

# THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime † Northern California Chapter

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 2017

## Dear Sisters and Misters,

It's hard to believe it has been a whole year since I first signed on as president of Norcal SinC. Time has flown by, so I must be having a good time. We had a lively year. Some of the highlights were a fascinating talk by forensics specialist Jan Burke, courtesy of national SinC; two showcases of Norcal authors with new books out; several events at monthly meetings to further the education of members; participation in the Bay Area Book Festival; and in the fall a daylong workshop featuring dynamic speakers Kelli Stanley, Deborah Crombie, Helen Sedwick, and Cindy Sample. We ended the year with a holiday party jointly hosted with Bay Area Mystery Writers of America.

All of this has been made possible by the work of our fantastic executive committee, twelve members dedicated to making Norcal SinC an organization to be proud of. The goal is to support women in the crime writing field, and event planners always keep that in mind.

Our membership has grown to 136 members, which brings me to the reminder that it's time to renew your national and local membership. Two-thirds of our members have already done so! National SinC is making an effort to ensure that everyone is a national member, so if you have not renewed your national dues, your name will be dropped from the membership list sometime in March (they were vague on the date). If anyone has financial trouble with the dues, here is the email to request a waiver: [admin@sistersincrime.org](mailto:admin@sistersincrime.org)



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## President's Message, continued

We are planning many more interesting events in 2017. Our meetings are generally the first Saturday of every month from noon to 2:00 p.m. Because we encompass such a large geographical area, we vary the meeting sites. If you have a site to suggest, please let us know. Watch the website (<http://sincnorcal.org>) and our Facebook page under Sisters-in-Crime Northern California Chapter for news of upcoming events.

In conjunction with the thirty-year anniversary of Sisters in Crime, we are planning a special event (with cake!) that will feature special guest speaker Catriona McPherson at our April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. Details soon.

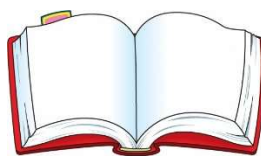
And finally, a planning committee has been formed, headed by new executive committee member Margaret (Peggy) Lucke, to explore the possibility of putting out a Norcal Sisters in Crime anthology of short stories. Members will be kept updated on this exciting venture.

Volunteers! You will find a section of the newsletter with short bios of the executive committee members along with their committee tasks and email addresses. If you see a task you would like to be involved with, please let the committee know. We are always excited to have members participate in the behind-the-scenes work that makes the organization vibrant.

Meanwhile, we continue to have lots of opportunities for writers to promote their work through library panels, book clubs, and groups that like to host mystery authors. Keep an eye on the listserv for notices of these events.

Here's to a happy and productive new year!

Sincerely,  
Terry Shames



# 2017 SinC Norcal Executive Committee Members Introduce Themselves

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**TERRY SHAMES, President:** I write the best-selling Samuel Craddock series. *A Killing at Cotton Hill* won the Macavity Award for Best First Mystery; *The Necessary Murder of Nonie Blake* has been nominated for a 2016 Lefty Award. I live in Berkeley with my husband and two rowdy terriers. I am proud of the great work Sisters in Crime has done on behalf of writers and am delighted to be SinC Norcal president this year. Visit my website at [www.terryshames.com](http://www.terryshames.com)

**DIANA CHAMBERS, Vice President:** I was born with a book in one hand and a passport in the other. Maybe it was *A Tale of Two Cities*, but I was soon wandering the cobblestones of Paris. An Asian importing business led to LA, where I spent several years as a scriptwriter until my characters demanded their own novels. The first was *Stinger*, set in Pakistan and Afghanistan. For more on my work and travels, please visit [www.dianarchambers.com](http://www.dianarchambers.com).



**MALENA ELJUMBAILY, Membership Chair:** I have been the Membership Chair since 2009. I am an avid mystery reader and especially love cozies. Though I did once write a mystery novel which resides in a drawer somewhere, I now concentrate on writing plays. Several of my short plays have been produced in Sonoma, Spokane and Brooklyn, among other places. I live and knit in beautiful Santa Rosa.

**CHERYL ARGUILE (aka Emily Brightwell), Secretary:** I was born in the Appalachian Mountains. In 1959 my family moved to California and I grew up in Pasadena. After I graduated from college, I decided to travel the world, but I only got as far as England, where I met the man who became my husband. We ended up back in the US, where I pursued my dream of becoming a writer. To date, I've written forty-four novels, the most successful of which are the "Mrs. Jeffries" Victorian mysteries. <http://www.emilybrightwell.com/>



## 2017 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**ANA MANWARING, Treasurer:** I write book reviews and blog at Building a Better Story, edit through JAM Manuscript Consulting, and teach creative writing and memoir at Napa Valley College. My work is included in many anthologies including award-winning *Sisters Born, Sisters Found*, and I'm querying agents for Books 1 and 2 of *The Hydra Effect*, the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures. Learn more at [www.anamanwaring.com](http://www.anamanwaring.com). Follow my adventures in Mexico at [www.saintsandskeletons.com](http://www.saintsandskeletons.com).

**HEIDI NOROOZY, Event Coordinator:** I'm a writer, translator, and once and future blogger. My fiction is set mainly in locations around the world and reflects my experiences as a globe trekker, from dipping my toes in the azure waters of the Caspian Sea to baking bread with Kurdish villagers in western Iran to searching for the perfect fondue in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland. My short stories have been translated into German, French, Polish, Slovenian and Estonian. [www.heidinoroozy.com](http://www.heidinoroozy.com)



**SUSAN C. SHEA, Past President:** My new series of French village mysteries begins with the May 2 release of *Love and Death in Burgundy* (St Martin's Minotaur). I love doing the research, of course. The third in the Dani O'Rourke Mysteries came out in February 2016. For that, work in non-profits and my lifelong love of art are the research bases. I serve as secretary of the national SinC board, blog on 7CriminalMinds, and live in Marin County. <http://www.susancshea.com/>

**MARGIE BUNTING, Newsletter Editor:** I'm an avid reader, with mysteries accounting for half of the books I read. Although I'm not an author, serving as editor of *The Stiletta* has been a joy for the past year. I also keep busy as a Toastmasters officer, cat socializer at the Humane Society, devoted musical theater-goer (*Hamilton*, here we come!), wife, mother of two, mother-in-law of one, and now a first-time grandma. My BA in French didn't help me with my Human Resources career (now retired) but came in handy in our trip to Paris last summer.





