

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 4

November 2017

Dear Sisters and Misters,

It's hard to believe that this is the last regular letter I will send to you as president of Norcal SinC. It has been a wonderful, productive two years. I'm very proud of our efforts and so grateful for the chance to have served as president. I wish I could take credit for the accomplishments, but we have what may be the most amazing Executive Committee in the whole Sisters in Crime community – and they are the ones to thank.

In November we will be voting for the new slate of officers, so stay tuned for that.

At Bouchercon last week in Toronto I attended the chapter presidents' meeting. As you know, the mission of Sisters in Crime is to support women in the crime writing field. At the presidents' meeting there were some amazing ideas floated for increasing authors' exposure in their communities. As an example, one idea was to have a one-day, informal work-in-progress workshop for aspiring writers. I will be presenting this and other ideas at the next Executive Committee meeting to see which of them seem most likely to help our author members. After that, we will present those to you. I'm truly invigorated by the ideas.

At the meeting the new national president, Kendel Lynn, articulated something that I have not heard said quite so clearly. Sometimes members wonder why they should belong to both national and their local chapters. Kendel pointed out that there is strength in numbers. The more members we have as a national group, the more influence we have in getting our books noticed. As we all know, a large group of women is a



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President's Message, continued

formidable force. So if you have not joined national, please join your sisters in becoming part of that force.

SURPRISE!!! Our next meeting will be the Author Showcase at Books, Inc. on Chestnut Street in San Francisco. Books, Inc. has always been welcoming to us, so be prepared to do some early holiday shopping there to support them and our authors. But that isn't the surprise! A question that someone asked me led me to wonder when our chapter started, and it turns out from long-time member Joan Imbeau that her notes indicate the chapter started in 1992. That means this is our 25th anniversary year! So I think we should celebrate at the Showcase on November 4. We'll have cake and an additional raffle item! Please come to share the fun.

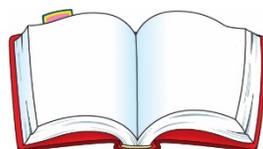
Our annual holiday party, held in conjunction with Mystery Writers of America, will be at another highly supportive bookstore, Borderlands, in San Francisco on December 9 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. As a special event, anyone who buys a book at the party will be entered into a drawing to win a \$100 gift certificate.

And finally, we have something particularly exciting to announce: Norcal Sisters in Crime is going to produce our first short story anthology. Details will be announced at the November 4 showcase meeting. Flyers about submission rules will be handed out and also available on the website. Executive Committee member Margaret (Peggy) Lucke has done an amazing job of researching the project and organizing the volunteers.

So here's to another great year. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for letting me serve and for being such wonderful, supportive members of our chapter.

See you on November 4!

Sincerely,
Terry Shames
President, Norcal Sisters in Crime



Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC Norcal Events

Saturday, November 4, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Author Showcase

*Books, Inc., 2251 Chestnut Street, San Francisco
(city parking around the corner on Pierce Street)*

Norcal members who have had a book published in the last six months will read excerpts, and there will be a prize drawing for – what else? – the authors' new books! Authors currently scheduled to participate include:

Bette and J.J. Lamb	<i>Bone Slice</i>
Vinnie Hansen	<i>Lostart Street</i>
Dana Fredsti	<i>Spawn of Lilith</i>
Margaret Lucke	<i>Snow Angel</i>
C.J. Verburg	<i>Another Number for the Road: A Cory Goodwin Mystery</i>
Susan C. Shea	<i>Love and Death in Burgundy</i>

We will also be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Sisters in Crime Norcal!

Saturday, December 9, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Holiday Party with Mystery Writers of America NorCal

Borderlands Books, 866 Valencia Street San Francisco



Once again this year, we will get together with our local MWA compatriots for a holiday-themed social event, featuring some spectacular food and, of course, fabulous company. If you purchase a book at Borderlands, you may win a \$100 gift certificate! Please be sure to join us.



No Meeting in January 2018

As always, we will take a break in January and will resume our monthly meetings in February with our annual Meet and Greet. Check the website for location.

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 . . .

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



August Meeting

We spent a couple of fun and informative hours exploring legendary crime author Dashiell Hammett's haunts in San Francisco, led by author, editor, and 40-year tour veteran Don Herron.



September Meeting

We could have listened to Heather Haven and Cindy Sample talk about their adventures in self-publishing for hours. They were informative and thorough, with a healthy dose of good humor. Mariella Krause (aka Marla Cooper) was the perfect moderator.



October Meeting

Norcal Mister in Crime Simon Wood addressed us about the importance of knowing and understanding our industry so that we can ensure we are seen as professionals as we develop relationships with publishers, editors, agents, readers, librarians, and each other.



