions, and contrasts. In addition, our perceptual system takes shortcuts. It resolves apparent ambiguity by imposing a context, and that context derives from our knowledge and experience. That is, when we get used to a certain scenario, we anticipate that it will continue to work as we expect, so we stop focusing. Thus, we fall into a cognitive stupor and fail to see the full range of our perceptual field (this is like trancing out while

driving). In addition, as the brain fills in gaps, it can be deceived into absorbing erroneous information. Once this is integrated into our memory fields, we believe it occurred.

Magicians and illusionists profit from these quirks. They create a frame in which they choreograph our focus from top-down to bottom-up. First, they form a context for directing us, knowing that we will automatically follow. Then they use motion, lighting, novelty, surprise, timing, a stream of patter, and knowledge about typical human assumptions to maintain control. Within the perceptual shadows, which the brain does not process, they perform their tricks. Often, they’ll make them part of a natural action, such as touching their hat, so it won’t detract from their deflection activity. They may use misdirection, such as a dramatic event (a flying white bird). At the same time, they shield what they’re actually doing (shoving a different bird up their sleeve). They also gaze at viewers while performing, because most people will look into eyes that are looking at them. Laughter, too, is a tremendous focusing tool.

Back to us, the audience. We also have a peculiar facility to block out things that occurred and accept things that did not. Studies that tracked eye movement during a trick indicate that the eye does see it. However, subjects do not recall seeing it, which demonstrates how the brain can decline to process and store it into memory. On the other hand, magicians can induce false memories with suggestion, unspoken innuendo, and post-event misinformation. For example, repeating an act can induce an expectation of cause and effect. They throw a ball into the air three times. On the fourth

throw, they keep the ball, but we “see” the ball go up, as it did during the three previous trials. Because of the expectation the magician has induced, we process as a real event something that did not occur.

Predators exploit the same perceptual oddities. They, too, use deflection, social miscues, and misinformation to provide cover. Often, they use a contrived persona of charm and success to falsely engender trust. They also deflect caution by doing favors or engaging their prey in compliant situations. Like magicians, they create a frame in which to manage our attention. They know what it takes to fool the brain. Charm, humor, a winning smile, dressing well, discussing their achievements, and lying with practiced smoothness all work to seduce us into inattentive blindness. Promises, fast talk, and gifts are calculated to deflect us from their manipulation, while they perform their best tricks in the perceptual shadows.

Katherine Ramsland is a writer and a professor of forensic psychology and criminal justice. Among her 38 books are The Forensic Psychology of Criminal Minds and The Mind of a Murderer: Privileged Access to the Demons that Drive Extreme Violence. She has also published more than 1,000 articles.

Law and Fiction - Cont'd. from p. 16

insisted he was perfectly sane when he manufactured and sent his bombs. The judge found that he had the requisite intelligence and understanding, but based on several psychiatric exams, lacked mental competence to represent himself. The judge’s decision led directly to Kaczynski’s agreement

to plead guilty in exchange for not receiving the death penalty.

You’ve heard the old saw “a man who represents himself has a fool for a client.” Does the same hold true for a lawyer? Your story, your call. But what possibilities!

Leslie Budewitz is a practicing lawyer and a fiction writer. Her book for writers, Books, Crooks & Counselors: How to Write Accurately About Criminal Law and Courtroom Procedure, will be published by Quill Driver Books in 2011.



Conferences & Happenings

Bloody Words

Victoria BC, Canada • June 3–5

The venue will be the Hotel Grand Pacific. Guests include Michael Slade and Laurie R. King; the MC will be Denise Dietz. William Deverell will receive a lifetime achievement award. Highlights include panels, agents, a short story contest, and forensics. For more information see www.bloodywords2011.com.

California Crime Writers Conference

Pasadena CA • June 11–12

Four tracks of workshops, a cocktail party with agents, manuscript critiques, and keynote speakers T. Jefferson Parker and S. J. Rozan will highlight the biennial conference at the Hilton Pasadena. Conference details are at www.ccwconference.org.

Historical Novel Society Conference

San Diego CA • June 17–19

The Society's bi-annual celebration of historical fiction will feature Cecelia Holland, Harry Turtledove, Jennifer Weltz, Diana Gabaldon, and C. C. Humphreys. For more information contact the program chair at rscott@san.rr.com or visit www.historicalnovelsociety.org.

American Library Association

New Orleans LA • June 24–27

Sisters in Crime will host a booth in the exhibit hall at ALA. Author and librarian SinC members who live in the area or who may be traveling there during the conference dates, are invited to represent SinC. For more information, contact Mary Boone, Library Liaison at macboone@me.com.

Conferences & Workshops

Please send all conference and workshop information, including those sponsored by SinC chapters, directly to Molly Weston at mysteryheel@mac.com. Include conference name, date, location, brief description, contact information, and website. Please include "Conference" or "Workshop" in the subject line. Deadline for the September issue is July 15.