## 2017 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**MADDY MCEWEN, Website:** I am an ex-pat from the UK, bi-focaled and technically challenged. I and my Significant Other manage our four offspring, one major and three minors, two autistic, two neurotypical, plus a time-share with Alzheimer's. If there's any time left over, I have my nose in a book and my fingers on the keyboard. [www.madelinemcewen.com](http://www.madelinemcewen.com)

**MARGARET (PEGGY) LUCKE, Member at Large:** I fling words around as a writer and editorial consultant in the San Francisco Bay Area. My novels include *House of Whispers*, a tale of love, ghosts and murder on the Marin County coast, and two featuring artist and private eye Jess Randolph: *A Relative Stranger* and *Snow Angel* (coming in 2017). I teach fiction writing classes and have authored two how-to books on writing. Some years back I was president of the Norcal chapter of MWA. I live in Hercules, where occasionally I am the reluctant subject for my photographer husband, Charlie. <http://www.margaretlucke.com>



**MYSTI BERRY, Member at Large:** I am an award-winning writer of screenplays, short stories, and novels. After earning a BA in Linguistics from UC Santa Cruz and an MFA from University of San Francisco, I settled in The City's storied, forgotten neighborhood, OMI. My latest short story, "The Johnny Depp Kickline of Doom," was published in *Ellery Queen Magazine* last year, and I'm hard at work on another short story, a novella, and a novel. I share a little redwood box of a house with graphic novelist Dale Berry and three black rescue cats. <https://mysti-berry.squarespace.com/>



## Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC Norcal Events

**Saturday, February 4, 12:00-2:00 p.m.**

### *Meet and Greet*

*Berkeley Public Library, North Branch, 1170 The Alameda, Berkeley*

This is an opportunity for current Sisters in Crime Norcal members to interact with new and potential members in a social setting, as well as to learn about exciting upcoming events, meet this year's Executive Committee, and catch up on everyone's news.

**Saturday, March 4**

### *See You in Court! A Day in the Life of a Defense Attorney*

*Los Altos Public Library Community Room, 13 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos*

Join defense attorney Allison Gomez, Deputy Public Defender for Santa Clara County, for a fascinating talk about her work in the Santa Clara County courts. A graduate of the Santa Clara University School of Law, Allison helps clients navigate the complicated and confusing maze that is our judicial system. Without a competent and caring attorney, people accused of crimes would be left to maneuver through the system without understanding how it works, with no guarantee that their rights are upheld or that district attorneys and judges are held to the ethical standards required by law. In her free time, Allison is a triathlete, runner, and crossfitter.

**Thursday, March 23, 11:00 a.m. -1:00 p.m.**

### *Santa Clara County Crime Lab Virtual Tour*

*Santa Clara County Crime Lab, 250 W. Hedding Street, San Jose*

Come and join your fellow Sisters and Misterys for a super-interesting virtual tour of the Santa Clara County Crime Lab with Criminalist Cordelia Willis. This presentation virtually "walks through" all the different areas of the Crime Lab via photographs and case examples. It is a special event in addition to our regularly scheduled Saturday meeting in March. **You need to register to attend** – be sure to RSVP to our Event Coordinator at [heidinoroozy@gmail.com](mailto:heidinoroozy@gmail.com).

**Saturday, April 1**

### *Sisters in Crime Anniversary Celebration*

Sisters in Crime is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and the Executive Board is working on ideas for ways to commemorate this milestone. To kick things off, we're planning a special anniversary celebration on April 1 with **Catriona McPherson** speaking. More details to follow soon.

**Check our website and our Facebook page for more info regarding events venues and directions:**  
<http://www.sincnorcal.org> [Sisters in Crime Norcal Facebook page](#)

## In Case You Missed It . . .

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If you weren't able to attend our November or December events, here's what you missed.

**November Meeting:** Norcal Sisters who were busy releasing new books during the past few months regaled us at Books, Inc. with selected excerpts and gave away copies in a random drawing.



Ann Parker



Camille Minichino



Carol Verberg



Bette G. Lamb



Elin Barnes



Heather Haven



Kirsten Weiss



Mary Feliz



Sabrina Flynn

**December Meeting:** Members of the Northern California chapters of both Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America gathered at Borderlands Books in the spirit of the season to enjoy some delicious holiday eats and each other's company.





## A Writer's Musings by Rita Lakin

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What does a writer often do when not writing? Avoid work, that's what, and I am master of this fine art of diversion. Why would any writer find ways to avoid the thing we love? Perversity, that's why.

### DIVERSION

*Definition:* Amusement. Deflection. Departure. Detour. Digression. Distraction. Entertainment. Game. Hobby. Levity. Merriment. Recreation. Red Herring. Relaxation. Sport.

Amusement. See Entertainment Page local newspaper. Choose something. Go.

Deflection. The printer is out of ink, must rush out to the store and buy.

Departure: A friend calls. Wanna go to lunch? Out the door in 20 seconds.

Detour. The fridge is on my path to my office. Ice cream cries out to me.

Digression. So many emails to answer.

Distraction. The brown pelicans are gliding past my window in my bird sanctuary view.

Entertainment. TV. Any *Masterpiece Theater*. *Antiques Roadshow*. Lately, *This is Us* (terrible title, wonderful show). Could watch *Breaking Bad* again. Love movies, too. Don't miss *La La Land*.

Game. Crossword puzzles. Yahtzee.

Hobby. Reading, of course. I must finish that mystery. Only five more pages to go.

Levity. Hanging out with other writers, laughing at not being at the computer.