The Long and Short of It by Heather Haven

Sentences. They can be short. They can be long, stretching out into eternity. One of the longest sentences in literature is contained in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* The sentence is composed of 1,288 words. Some people say that James Joyce has the longest sentence with over 13,000 words in *Ulysses*. Others claim he merely left out the punctuation. When you're James Joyce, you can do what you want.

For the rest of us, we often need to pay attention to our sentences. There is a certain tedium for readers when every sentence has a similar structure and length. They can get bored. They can start skipping. They can put the book down. Like forever. Yikes!

To prevent the unspeakable from happening, when I am at the final draft, and lo, those many drafts that came before, I check my sentences, not just for grammar and punctuation but for length. Like the preceding sentence. I mean, really, Heather? That is one long run-on sentence. However, if I really wanted to keep it, I might surround it with shorter, more clipped sentences. To break it up. Or get away with it. Take your pick.

As writers, we like our words. Stringing a long line of gorgeous, evocative words together is yummier to us than any dessert in the world. Well, almost.

There are no hard and fast rules, but usually lush, flowing sentences work well for descriptive or languid passages. Brief, shorter sentences work well for high-tension scenes. They also serve to break up the monotony. They often get the job done.

"For sale. Baby shoes. Never used."

Ernest Hemingway? Maybe, maybe not. But there was a writer who knew the long and short of it.

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. Heather is delighted and relieved to say her twelfth book, *The Culinary Art of Murder*, Book Six of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, debuts November 27. She hopes her readers will find it delicious.. [Heather Haven Stories - Mysteries with Wit](#)

Reading a Series

by Camille Minichino



Not long ago there was a proposal suggesting that publishers number books in a series. I mean really number them, placing big numerals on the spines. It would make it easier, goes the argument, to know in which order to read the books.

Can you imagine? What if I'm tempted to pick a book off a shelf at my local indie bookstore, but it has a big red **3** on its spine? Maybe I like the title, or the author, or even the cover and flap copy, but there's that big red **3**, glaring at me, asking if I've read **1** and **2**. But my small indie doesn't have **1** and **2**. Never mind that, without those numbers, I might not even know about a **1** and **2**.

I understand that there are readers who must read a series in order. If number **1** is out of print, for example, well, too bad, ditch that series. Here's what I have to say to order-fans.

Recently I had lunch with a writer friend I met about a year ago. She's well into middle age, with two grown children who live nearby. One of the kids is a physician who – never mind. Here's my point.

I learned this not by being present at my friend's birth, but by back story she reveals little by little, or a lot by a lot, depending on the circumstances. We bond over things we have in common now.

I don't feel deprived that we didn't meet right out of the womb. It's not important that I wasn't around when she got engaged or married or started wearing contacts. I can catch up.

I feel the same way about a series protagonist. I don't have to start with "A is for" – in other words.

I can feel a shiver through the computer. What? S-s-s-start reading a series in the middle?

But it's no different from meeting a friend in the middle of her life. You can always go back and find out what she's been doing before she met you. You can "track her growth" through stories, even when they're told out of order.

In fact, there are many reasons to go for the **last book** of a series first:

Reading a Series, continued

1. Any author worth reading gets better with each book. It stands to reason that the latest book will be the best. It's better to get hooked on the protagonist through the best book, and then go back to earlier ones. You're more likely to forgive a few flaws in the early books if you're already committed to the characters.
2. It's better for the author! The publishing industry is all about "what have you done for me today?" Sales of that new book are what count.
3. I like to stay current. I want to read what everyone is talking about. Fellow writers, readers, reviewers will be discussing the newest book, not book 1.
4. Sometimes early books go out of print. Why deprive myself of a good book just because the series may not be complete on my shelves?
5. I'm a fan of the Fibonacci series. You can start anywhere in the series and generate other numbers in either direction.

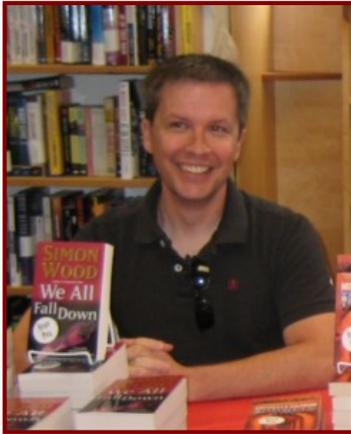
(Fibonacci Refresher: Starting with 0 and 1, each new number in the series is simply the sum of the two before it: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144 . . .)

If it's good enough for Fibonacci . . .