Public Safety Writers Conference

Las Vegas NV • July 14–17

Open to those writing fiction or non-fiction about or for any public safety field. Conference speakers include a coroner, fire firefighters, police officers, and others in the writing field. See www.policewriter.com.

Thrillerfest 2011

New York City • July 6–9

Hosted by The International Thriller Writers, the conference will feature R. L. Stine and Ken Follett as Thrillermasters and Robert Crais, Diana Gabaldon, and John Lescroat as Spotlight Guests. For more information see www.thrillerfest.com.

Threkstons Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival

Harrogate UK • July 21–24

The festival where "your only crime... would be to miss it" will be high quality, wall-to-wall crime for four solid days. Featured guests are Linwood Barclay, Lee Child, Martina Cole, Lisa Gardner, Tess Gerritsen, Denis Lehane, and Howard Marks. For more information and to book, contact the Festival Office at +44 (0)1423 562303 or email crime@harrogate-festival.org.uk. Details and updates are at www.harrogate-festival.org.uk/crime.

Deadly Ink

Parsippany NJ • August 5–7

Deadly Ink will kick off at the Sheraton, Parsippany. Guest of Honor is Hank Phillippi Ryan and toastmaster is Jeff Markowitz. Special honoree is Sisters in Crime. Happy 25th Birthday, Sisters in Crime! More information is at www.deadlyink.com.

Florida SinC Workshop

Jacksonville FL • August 6

Nancy J. Cohen will headline the second annual free workshop at the Southeast Regional Library. Details are at www.floridasistersincrime.com. For more information contact KathrynBain@comcast.net.

St. Hilda's

Oxford UK • August 19–21

Plans are underway for the conference "The Anatomy of Justice." More information is forthcoming.

Killer Nashville

Nashville TN • August 26–28

The conference for writers and readers offers learning tracks for varied interests and experience levels: writing, publishing, career management and promotion, forensic, and fan. Donald Bain and Robert Dugoni are guests of honor. For details, visit KillerNashville.com.

Seascape "Escape to Write" Writers Retreat

Chester CT • September 9–11

Participants in this non-conventional conference will pre-submit 25 pages of a work-in-progress (WIP). S. W. Hubbard, Hallie Ephron, and Roberta Isleib will lead focus groups which will examine the WIP from different perspectives. Full details can be found at www.robertaisleib.com/seascape.html.

Bouchercon

St. Louis MO • September 15–18

"Spirits of St. Louis" will convene at the Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel with special guests Robert Crais, Charlaine Harris, Colin Cotterill, Val McDermid, Sara Paretsky, Kate Stine, Brian Skupin, and Ridley Pearson. The ever-developing website is at www.bouchercon2011.com.

Writers' Police Academy

Jamestown NC • September 23–25

Experience the most hands-on, interactive and educational experience writers can find to enhance their understanding of all aspects of law enforcement and forensics. Speakers include Dr. Katherine Ramsland, Dr. Denene Lofland, Alafair Burke, Rich McMahan, and Josh Mouin. See more at writerspoliceacademy.com.

Love Is Murder

Chicago IL • February 2012

Love is Murder provides an educational forum to writers and readers to further their knowledge of writing, publishing, and the business of book production. See www.loveismurder.net.

The Docket

by Patricia Gulley



Avery Aames (Daryl Wood Gerber), *Lost and Fondue*, Berkley Prime Crime, May

Susan Wittig Albert, *Mourning Gloria*, April; *The Darling Dahlias and the Naked Ladies*, July, both Berkley Prime Crime

Laura Alden (Janet Koch), *Foul Play at the PTA*, Signet, July

Judy Alter, *Skeleton in a Dead Space*, Turquoise Morning Press, August

Barbra Annino, *Opal Fire*, January, *Bloodstone*, June, both Vanilla Heart Publishing

P.I. Barrington, *Final Deceit*, Desert Breeze Publishing, January, "Killer Stew," *Suspense Magazine*, January, "A Cougar's Tale," *Suspense Magazine*, April

Joan Blacher, *Lethal Lake*, Zumaya Publications, March

Janet Bolin, *Dire Threads*, Berkley Prime Crime, June

Kaye George, *Choke*, Mainly Murder Press, May

Karen Harper, *Dark Angle*, Mira Books, May

Roberta Isleib, "The Itinerary," *The Rich And the Dead*, Grand Central, April

Beth Kanell, *The Secret Room*, Voyage (Vermont), September

Julie Kramer, *Killing Kara*, Atria/Simon & Schuster, July

Sofie Kelly, (Darlene Ryan) *Curiosity Thrilled the Cat*, Obsidian, February

Norma Lehr, *Timestep to Murder*, Camel Press, June

Ramona DeFelice Long, ed., *Fish Tales: 22 Tales of Murder and Mayhem from the Rising Stars of Mystery*. Introduction by Chris Roerden; short stories by Leslie Budewitz, Nancy Adams, James Montgomery Jackson, Diane Vallere, K B Inglee, Patricia Winton, Karen Pullen, Sarah E. Glenn, Gigi Pandian, Warren Bull, Peggy Ehrhart, Kaye George, Betsy Bitner, Annette Dashofy, Krista Davis, Gloria Alden, Heidi Saunders, Deborah J. Benoit, Daryl Wood Gerber, Beth Groundwater, Darlene Ryan, Patricia Gulley, Wildside Press, March