Merriment. Telling old age jokes. (Seventy-year-old Sadie walks into the rec room carrying a large purse. She faces the old men playing cards. "I'll have sex with the guy who can guess what's in my purse." Al yells, "An elephant." Sadie says, "Close enough.") Couldn't resist.

Red Herring. Quickly scribble some notes, pretending they will go into The Next Book.



## A Writer's Musings, continued

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Relaxation. Ah, a nap and then, of course, I'll get to work.

Sport. Sport? Are you kidding? Me? No way. Oh, they must mean watch a sport. The San Francisco Giants play 162 games a year. Stop writing and watch. Only takes up three hours a day. Each game.

### WORDS

Naturally, words enchant writers. They roll lovingly off the tongue. Inkling. Defined as “a slight knowledge of a hint, a clue, a hunch, a glimmering, an indication...”

As a child, early words captivated me. I had an inkling. When I learned to read, I had to read everything. Anything. Cereal boxes as I breakfasted. Clothing labels. My parents' newspapers—upside down as they read. When I tried on my own, at age five, I actually set our kitchen on fire. Mama was next door chatting with a neighbor. I turned a large page with my chubby hands and knocked over a lit candle. I screeched. Mama came running back. She found me curled up in the bathtub, the only safe place I could think of.

And speaking of plumbing.

It was in fourth grade when I had my epiphany. Elementary school. A busted pipe in an old building. So we little children were led by teacher into the library, informed that our classroom was flooded out. We were to take seats around those scuffed and much-used tables. “I'm afraid this will be our home for months,” she said.

Groans were heard. Stuck here?

Groans? Were they crazy? Didn't they realize we now had a room full of books for us to enjoy? From eight am to three pm every day, all day. Nothing to do but read. How wonderful.

And I read and read and my notebook started filling with little stories I made up, inspired by what I read. So, I must have had an inkling of what career I would choose.

But wait a minute—I once had an inkling I might want to be a belly dancer. A clue. A hint. An indication. I even took a few lessons. It was just as well that I was awful at it.

### WORKPLACES

As a writer I have always worked in the same room of my home and no matter which house or apartment I've lived in (about 10 or so over the years), there was one deal breaker. My office had to be located next to the kitchen. For obvious reasons. Need I spell them out? OK, I will. F.O.O.D.

## A Writer's Musings, continued

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When writer's block might strike me (rarely) or boredom (seldom) or when I just needed a change of pace and place, off I'd go to my beloved kitchen. I'd open the fridge and dive right in.

Over the years I have written in bars. (Must be part of a restaurant.) Usually off hours with a bartender keeping pests away who will always ask: 1. What are you writing? (a script) 2. Where do you get your ideas? (from out of my head or, from God, when feeling feisty) 3. I could write that crap better than what's on TV. (get lost!!!! or stronger)

Another favorite place were bowling alleys. The wild cadence of the bouncing balls flying down the alleys reminded me of an angry ocean at high tide. Very soothing. Naturally, I sat near the coffee shop.

But my all-time favorite was the year I spent in a small neighborhood boutique restaurant. The owner, a gourmet chef, saw me as an "artiste" and offered me a table in the rear, with a socket for my computer.

I arrived eight am sharp, had my incredible breakfast, different every day (Spinach Benedict, yum). Then got to work. Of course, I was still there at lunch (my favorite, croissant sandwiches filled with brie cheese with a bisque soup to die for).

The customer and street noise level was high. The TV blasted. The phone rang off the proverbial hook. The kitchen shouted out when orders were ready. The smells, divine. I loved it all.

I heard nothing but the sound of my muse whispering in my ear, telling me just what to write. (Or was it my mother nagging from her great white condo in the sky?)

I wrote an entire novel there and gained five pounds, but it was worth it.

Enough musing. Back to work.

Rita Lakin spent 25 years in TV as a writer of series, movies, and miniseries, finally becoming producer/show runner on her shows. *The Only Woman in the Room*, her memoir of those years, has recently been published. She is also known for writing comedy mystery novels featuring Gladdy Gold and her zany geriatric partners in crime-solving, starting with *Getting Old is Murder*. She won first place for her IMBA bestselling *Getting Old is a Disaster*, and the same novel won the Left Coast Crime Lefty for most humorous mystery published in 2009. Other nominations include Writers Guild of America, MWA Edgar, and the Avery Hopwood awards from the University of Michigan. Visit [www.ritalakin.com](http://www.ritalakin.com).

# This Writing Thing Called Craft

by Heather Haven



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Okay, you want to write a novel. You're excited, filled with energy, hope, and something to say. You can't wait to start the process, do the research, meet the characters, and create a spiffy plot, all that good stuff. If you're a mystery writer like me, you pretty much know what the ending is going to be, but the 'how' of getting there! It's elixir for the soul. In the beginning, you're open to all the possibilities that will spur you on during the forthcoming, never-ending months. Writing a novel—at least the start of it—is a wonderful adventure. Just you, your ideas, a computer, and buckets of strong coffee.

But at some point in the process, trying to reach eighty-five thousand words with what you suspect is pure, unadulterated drivel is another matter. You become bogged down, overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. You discover you need more than just a fire in the belly (which could also be labeled as heartburn).

For me, that's the place where 'talent' and 'craft' need to cohabitate. The craft of writing is a practiced art, much like learning to play tennis. The more you practice, the better you get. You also need the tools that make the process more doable. Where would tennis be without a racket? So I've learned—and continue to learn—certain tricks to help me get through the arduous parts of completing a novel. I'm in the throes of writing my 11<sup>th</sup> novel, *The Culinary Art of Murder*, Book Six of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, so I'd better have learned a thing or two. Some things could be called obvious, but often the obvious becomes overlooked along the way. Better to repeat them endlessly than lose sight of them. Here are a few of the important ones.

**Have a place to call your own when you write.** No matter how large or small, make it comfortable and keep it neat. Share it with no one. It's your sanctuary. Okay, share it with a cat. The purring of a cat is very soothing. It's been medically proven.