Camille Minichino has a Ph.D. in physics from Fordham University and teaches science at Golden Gate University and writing throughout the Bay Area. She has published more than 20 novels, as well as many short stories and nonfiction articles. Under her own name, she has published the Periodic Table Mysteries featuring retired physicist Gloria Lamerino, as well as the standalone, *Killer in the Cloister*, featuring Sister Francesca, and the nonfiction book, *How to Live with an Engineer*. As Margaret Grace, she writes the Miniature Mysteries, featuring Geraldine Porter and her 11-year-old granddaughter, Maddie. As Ada Madison, she has published the Professor Sophie Knowles Mysteries. And as Jean Flowers, she has launched the new Postmistress Mysteries, with the third in the series released in July 2017. Camille is a Past President of SinC Norcal. Visit <http://www.minichino.com/>

Bulletproof

by Simon Wood



I'm not bulletproof. I hope to be one day, but I'm not. I wound easily.

No, I'm not talking about being bulletproof in a percussion weapon way (so please don't try shooting me), but in a literary way.

The topic of author "bulletproofness" came up in conversation with a couple of writing chums—one in person and one online. The discussion was around how some authors can have relatively poor reader reviews and still ship a boatload of books while writers with excellent reader feedback don't get half the sales.

My answer was that successful writers are bulletproof. They possess a large and loyal enough readership to survive subpar reviews and still sell books. There are a few reasons why bestselling authors can sometimes have lower ratings but still have a bestselling book.

The book is going to be read by a whole range of readers, and no doubt people reading out of genre are going to rate it lower because it was never going to be their thing anyway. Name recognition comes into play, too. People are more likely to pick up a book by a name they know than by one they don't. There's the numbers factor, too. A book by a bestselling author is going to get more shelf space and, therefore, is more likely to get picked up than one that doesn't. It's simple math, but the simplest math applies to the issue of a loyal and supportive readership. It is worth its weight in gold. Fans will forgive a book they don't like and still buy the next one.



That might seem weird, but it's not. We do it all the time. Nobody stops listening to their favorite band because they don't like their current single. Nobody stops supporting their favorite sports team just because they lose one game. It's the same with loyal readers—they will forgive a book they don't like and keep reading. That's not to say you can get away with that in the long term. No writer can continue to turn out duds and still keep their loyalest of readers. Even bulletproof glass can only take so many shots.

One of the writers suggested I was "set" in that I had attained bulletproof status. I had to disagree with that. I have been fortunate over the last few years. I have sold significantly more books than ever before. I have a "following," but it's far from significant enough to help me weather a review drubbing. I know this from harsh experience. One of my books went on a bad run of reviews, and it hurt my sales to the extent that it took a year to recover. Oddly, that book has

Bulletproof, continued

recovered its review rating and now remains one of my better selling books. How I wish I had been bulletproof during that period.

But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter whether I'm bulletproof or not. I owe it to the book-buying public to write the best book I can, and I hope it will be embraced because of it. Now that's the true definition of bulletproof.

Simon Wood is a California transplant from England. He's a former competitive race car driver, a licensed pilot, an endurance cyclist, an animal rescuer and an occasional PI. He shares his world with his American wife, Julie. Their lives are dominated by five cats. He's the Anthony Award winner of more than a dozen books. His most recent thriller is *Deceptive Practices*. Curious people can learn more at <http://www.simonwood.net>.



Mini Book Review

by Ana Manwaring



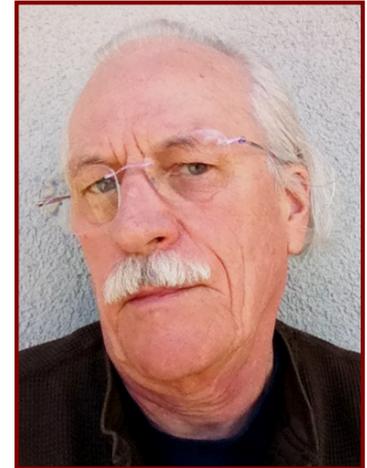
Ana Manwaring

What to read during a firestorm? Ana Brazil's first novel, *Fanny Newcomb and the Irish Channel Ripper!* Fanny Newcomb kept me engaged with her dogged and reckless determination to find the killer who murdered her star pupil. Instead of worrying about the Nuns fire, I explored the brothels, saloons, cemeteries and legal system of 1889 New Orleans. A delightful new sleuth and a "ripping" good story that will keep you turning pages.

Read my full review on my just-launched website:
<https://www.anamanwaring.com>, under Blogs

QR Codes for Your Books and Promotional Material

by Jim Guigli



At a conference I attended this summer, a publisher made a great suggestion: put a QR code that leads to your website on your book covers. Someone picking up your book can see your website instantly appear on his or her smart phone screen by scanning the code with a QR code reading app. This QR code should also be on your bookmarks and postcards, and it can be put on T-shirts, baseball caps – whatever you might want.