Jeanne Matthews, *Bet Your Bones*, Poisoned Pen Press, June

Frances McNamara, *Death at Pullman*, Allium Press, March

Katherine Hall Page, *The Body in the Gazebo*, Wm. Morrow, April

L.J. Sellers, *Dying for Justice*, Spellbinder Press, April

Clea Simon, *Grey Zone*, Severn House, *Dogs Don't Lie*, Poisoned Pen, both April

Jessica Speart, *Winged Obsession*, Wm. Morrow, April

Dorothy St. James (Dorothy McFalls), *Flowerbed of State*, Berkley Prime Crime, May

Elaine Togneri, "Paparazzo," *The Rich and the Dead*, Grand Central Publishing, May
Lea Wait, *Shadows of a Down East Summer*, Perseverance Press, April,

Kathryn R. Wall, *Jericho Cay*, St. Martin's Minotaur, April

Weibezahl, Robert, "Identity Theft," *Deadly by the Dozen*, OROX Books, February

Lois Winston, *Assault With a Deadly Glue Gun*, Midnight Ink, January

Patricia Wynn, *A Killing Frost*, Pemberley Press, July

Elizabeth Zelvin, "The Emperor's Hoard," *Mysterical-E*, April

Awards/Nominations

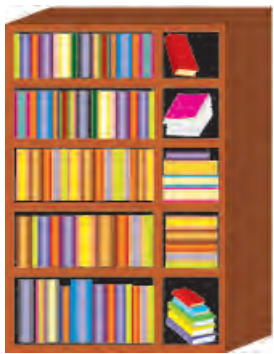
Barb Goffman was nominated for an the Agatha Award in the Short Story category for "Volunteer of the Year" in *Chesapeake Crimes: They Had It Comin'*.

Karen Harper's *Down River* was nominated for The Mary Higgins Clark Award.

Sasscer Hill's *Full Mortality* was nominated for an Agatha Award for First Best Novel.

Sandra Parshall is a finalist for ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year Award in the mystery category for *Broken Places*.

Jeri Westerson's *The Demon's Parchment* was nominated for a Bruce Alexander Memorial Historical Award.



Mary Kinney Branson, *Delayed Justice: Inside Stories from America's Best Cold Case Investigators*, Prometheus Books, June

P.A. Brown, *Between Darkness & Light*, February,

Bermuda Heat, March, both MLR Press

Lila Dare (Laura DiSilverio), *Polished Off*, Berkley Prime Crime, February

Kathleen Delaney (Kathleen Koppang), *Murder Half-Baked*, Camel Press, May

Vicki Delany, *Among the Departed*, Poisoned Pen Press, May

Laura DiSilverio, *Die Buying*, Berkley Prime Crime, August

A. B. Emrys, *Wilkie Collins, Vera Caspary, and the Evolution of the Casebook Novel*, McFarland, April

Susan Furlong-Bolliger, "Paddy Whacked," *Untreed Reads*, March

Sending Your Entry

- Author, book or story title; publisher, magazine, or anthology; release month
- Awards and nominations in sentence format with period
- Docket in subject line
- No further information, entries older than six months, or colors.
- Editor(s) of anthologies only with a story in anthology
- Pen name? Add real name in parentheses if you want this included.
- Send to Patricia Gulley
- weyrcottage@yahoo.com



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Writing Contests

Florida Sisters in Crime Contest

June 30

Florida Sisters in Crime is holding its first writing contest. Submit your first scene or prologue up to 750 words. Winner receives a certificate and a critique from Elizabeth Sinclair, author of *The Dreaded Synopsis*. See www.floridasistersincrime.com for details.

William F. Deeck-Malice Domestic Grants Program for Unpublished Writers

Annually, Mid-November

Grants to two unpublished writers in the malice domestic genre at the Malice Domestic Conference. Details at www.malicedomestic.org/grants.html.

St. Martin's Minotaur/mwa First Crime Novel

Annually, November

Open to any writer who has never been the author of a published novel (excepting self-published or one who is under contract). Murder or serious crime must be at the heart of the story www.mysterywriters.org/?q=Contests-writers or us.macmillan.com/Content.aspx?publisher=minotaurbooks&id=4933

Golden Donut & Don Knotts Silver Bullet

Watch for updates

The Golden Donut short story contest and Don Knotts Silver Bullet Novel contests are sponsored by the Writers Police Academy. Updates at writerspoliceacademy.com.

Writing Contests

Please send all information for mystery writing contests, including those sponsored by SinC chapters, directly to Molly Weston, *inSinC* editor, at mysteryheel@mac.com. Include contest name, entry deadline, sponsor, and website. Include "Contest" in the subject line. Deadline for the September issue is July 15.