**Make writing a habit.** Write every day, and shoot for the same time. Yes, every day, even if it's only fifteen minutes and on a Sunday. Habits become hard to break, so develop this one. Your mantra should be "A Day without Writing is Like a Day without Sunshine." The reward is the surprise of what fifteen to thirty minutes a day can produce at the end of only one month. Imagine an hour, two hours, or four!

**Writing needs to move forward like a shark.** Don't beat a paragraph, page or chapter to death, letting it lead to a form of literary impotence. Of course, the first time out it's not going to be what

## This Writing Thing Called Craft, continued

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you ultimately want. No one knows that better than you. None of this will get lost in the shuffle. Promise. It adheres itself to your soul. So you need to keep going. You'll get everything in the third rewrite or the fiftieth. Trust yourself. But move forward.

**The first sh—y draft is called that for a reason.** Don't be discouraged with the first draft. It's your outline. In some ways, it's a rite of passage. You'll improve it on the next round. It's just part of the process.

**Give yourself the luxury of time.** A manuscript is often like a bowl of rising dough (when it's not like tennis or a shark). It needs to have the life punched out of it, then put in a corner to rest until it rises again. Only to be punched down once more. What I really mean is WRITING IS REWRITING. There, I've said it and without any metaphors. In order to get the novel just right, you'll have to leave it for a while so you can come back with a fresh eye. And you may have to do this several times. Any baker will tell you rising dough cannot be rushed. Same for a novel. No rushing. That's just a mistake waiting to happen.

**Don't let anyone read your work until you're ready.** If you read a passage or two to someone you TRUST for feedback, that's one thing. But showing your novel to ANYONE before it's completed is like wrapping a bolt of fabric around a model and telling an audience what the dress will look like when you're finished sewing it together. OMG! Did I just use my fourth metaphor? The reality is, though, the more you have to explain or justify yourself, the more you diffuse the project.

**Above all, respect yourself, your novel, and your craft.** Always remember, you are shining a light on truth. That's what novels are all about. There is a nobility in that. And, yes, that was my fifth metaphor. Just seemed right.

After studying drama at the University of Miami (FL), Heather Haven moved to Manhattan. There she wrote short stories, novels, comedy acts, TV treatments, ad copy, commercials, and two one-act plays, produced at the famous Playwrights Horizon. She even ghostwrote a book on how to run an employment agency (while unemployed). Heather has won numerous awards for her Silicon Valley-based Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, Manhattan-based WWII Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries, Ringling Brothers Circus mystery noir *Death of a Clown*, and short story anthology *Corliss and Other Award-Winning Stories*. She and her husband of 34 years are allowed to live with their two cats, Ellie and Yulie, in the San Jose foothills, where Heather is currently writing her eleventh novel, *The Culinary Art of Murder*. [Heather Haven Stories - Mysteries with Wit](#)



# Loneliness and the Writer

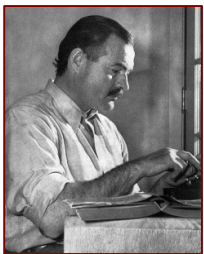
by Pat Morin



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It was a ho-hum day, and I was exploring topics for my blog. I had begun to write a dark-comedy mystery play, “Hit List,” about an 82-year-old woman in a nursing home, dying of cancer alone, and with no mystery books to read (oh my!).

So I explored the Internet, and my psychology library, and decided to do the blog on “Loneliness and the Writer,” kinda feeling that way myself that day. I found an article on Ernest Hemingway.



In his 1954 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “Writing, at best, is a lonely life . . . he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer, he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.”

Ernest Hemingway, whose father, sister, and brother all took their own lives, was practically destined for suicide.

Kay Redfield Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and author of *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, reports that writers are ten to twenty times more likely to suffer from depression than other people.

Sylvia Plath, a famous poet who committed suicide in 1963, wrote about her loneliness: “God, but life is loneliness, despite all the opiates, despite the shrill tinsel gaiety of ‘parties’ with no purpose, despite the false grinning faces we all wear.”



Nathan Bransford, author and retired literary agent, says, “I don’t find the act of writing to be a lonely one. There’s something about the concentration, the empathy required to imagine what characters think and do, and being immersed in another place that never makes you feel you’re actually by yourself.”

But what is loneliness then? Can it be more a factor of the writing life? The writing life forces you to shut off the outside world for long stretches of time. The lack of social contact with friends, family, gym visits, because you are near your book’s due date, and the book is not completed; you need one more rewrite so you can “work” that weak area in chapter seventeen; you need to

## Loneliness and the Writer, continued

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concentrate on the consistency of the “voice” – all these things impede time necessary to get out of the chair and communicate with others. Loneliness is a feeling that seeps into your soul slowly, so that soon you might not even want, or think, you need to be with others.



I know the anxiety of having to meet a deadline, of closing myself off to the outer world in order to attend to the conclusions in my character’s world.

“If you are finding yourself struggling with loneliness, you’re not alone. And yet you are alone. So very alone,” reads an anonymous quote.

Many writers choose social isolation, a precursor to the feeling of loneliness and depression, to fuel creative endeavors – to enhance their creative expression. This self-imposed social isolation, often termed solitude, is simply a lack of contact with people. It’s ironic when I hear the word solitude and think of Superman’s Fortress of Solitude, a self-imposed exile from man, but a place that would have portals to other experience to enhance Superman’s knowledge of . . . well . . . life, the universe, and everything.

We, as writers, maintain a fortress for our writing, our minds flying through different portals of experiences with our characters, research, and plot lines. So, when do we step over the threshold from solitude to loneliness?

When we *feel* loneliness.

What can we do when we feel that loneliness, when creativity begins to dwindle, but we need to complete our work before a deadline?

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Flow: The Psychology of the Optimal Experience*, states, “One can survive (extended) solitude, but only if one finds ways of ordering *attention* that will prevent entropy (blockage of creative flow) from destructing the mind.”

Do we fill the spaces with computer games . . . Spider Solitaire (my favorite), Angry Birds (not my favorite)? That’s a positive alternative; you have turned your mind into concentration on a specific task. The unconscious mind is still working while the conscious mind relaxes (and has some fun). Structuring your time will control your mental focus. Give yourself permission to do something else.