QR code that leads to www.jimguigli.com

QR codes are certainly not new. I had a QR code reading app on my first smart phone, an iPhone 4. But it didn't work half the time. I stopped trying to make it work and forgot about it. But something changed, and now I have a QR code reading app that works wonderfully. I just open the app and hold my phone near the code – on paper or a computer screen – and buzz, rattle, in two seconds it's there. It couldn't be simpler. The app I use is *Scan - QR Code and Bar Code Reader* by QR Code City. I did pay \$1.99 for it, because my experience with "free" apps is not great. (It is iPhone, not Android.) The App Store link is:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/scan-qr-code-and-barcode-reader/id411206394?mt=8>

I'll bet, if you spend the time, you can find a great QR-code-reading app – maybe free – for whatever phone you use.

Now, how do I make a QR code for my website? It's easy. You use a QR-code generator. Try:

<https://www.the-qr-code-generator.com/>

QR Codes, continued

Using this free website I made this code for the SinC Norcal website, www.sincnorcal.org.

There are other QR code generators, too, some also free.

Good QR coding to you!



Jim Guigli began writing in his sixties after retirement, entering the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest in 2005. His first published fiction longer than one sentence is *Bad News for a Ghost*, now available exclusively on Kindle. <http://www.jimguigli.com/>

Be on the Lookout . . .



. . . for more details about Sisters in Crime Norcal's first anthology!

That's right, SinC Norcal is about to undertake a very exciting project, the publication of an anthology of short stories by our members. Come to the Author Showcase on November 4 for the official announcement about *Fault Lines: Stories by Northern California Crime Writers*.

All chapter members are eligible to submit up to two original works of crime or mystery fiction that reflects the theme in some way, maximum length 5,000 words. Submissions will open on January 15, 2018 and close on April 1, 2018.

If you are interested in joining the story selection team or helping out in general, please get in touch with Peggy Lucke at Margaret@margaretlucke.com.

A flyer with full details will be available at the November 4 meeting and also at <http://www.sincnorcal.org/wp/>.

CSI: Monterey

by Elin Barnes



A couple of years ago I visited Monterey for my very first Left Coast Crime. At that time, I had no idea I would go back for a very different conference in 2017. This year I had the privilege of attending the 101st Annual Training Seminar of the California State Division International Association for Identification—basically, a CSI conference where everyone was either law enforcement or a criminal scientist, except me.

I only knew one person when I showed up at the registration table, but I immediately felt welcome. I got my bag of goodies and my badge, purchased some cool swag including two books, and headed out into the wild to learn stuff.

I've been to enough work and writing conferences to know that people love to talk about their passions. This was no different; however, their "shop talk" was so fascinating that I wish I had transcribed every exchange. The interactions, I soon found out, happened with pretty much everyone I met. It was amazing. There was always a fascinating case on which they had discovered some interesting evidence that helped to convict, or clear, a suspect, or a famous case in which they played an integral part (such as the O.J. Simpson investigation). Everyone was incredibly generous with their stories and their time, inside and outside the classroom.

Here are some of the things I learned that may help with our mystery writing.

15 things to know about Crime Scene Investigations:

1. Don't forget trace evidence. DNA is not the be-all and end-all. Types of trace evidence include: fibers, hair, paint, glass, soil and botanicals, and gunshot residue (GSR).
2. Use the same numbering system when setting up the cones and evidence markers, and use the numbers sequentially (some people don't, creating innumerable problems later on).
3. The same team needs to work the whole crime scene, no matter how long it takes (sometimes multiple days).
4. Much of physical evidence is about what you see and feel is out of place.
5. Many people have been exonerated in cases of bite-mark identification.
6. About 75-80% of carbon monoxide deaths happen to people far away from the fire.
7. Always take fingerprints last.

CSI: Monterey, continued

8. Prints are there before you are born and well after you are dead. Even after a horrible fire, prints can be obtained.
9. Collecting trace evidence is very cost effective, and the evidence lasts a long time. Collect evidence from the scene, the suspect, the victim, and anything that doesn't seem to belong.
10. Sticky notes are perfect for collecting hairs and small particles. Collect it, place it on the sticky note, fold it, and bag it.
11. Vacuums are most effective for larger items or retrieving stuff from the bed of a pickup truck.
12. Hair examination questions:
 - a. Is it human?
 - b. From what part of the body?
 - c. Race?
 - d. Comparison to known sources?
 - e. Anything unusual about the hair (e.g., dyed)?
 - f. DNA?
 - g. Actually growing (check the root)?
13. Any area of a gun with openings or creases can contain GSR. You can't tell for sure if someone was the shooter or was just close to the gun that was fired.
14. There's only a 6- to 8-hour window to collect GSR before the particles are gone. A simple hand washing will remove the evidence.
15. Analysis of GSR can take from a day to over a week, depending on the particles found.