You don’t need to see solitude and loneliness as an enemy. “A good enough writer must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day,” as Hemingway believed, and loneliness will be close at hand.

When we reach the depths of loneliness, where what is real or what is imagined no longer matters, and depression sets in . . . like Sylvia Plath, David Foster Wallace, and Virginia Wolfe . . .

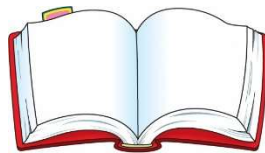
## Loneliness and the Writer, continued

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there is no longer meaning in life and our creative juices evaporate. Then solitude and loneliness have become deadly.

Loneliness can be transient or chronic, and our reactions to it just as varied. It's good to stop and check with ourselves every once in a while, to insure that under that self-imposed solitude is not a slow-growing loneliness that will eventually eat away our creativity, and result in a deep-seated depression.

Besides writing short stories, novels and plays, Pat Morin has Master's degrees in both Counseling Psychology and Clinical Social Work. She has had numerous plays produced and has four short story collections published. Her first two short story collections, *Mystery Montage* (2010) and *Crime Montage* (2012), were released by Top Publications, Ltd., Dallas, TX. Her short story "Homeless" was a Derringer and Anthony Award finalist, while "Pa and the Pigeon Man" was nominated for a Pushcart. Her third and fourth short story collections, *Confetti* and *Deadly Illusions*, were released in 2014 and 2015. You can learn more about Pat and her writing by visiting her website: [www.patriciamorin.com](http://www.patriciamorin.com).



## Mixing Mystery Genres:

### or *Skinwalkers* Meets

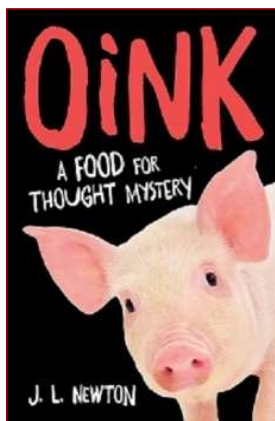
## *The Lemon Meringue Pie Murder in Oink*

by Judith Newton



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As a several-year member of SinC Norcal and as a retired professor of women's studies at U.C. Davis, I'm delighted to report that I will publish my first novel, *Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery*, with She Writes Press on April 18, 2017. In this novel, Emily Addams, foodie professor of women's studies at Arbor State—a land grant university in northern California—finds herself an unlikely suspect in the poisoning of Peter Elliott, a professor of plant biology and a hot shot developer of a new genetically modified corn. How did *her* cornbread (unmistakable for its goat cheese and caramelized onions) end up in *his* hand as he lay comatose on the smelly muck of a pig's pen? Emily must find out before the police close in on her.



As Emily and her feminist network try to identify who or what has poisoned Peter—his work on GMOs is secretly financed by Syndicon, a giant biotechnology corporation—they also struggle to keep a new and business-minded administration from defunding the women's and ethnic studies programs and running their beloved Arbor State more like a corporation than an institute for higher learning. In the process, Emily and her multicultural network deepen their ties to each other while uncovering some of the dark secrets of a university whose traditionally communal values are being eroded by a wave of profit-fueled ideals. Left unanswered is this question: is the greedy, narcissistic, and womanizing Peter Elliott an aberration? Or is he the future? And not just at Arbor State.

I became interested in mystery sometime in the 1990s when I began making visits to Santa Fe and reading the mysteries of Tony Hillerman, who sets his novels in New Mexico and whose sleuths are two Navajo policemen, Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn. What I liked about Hillerman's books was the sense of place they conveyed—I was born in a desert town, Death Valley Junction, and identified with the high desert of New Mexico—and the fact that the novels' stories are told from the points of view of Navajos, of people on the margins of mainstream US culture.



## Mixing Mystery Genres, continued

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*Arboretum Native American Garden*

I was especially taken by the latter because in the 1990s I saw myself as living on a different sort of margin at my university. I was director of women's studies, the faculty of which I had worked to make half white, half women of color, and I and my program had formed deep personal connections with faculty and the four programs in ethnic studies. To quote a Native American saying that appears on a sign in the university's arboretum, "our lives were bound the way baskets were bound together." Sometime in the early 2000s I decided that if I were ever to write a mystery, I would write one like Hillerman's.

I did not write that novel in the early 2000s, although I did draft a few initial paragraphs and taught a course on mystery. I was too busy to do more because I had to publish academic work and because I was engaged in a political struggle inside my university. In the mid-1990s the state cut funding to the U.C. system and corporate financing of research was on the rise, especially in the sciences. Davis was transforming itself from a university focused on agriculture to one focused on biotechnologies. Administrators from outside the campus were being hired at princely salaries, and the school's communal spirit seemed to be giving way to an ethic based less on community – or on creating a wide-ranging educational experience for its students – and more on profit.



*The Hog Barn was an emblem of the past Photo Davis Wiki*



*The Institute for Analytical Dynamics was the future*

In the wake of budget cuts and an increasingly corporate ethic, the first programs to be threatened were those of women's and ethnic studies, programs which mentored students who were marginalized by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender and which taught those students to think critically about how these forces shape the globe. In the words of the then Vice Provost: "Small programs like your own will have to prove that they are able to keep up. Only strong and productive units will get resources from now on. Weaker programs will have to become parts of big departments like English or Sociology." You can imagine how thrilled I was to hear that.

I retired in 2008 but instead of hammering out a mystery, I wrote a food memoir, *Tasting Home: Coming of Age in the Kitchen*. The memoir is a feminist coming-of-age story, in which I tell the story of my efforts to overcome childhood and other traumas and to recreate a series of different "homes." The last chapters are set at U.C. Davis in the 1990s and recount the ways in which the administration's efforts to downsize women's and ethnic studies prompted the faculty in these programs to unite and form a tight-knit community that provided me with both a sense of "family" and home – and that also became a powerful resource in resisting the newly corporate ethic and in successfully ensuring the survival of our programs.