6 things to know about suicides and homicides:

1. Suicide notes are found in only 25% of cases (they may exist, but they may not be found).
2. About 65% of all suicides have a history of a known prior attempt.
3. Suicidal people normally set a date that means something to them.
4. It is often assumed that elderly victims died of natural causes.

CSI: Monterey, continued

5. Suicides are often embarrassing for family members, who tend to remove notes or weapons.
6. Is the suicide note fake? Check fingerprints and writing analysis.

3 things to know about staging crimes:

1. Most common ways people stage homicide crime scenes:
 - a. Make it appear to be an accident or a suicide.
 - b. Make the crime look like a sex-related homicide.
 - c. Set a fire to destroy evidence.
2. Crime scenes may be staged for many reasons:
 - a. Ad hoc staging, not premeditated, due to panic after the crime
 - b. To depersonalize the victim, or to pose the victim
 - c. Alteration by people other than the perpetrator (e.g., a family member) to cover a naked body, to remove the murder weapon, etc.
3. Red flag indicators of staging:
 - a. Items are removed or damaged to make it look like a burglary.
 - b. Fatal assault on the victim while another person, present at the time of the crime, seems to be relatively unharmed
 - c. Offender arranges for a third party to discover the body.
 - d. Forensic findings are inconsistent with what the witness says happened: blood stain patterns, damage to property or things, etc.
 - e. Exaggeration of the crime scene

Final interesting facts:

1. About 77% of wrongful convictions have witness misidentification as a factor.
2. Smell is a stronger sense than eyesight.
3. The DEA comes up with standards for testing new drugs, then shares them with other agencies. New drugs appear frequently.

CSI: Monterey, continued

4. Based on Brady v. Maryland, California state law requires the prosecution to disclose any exculpatory evidence to the defense. If they don't, they can go to prison for serious Brady violations.
5. An order of exhumation can take up to a year.
6. Blisters can form after death in a body burnt by fire.
7. The best way to get a body out of a hotel is to stuff it into luggage because nobody is likely to notice.
8. Collect more samples than you think you need. You don't need to run them all, but if you didn't collect it, you can't run it later.
9. About 50% saturation of carbon monoxide is lethal.

In addition to learning all of the facts above at lectures, I heard many fascinating stories at the hospitality suite after the classes. Being immersed for a week with so many people who love what they do was humbling and made me feel honored to spend those few days with them. They make such an effort to speak for the dead, to make sure victims get a say, even after they've passed, and to make sure that, to the best of their ability, justice is served.

Elin Barnes, a native Spaniard, moved to America to become a pilot. When her eyesight prevented her from flying passenger aircrafts, she obtained a B.A. in Philosophy, worked for a criminal appeals lawyer, and earned an M.A. in International Commerce. Finally settling in Silicon Valley, she's worked for companies such as AT&T, T-Mobile, Google, Microsoft, TiVo, Samsung, and Apple. Her love for technology and the great weather keep her in the Bay Area with her dog, Shelby. <http://elinbarnes.com/>

Member Profile: Robin Stuart

Third in a series to introduce our members to each other



Meet Robin Stuart, a San Francisco-based Guppy with an agent hard at work selling her first cyber crime novel while she's hard at work writing two more. It's clear that her own background in cyber crime has inspired her novels.

Stiletta: First of all, what exactly is "cyber crime"?

Robin Stuart: It's a nomenclature for any crime targeting or involving electronics and computer networks. Given our reliance on digitizing just about every aspect of our lives, I suspect in the next few years it'll just be called "crime." The real title for my line of work is Information Security Threat Research. But that doesn't sound nearly as sexy and I end up having to describe what it means. So I just say "cyber crime investigator."

Stiletta: Tell us about your background in cyber crime and how you got into that field.

RS: I've been involved in digital investigations for nearly 20 years. I was a paralegal at a career crossroads when the tech boom was underway in the late 90's, and I was intrigued but completely clueless about computers. Meanwhile, the lawyers I worked with were encouraging me to go to law school. Undecided, I took to hanging out with our IT guys as they were improving the firm's network "to keep it safe from hackers." I got curious about what was and wasn't possible.

One day I noticed a photo of the managing partner's family on his desk and got his daughter's name from his admin. I logged into his email and used his daughter's name as the password. It worked. I logged back out and told the IT guys, who were stunned. They instructed everyone to set new passwords to include both letters and numbers. I tried logging into the managing partner's email again, this time using his daughter's name and birthday. It worked.

One of the IT guys, Mike, grabbed a desktop computer that he was supposed to fix and instructed me to look inside. He said, "Notice how everything is connected and when you think you've got a good feel for it, let me know." I stared inside the box for a few minutes, reached in and followed cables from one place to the other. Mike took the entire computer apart and put all the pieces into the computer case. He carried it out to my car and said, "Bring it back when it works."

That night, I spread all the pieces out on the floor of my home office, learned very quickly about static electricity grounding (got a little shock), and put it all back together. The next day, to Mike's surprise, it started up. Mike told me I was in the wrong line of work.

Robin Stuart Profile, continued

About this time, I read a newspaper profile of one of the “big four” accounting firms’ new digital forensics practice, which sounded like a fun job to me. Mike helped me find some UC Berkeley Extension classes to learn the basics of Microsoft networks.

I had no experience in the field, but I met a headhunter who was bowled over by my enthusiasm and set up an interview for me with a Fortune 100 company. During the interview, the hiring manager said she was impressed that I didn’t try to BS my way through some of her questions, and that I had questions for her. The job offer was on my voicemail by the time I got home.

Stiletta: You consult on all things cyber crime for Fortune 100 companies, TV shows and media outlets. Tell us about that.

RS: The consulting I do is voluntary, not paid. TV consulting came about because I have a couple of close friends in Hollywood, one of whom is a showrunner (an exec producer who’s the top of the food chain). She picks my brain from time to time about different scenarios and real world events. Some of the shows were “Rizzoli and Isles” (I’m a huge fan of the books, too), “Boss” (Starz show with Kelsey Grammer), and “Commander in Chief” (with Geena Davis). My other friend in SoCal has introduced me to a few celebrities who need help or advice. They come my way because of my reputation for discretion so that’s all I’m going to say about that! 😊

Stiletta: You were a contributor to The Tech Museum of Innovation’s (Mountain View CA) acclaimed Cyber Detectives Interactive Installation.

RS: The curator and her team had limited knowledge on the subject so they were looking for help with content and conceptual design. My boss at the time, who sat on their board, recommended me because of my ability to make complex concepts easy to understand. I spent a few afternoons with the Tech Museum team, brainstorming ways to make learning about cyber-y topics such as cryptography and phishing an interactive learning experience suitable for kids. We then worked together on theming escape rooms and devising appropriate clues. First Lady Michelle Obama presented The Tech with the National Medal for Museum and Library Service a couple of weeks before the exhibit opened to the public and raved about it after getting a sneak preview. After the exhibit opened, it was such a hit that the museum decided to make it permanent. Last I heard, there was talk of taking the show on the road as a loaner exhibit to East Coast Museums in 2020.

Stiletta: How were you selected to be a panelist at the upcoming New England Crime Bake?

Robin Stuart Profile, continued

RS: I do a lot of volunteering to help out in behind-the-scenes operations or research in the cyber investigations world. That type of networking went a long way in establishing myself in the tech world. I'm recreating that success with the crime fiction community. I started off attending conferences and workshops as an aspiring writer, then volunteered as a timekeeper at one event. I've been looking for opportunities to contribute ever since, especially as the world has gotten more familiar with technology and how it can be misused with disastrous consequences. This year I participated on a "Cyber Crime 101" panel at the Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference in Corte Madera, I'm a panelist at a Norcal MWA's Mystery Week event, and joined the "Ask the Experts" open session at the New England Crime Bake. Basically, I'm a believer in "sharing is caring" so I'm always game to help out my fellow writers with insights into all things technical.

Stiletta: You have been a contributor to the *Handbook for Information Security* so we know you can write. What made you decide to start writing crime fiction?

RS: I've been a lifelong crime fiction fan. I started with the Hardy Boys series after my parents picked them up at a library book sale. I read all of Ian Fleming's James Bond books and a fair amount of Agatha Christie's Poirot mysteries by the time I was 11. After that I moved on to Stephen King and Dean Koontz. I wrote my first full-length crime novel when I was in my early 20s and got the attention of a fledgling agent. Nothing ever came of that, but it was a great learning experience about both writing and the commercial market. The book is still one of my favorites and easily adaptable to include cyber themes. I'll dust it off and update it one of these days.

Stiletta: Tell us about your efforts to sell your first cyber crime novel.

RS: My first cyber crime novel is the result of an online boot camp with an agent. My work-in-progress at the time had zero to do with cyber crime and she, along with a mentor I met at a conference, convinced me to write what I know. The result is a political cyber thriller. I attended Algonkian's New York Pitch with the completed novel in hand and got requests from every agent and editor, which was flabbergasting and awesome. That's where I cemented my relationship with my agent, Paula Munier. She's shopping that novel now. The protagonist is a bit of an antihero so it's not the easiest sell for a debut.