## Mixing Mystery Genres, continued

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While finishing the memoir, which focused on my personal growth, I realized that I had more to say about the university and those years of community and struggle, so I began the long-delayed mystery. Following Hillerman, I decided that my main characters would be people on the margins of the university, faculty in women's and ethnic studies. Although the most prominent characters would be women, for it was women who were the primary instigators and supporters of the community we built, Frank Walker, an elder in Native American Studies, would be the most vocal representative of the values of the community and connection, a counterpoint to the growing emphasis on profit and competition at Arbor State.

The biggest issue I faced at this outlining stage was how to write so that a general audience would read. I was aware that puzzles and unsolved crimes keep people reading and that within different mystery genres there were additional inducements to reader engagement. Hillerman, of course, uses elements of the thriller. At the beginning of *Skinwalkers*, detective Jim Chee looks through his trailer window one desert-black night, glimpses a figure in the darkness, and then boom, boom, boom. Someone shoots at him through the trailer wall. That kept me reading.

I'm incapable of writing a thriller, however, and at any rate, I wanted a different feel for my novel so I turned to another genre, that of the cozy. Cozies characteristically involve a small community (the university is such a community). They often feature a quirky female sleuth, which, in my case, turned out to be a heightened version of myself—me and my quirks on steroids. They often supply humor, of which I would give a generous dose, and some involve food and come with recipes.

I decided that *Oink* would feature many scenes involving cooking and dining because, in real life, food had helped bring the community of women's and ethnic studies faculty together at U.C. Davis. In an effort to bond with each other, we went to endless lunches, coffees and dinners, attended each other's receptions, which always involved good things to eat, and even met for breakfast to discuss political strategies. I myself gave a series of lavish buffets which always ended in dancing and which helped to deepen our sense of common cause. Sharing recipes with the reader seemed a way of extending this food-based communal experience outward. All the recipes, moreover, would involve corn, which is a common symbol of life and birth. That pigs also eat corn would emphasize a connection between the human and natural worlds, a connection espoused by the Native American elder, Frank Walker, and a theme that would run throughout the novel.

In taking up the conventions of the cozy, I was conscious of using a literary form that is identified with women and with values often ascribed to and adhered to by women such as putting relationships at the heart of one's life, whether those relationships be those of love, friendship, family, or political community. These "feminine" values, of course, overlap with those of Frank Walker. Emily, for example, does not solve the mystery as a single, individual self. She solves it, in part, by drawing on the knowledge of other women.

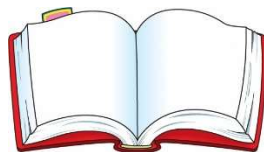
## Mixing Mystery Genres, continued

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Like Jim Chee, who reads the natural world for clues as most of us can never hope to do, Emily also possesses special forms of knowledge that are associated with the feminine and that turn out to be important. She notices what people wear and what their clothes signal about them. She is tuned into décor, into what houses or offices reveal about the people who inhabit them. She intuits hidden connections between other characters. All these forms of knowledge, including her analytical capabilities, her ability to overcome her fear of heights, and her skill in kickboxing help her solve the mystery and bring criminals to justice.

In merging Hillerman's focus on marginal points of view with the conventions of the cozy, especially those having to do with appreciation for community and personal connection, I could write about some of the difficulties for people on the margins in the university and in the nation – overwork, low pay, isolation, competition, inequality – while also immersing the reader in experiences of connectedness, love, humor, and pleasure, experiences which I identify as ways to live a more fully human life and as crucial to effective struggles for social justice. In a way I hadn't anticipated, the continuation of these values seems ever more critical to our time.

Judith Newton is a Professor Emerita in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at U.C. Davis, where she directed her program and the Consortium for Women and Research. Her first novel, *Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery*, the first in the Emily Addams/Food for Thought series, is forthcoming with She Writes Press on April 18, 2017, and is available for [preorder](#). She is at work on the second in the Food for Thought series and lives in Kensington, where she tends her garden and cooks for family and friends. Read more about her at [www.judithnewton.com](http://www.judithnewton.com) and at <https://www.facebook.com/TastingHomeComingOfAgeInTheKitchen>.



## Member Profile: Malena Eljumaily

Second in a series to introduce our members to each other



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You've all seen her, the smiling woman bustling in to every chapter meeting carrying a big cardboard box, talking over her shoulder to someone, balancing paper plates and plastic cups and nametags . . .

**Membership Chair Malena Eljumaily** is so much of a fixture in Sisters in Crime Norcal that it's sometimes hard to believe she's only been a member since 2007. How did we get so lucky to find a Sister who will pitch in to do just about anything, who is also our unofficial hospitality chair, who carools to meetings hours away rather than miss one?

"While I was attending the Book Passage Mysters Writers Conference, I heard from many people that Sisters in Crime was the best fit for new writers. I followed Pat Morin as Membership Chair in 2009."

What that entails is reminding members to renew, processing member dues, keeping a master list of current members, and answering lots of questions from members who know her if they don't know anyone else. "If I'm doing my job right, I'm greeting members and making them feel welcome at meetings." Does she really come to every meeting, all the way from Santa Rosa? "I go to all of them. Hey I want to get my money's worth."

Malena's primarily a playwright, not a novelist. "I grew up going to plays and musicals with my mother from age about 11. My brother was involved in the technical side of many small theaters around Los Angeles, so I saw all his shows, too. Like everyone else in LA, I wrote a couple of screenplays (all terrible) but was frustrated by the form. Movies are visual and there really isn't much dialogue per se. But in theater, the playwright is allowed to let people have long conversations. And since I love writing dialogue best of all, it was a great fit for me. I wrote my first play for a 10-minute play contest and it not only got into the festival, it was voted audience favorite."

She thinks she's written twenty one-minute and ten-minute plays and a number of them have been produced. "There's a blog where people post calls for submissions from all over the country, a lot with specific themes."