Stiletta: You are working on a couple more cyber crime novels – are they part of a series?

Robin Stuart Profile, continued

RS: I'm leaving the series question to my agent and eventual publisher to decide. The other two novels are a YA domestic thriller and an adult domestic, both with liberal doses of the evil technology can do in the wrong hands. They're standalones now but I'm all too happy to adapt any or all of them to fit one or more series.

Stiletta: Besides SinC Norcal, are you in any other writer organizations?

RS: I'm also a member of Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers. I highly recommend all writers join their genre organizations for networking and resources. The mystery/thriller community is so generous and welcoming, It's fun for fans and crucial for authors. Learning the craft is essential, as is understanding the business side. It's a journey with highs and lows. The camaraderie helps me get through the lows and enjoy the highs. And I like being right there to help others with both.

Stiletta: Do you have any writing/publishing mentors or coaches. Any well-known authors who have influenced your writing?

RS: I have great mentors. Michael Neff, who heads up Algonkian, took me under his wing early on and made me a better writer. Paula, of course, is a fantastic coach, mentor, cheerleader and friend. As far as influential authors, there are a ton. Joe Finder, J.T. Ellison, Hallie Ephron and Hank Phillippi Ryan are authors I've been fortunate enough to meet and chat with. Bruce Coffin is a friend from whom I've learned a lot. And, of course, all my fellow Miss Demeanors – they're my posse. I learn from them every day and they're hilarious: D.A. Bartley, Susan Breen, C. Michele Dorsey, Alexia Gordeon, Tracee de Hahn and Cate Holahan.

Stiletta: Is there anything else you would like fellow SinC members to know about you?

RS: If you see me at a conference, an event or (fingers crossed) a book signing, please feel free to ask me anything. J.T. Ellison told me I scared the hell out of her after the MWC panel, which I took as a high compliment, but I promise I'm not a scary person. I just know scary things.

Robin Stuart was profiled by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime Norcal's newsletter editor.

Why They Die in *Game of Thrones*

Eighteen motives to consider for your next mystery

by Ana Brazil



Devoured by dogs. Burned at the stake. Smooched by poison-painted lips. Ripped to shreds by a direwolf. Immolated by a dragon. Bludgeoned with a hammer.

What a way to go! And these are just some of the gruesome ways that characters die in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (aka *GOT*).

Adapted from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice*, the *GOT* fantasy leads viewers through a brutal battlefield where kings, queens, and royal wannabes fight sword and scythe to ascend to and rule from the Iron Throne.

In the world of *GOT* there are schemes and betrayals and battles and dragons. There are alliances and assassins and wizards and Winter. And there are murders. Lots of them.

Much attention has been given to the *methods* of murdering *GOT*'s characters—*Time* and other publications have even created tables and flow charts detailing how each named character died—but not much analysis has gone into *why* they died.

To find the *why*, I dumped all of the “named character deaths” data into a table, examined what happened before each murder, re-watched a few selected deaths on YouTube, and classified each motive.

So *why* did they die in *GOT*? Because according to the rules of this game, you can kill to:

1. retain your territory and world dominance
2. expand your territory and world dominance
3. remove your direct competitors to any of the thrones
4. defend your family, castle, keep, troops, and city
5. protect your innocents (and your not-so-innocents)
6. intimidate or rally your troops
7. satisfy your sadistic sexual desires
8. prevent someone from physically harming you or your loved ones in the future
9. silence someone from exposing your secrets in the future

Why They Die in *GOT*, continued

10. exact your revenge against someone who hurt you or your family
11. dispense valid justice
12. dispense invalid justice
13. keep order by killing the rule breakers (or even the people who just irritate you)
14. eliminate as many enemy combatants as possible before, during, and after combat
15. please “the Lord of Light” with a sacrificial burnt offering
16. show off your absolute power over life and death
17. deceive someone into thinking that you’re on his/her team
18. stop a loved one’s pain

So if you’re musing about the motives for your next mystery, spend some time considering this list. From the general to the specific, it’s got ideas to keep any cast of characters murderously motivated.