Does she have favorite playwrights? "Shakespeare, of course. I went to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival a few years ago and saw their version of *Pericles of Tyre*. It was almost a transforming experience. It left me with a new respect for how powerful live theater can be. I also really love zany British comedies, like Joe Orton's work and one I just saw locally called *Run for Your Wife*. And Chekhov. Anything by Chekhov."



## Member Profile: Malena Eljumaily , continued

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What about crime novels? “I READ crime fiction. I belong to two mystery book clubs. I do have a crime novel in the drawer that I finished so long ago, it might be considered historical at this point. I may dig it out and dust it off someday. I have lots of ideas.”

What keeps her committed to SinC Norcal? “The people! I love seeing all my old friends and meeting new ones at the meetings. We are such a great group. I especially love hearing that someone in SinC Norcal has finally broken through, gotten an agent or a publisher, or even just finally finished their novel. Other people’s successes are inspiration to me.”

Malena, a registered nurse who belongs to the Medical Reserve Corps of Sonoma County, has two teenaged sons, one of whom – when he was 13 years old – helped SinC Norcal set up Mail Chimp and Survey Monkey, both of which Malena uses as our Membership Chair and the executive committee member who runs our annual elections. Her husband, Omar, is also a writer. Malena is also the treasurer of the Redwood Writers Association. “The last member of the family is Polly. She is my beautiful Russian Blue cat with no tail. I will admit that I’ve bought a couple of cozy mysteries solely because there was a picture of a cat on the cover.”

So, as Membership Chair, is there something she’d like to say to the members? “Yes! Answer my emails at the start of the year, please. Renew early so I don’t have to keep sending out more emails. We have about 135 members and probably a third need reminders.”

Hear that, fellow Sisters and Misterys? If you’ve been meaning to renew but haven’t quite gotten to it, isn’t today the day?

Malena Eljumaily was profiled by Susan Shea, Immediate Past President of Sisters in Crime Norcal.



## Member News



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### *New Releases*

*A Short Time to Die* by Susan Alice Bickford, debut novel, January 31 by Kensington Books

*Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery* by Judith Newton, book #1 in the Food for Thought/Emily Addams Mysteries series, April 18 by She Writes Press

*Dying for a Diamond* by Cindy Sample, book #6 in the Laurel McKay Mysteries, February 1

*The Elusive Elixir* by Gigi Pandian, latest in the Lefty Award-winning Accidental Alchemist mystery series, January 8 by Midnight Ink

*The Red Queen Rules* by Bourne Morris, book #3 in the Red Solaris mysteries, December 2016 by Henery Press

*The Proud Sinner* by Priscilla Royal, book #13 in the Medieval Mysteries, February 3 by Poisoned Pen Press.

*Wine of Violence* by Priscilla Royal, special reissue of book #1 in the Medieval Mysteries with a new introduction by Sharon Kay Penman, February 3 by Poisoned Pen Press.

*Farleigh Field* by Rhys Bowen, a standalone WWII thriller, March 1 by Lake Union (Amazon's big fiction arm)

*A Head in Cambodia* by Nancy Tingley, debut novel in the Jenna Murphy Mystery series, in March by Swallow Press/Ohio University Press

*Scheduled to Death* by Mary Feliz, book #2 in the Maggie McDonald Mystery series, January 17 by Kensington Publishing

### *Public Appearances*

February 4, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Judith Newton will appear at the Santa Rosa AAUW Authors Luncheon with two other authors, Legends Restaurant, 3328 Yulupa Road, Santa Rosa

February 9, 7:00 p.m., AAUW Mystery Panel with Susan Bickford, Mary Feliz, Terry Shames and Simon Wood, Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church, 728 W. Fremont Ave., Sunnyvale

February 22, 7:00 p.m., Book Launch Party for Susan Bickford's debut mystery, *A Short Time to Die*, Books, Inc., 301 Castro Street, Mountain View

February 24, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Margaret Lucke will speak on "Whose Head Am I In Anyway? Mastering the Fine Art of Point of View?" at the Fremont Writers club, DeVry University, 6600 Dumbarton Circle, Fremont

April 20, 7:00 p.m., Book Launch Party for J.L. (Judith) Newton's book, *Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery*, Books, Inc., 1491 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley

## Member News, continued



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### *New Contracts*

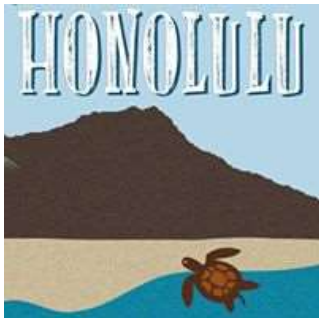
Mary Feliz has signed a contract with Kensington Publishing for books 4, 5, and 6 in the Maggie McDonald Mystery series.

### *Awards*

*Expert Trouble* by JoAnn Smith Ainsworth, Book 1 in the Operational Delphi paranormal suspense series, achieved runner-up status in the 2016 Shelf Unbound Best Indie Book Competition. Book 2 in the series, *Expect Deception*, won a Finalist position in the 2016 Best Book Awards, "Fiction: Mystery/Suspense" category.

*Michelangelo's Ghost* by Gigi Pandian, published in October 2016 by Henry Press, was named a "Best of 2016" mystery by *Suspense Magazine*.

Congratulations to our members who are nominated for Lefty Awards at this year's **Left Coast Crime** in Honolulu, March 16-19:



Heather Haven, *The CEO Came DOA*  
Rhys Bowen, *Crowned and Dangerous*  
Laurie R. King, *The Murder of Mary Russell*  
Catriona McPherson, *The Reek of Red Herrings*  
Ann Parker, *What Gold Buys*  
Marla Cooper, *Terror in Taffeta*  
Gigi Pandian, *Michelangelo's Ghost*  
Terry Shames, *The Necessary Murder of Nonie Blake*

LCC 2017:  
*Honolulu Havoc*

### *Miscellaneous*

Margaret Lucke will be teaching a 10-week class on mystery writing (which includes all genres of crime writing) for U.C. Berkeley Extension on Wednesday nights from February 8 through April 19 (no class on March 15 because of Left Coast Crime). For details and to register, go to <http://extension.berkeley.edu/> and enter Mystery Writing in the search box.

## Question of the Quarter



**Who should play the protagonist of one (or more) of your books or stories in a TV or film adaptation and why?**

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That depends on who you listen to. If you listen to me, Dr. Dot Meyerhoff's creator, I will tell you she's short, Jewish, in her early fifties, with gray hair, glasses, incipient wrinkles, and abundant cellulite. Parts of her body have fallen victim to gravity. Think a young Judi Dench. If you listen to the TV folks who occasionally perk up like prairie dogs on the lookout for a new series, think Angelina Jolie, Robin Wright, and Cameron Diaz. TV folks it seems are terrified by age and cellulite and limited in their imagination to tall, leggy blondes of the non-Jewish persuasion. I told my publisher I'm not budging. **Ellen Kirschman**

OK, so for my comedy mystery series, eight *Getting Old Can Kill You* novels, my actress for my protagonist would have to be Anne Bancroft. She was a wonderful actress, who could play any role brilliantly. She would be my Gladdy Gold – funny, yet kind and smart. **Rita Lakin**

The heroine of my debut novel, *Arsenic with Austen*, is a gracious, intelligent widow in her early 50's who stumbles into detecting quite inadvertently. I'd love to see her played by Meryl Streep. Meryl, of course, can play anyone, but I think Emily has a presence similar to Meryl's own personality, so it would be a particularly good fit. She would have to wear an auburn wig, though, because Emily's red hair is an intrinsic element of her being. **Katherine Bolger Hyde**

I have two people I'd like in my TV or movie adaptation and, of course, they are both English actors. The first is Olivia Colman as Mrs. Jeffries – she is young for the part, but she has exactly the right persona. To play the part of Inspector Witherspoon I'd cast my vote for Tim Roth, another fabulous English actor. **Cheryl Arguile (Emily Brightwell)**

My protagonist, Meredith "Red" Solaris, is a journalism professor in a northern Nevada university. Because of her thick red hair, she was nicknamed the Red Queen by one of her colleagues when she rose to the leadership of her school. In three mystery novels, Red has been challenged with serious violence on her campus. She is brave and bold but also vulnerable. That's why I think Debra Messing would be a good choice to play Red in a movie. I loved her in "Will and Grace" and again in "Smash."  
**Bourne Morris**

In *A Short Time to Die*: For Marly Shaw: Lauren Ambrose. Marly considers herself to be an ugly duckling compared to her mother and sister. She hides her deep empathetic feelings as she struggles to survive her terrible family. Lauren has a wonderful, unconventional beauty. She can appear quite plain and has a very complex range of facial expressions. For Elaine Fardig: Emma Stone. Elaine has





## Question of the Quarter, continued

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classic, delicate face that hides a steely determination and driving personality. Emma (with mousey brown hair) captures the icy calm in the face of adversity, concealing an ability to embrace moral ambiguity. ***Susan Bickford***

For Jess Randolph, the artist and private investigator who stars in *A Relative Stranger* and *Snow Angel*, I've always thought I'd like to see her played by an age-adjusted blend of Susan Sarandon and Jodie Foster. Of course, the age-adjusting requirement gets more intense each year. As to who should play Claire Scanlan of *House of Whispers*, I'll have to give that some thought. Another character in the book compares her to Anne Hathaway, but I don't really see Anne Hathaway in the role. ***Margaret Lucke***

Michelle Monaghan! She's talented, is about the right age and height, and has the coloring to play Carol Sabala. She's also capable of channeling Carol's mix of vulnerability and spunk. ***Vinnie Hansen***

Here's my answer: I don't know! I have had some lively discussions with people offering suggestions of everybody from Sam Elliott (I could only wish) to James Garner (who is, unfortunately, no longer in his earthly body). I kind of like the idea of Sam Shepard ten years ago or Chris Cooper (although his eyes are a little squinty). Unhappily, this is not a subject that seems to need serious consideration. I'll let you know when it does! ***Terry Shames***

I've long dreamed of Sandra Bullock playing Dani O'Rourke in my first series – brainy, vulnerable, funny – and I still do. She may have aged on the calendar, but since she looks 20 years younger than her age, it makes no difference! For Katherine, the 55-year-old, slightly scattered, slightly eccentric artist trying to carve out a new life in rural France in my new series, Emma Thompson, please! I hope the universe is listening. ***Susan Shea***

My sleuth is Emily Addams, foodie professor of women's studies at Arbor State. She should be played by Amy Adams, who is cast as both hopeful and strong characters. Like Emily, Amy has large blue eyes and her hair, while too glamorous, could be styled to hang straight to the middle of her neck – just like Emily's, which had "pretended to obey the curling iron at home, then slyly unfurled itself as soon as she stepped outside." ***Judith Newton***

I'd cast Jessica Chastain to play Claire Marshall, the heroine of my mystery trilogy – *A Perfect Victim*; *Secrets, Lies & Homicide*; and *A House of Her Own*. Ms. Chastain is a fine actress and even a redhead like Claire, but the real reason is that in real life, she appears to be both tough and caring, a survivor. Perfect. ***Patricia Dusenbury***

If you have any suggestions for future **Questions of the Quarter**, please send them to  
[mbunting@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mbunting@sbcglobal.net)

## **It's All about YOU!**

Make the most of your membership. Your Executive Committee members are working hard to present the most interesting, educational, useful and entertaining programs to our members. We invite your participation regarding ideas for speakers, events, and potential meeting locations, as well as articles for *The Stiletta*, our quarterly newsletter.

Please contact **Heidi Noroozy**, Event Coordinator ([heidinoroozy@gmail.com](mailto:heidinoroozy@gmail.com)), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter Editor ([mbunting@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mbunting@sbcglobal.net)), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions

### **SinC Norcal Executive Committee**

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Member at Large: Mysti Berry [mysti.berry@mac.com](mailto:mysti.berry@mac.com)

**Don't forget to renew your membership for 2017!**

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**IN CRIME**  
Northern California Chapter

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