Ana Brazil is the author of the New Orleans historic mystery *Fanny Newcomb and the Irish Channel Ripper* (Sand Hill Press, November 1). She earned her master’s degree in American history from Florida State University and traveled her way through Mississippi as an architectural historian. Ana loves fried mullet, Greek Revival colonnades, and Miss Welty’s garden. She has a weakness for almost all things New Orleans (although she’s not sure how it happened . . . but she favors bluegrass over jazz). The Fanny Newcomb stories celebrate the tenacity, intelligence, and wisdom of the dozens of courageous and outrageous Southern women that Ana is proud to call friends. <http://anabrazil.com/>

Member News



New Releases

Patricia Dusenbury's short story, "Unstrung Quartet," in the anthology *Snowbound: The Best New England Crime Stories 2017*, which will be released in November at New England Crime Bake, sponsored by the New England chapters of SinC and MWA

Saving Grace, a kidnap thriller by Simon Wood, on January 9. On the international front, Simon's latest German book, *Rashe Ist Bitter*, hit bookstores and his previous book, *Was Sie Nicht Tötet*, grabbed a spot on Bild's Bestseller List. Newton Compton has bought the Italian rights to *Paying the Piper* for a hardback release (Simon's second book with them). And Limos has bought the Turkish rights to *The One That Got Away*. Finally, *La Pute* came out in France.

Fanny Newcomb and the Irish Channel Ripper, debut historical mystery by Ana Brazil, on November 8 by Sand Hill Review Press

The Ninja's Illusion by Gigi Pandian, book #5 in the *USA Today* bestselling Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt Mystery Series, on October 3 by Henery Press

Vineyard Prey by Carole Price, book #3 in the Vineyard Mystery Series, on October 21 by Black Opal books

The audio book of *Expect Trouble: An Operation Delphi Novel* by JoAnn Smith Ainsworth on August 17 by Pro Audio Voices

The Culinary Art of Murder by Heather Haven, book #6 of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, on November 27

Snow Angel: A Jess Randolph Mystery by Margaret Lucke, August 29 by Oakledge Press

Public Appearances

On November 1 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., Rhys Bowen, Gigi Pandian, Terry Shames and Susan Shea will be on a mystery panel at San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin St., San Francisco.

On November 2 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., Camille Minichino will join California Writers Club authors in a panel discussion, "So You Want to Write a Book," at the Moraga Library.

Member News, continued

On November 11 from 4:20 to 6:00 p.m., Robin Stuart will appear at the New England Crime Bake's "Ask the Experts" session to answer questions and provide perspective on all things cyber crime. Conference website and schedule: <http://crimebake.org/2017-schedule/>

On November 15 from noon to 4:00 p.m., Susan Bickford and Mary Feliz will be at the Los Altos History Museum as part of the Author Showcase for their Catch the Spirit event.

On November 17 at noon, Diana Chambers and Terry Shames will be at the Mechanics Institute, 57 Post Street, San Francisco, talking about Sisters in Crime.

On November 17 from 10:00 a.m. to noon, Judith Newton and Amy Peele will discuss their books with the AAUW of Contra Costa County at Christ Lutheran Church, 780 Ashbury Avenue, El Cerrito.

On November 19 from 11:00 a.m. to noon, Judith Newton and Kate Jessica Raphael will discuss "Creating the Worlds We Want through Fiction" at the Howard Zinn Book Fair at the Mission Campus of SF City College.

On November 28 at 6:00 p.m., Margaret Lucke, JoAnn Smith Ainsworth and Kate Jessica Raphael will discuss "What Goes into Writing a Mystery" at the Fremont Main Library, 2400 Stevenson Road, Fremont.

Awards

The Ninja's Illusion by Gigi Pandian is a long-list selection for the 2018 ALA Reading List.

Judith Newton's *Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery* was a finalist in Humor in the Book Excellence Awards.

Training Sessions

Next summer (2018) Rhys Bowen will repeat her 10-day writing workshop in Tuscany. It will be called "Novel in a Week" and Rhys will help you jump-start that stalled novel or bring that idea to fruition. Lovely old hotel with pool and grounds in a Tuscan hill town, gourmet meals, and excursions. For info visit www.Minervaeducation.net.

Shelley Adina is adjunct faculty with the low-residency MFA in Writing Popular Fiction at Seton Hall University in Pennsylvania. During the next residency on January 5-10, 2018, she will be teaching "World Building and Research" and "The Business of Writing."

On January 13, 2018, from 10:30 a.m. to noon, Shelley Adina will present "Plotting and Planning a Series" at the San Francisco Area chapter of the Romance Writers of America. The venue is the Berkeley Adult School, 1701 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley and guests are welcome.

Question of the Quarter



What crime fiction book do you wish you had written?

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, really the first successful mystery novel with a woman, Cordelia Grey, private eye. P.D. James was a brilliant writer. **Rita Lakin**

I wish I had written Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island*. Although all the clues were there, I was completely taken in by the fantasy of the main character. Only toward the end did I have this feeling that something was not right. Then he hit me with the true story. It was a master class in plotting and planting clues. **Priscilla Royal**

Mystic River by Dennis Lehane. Everything about this book grabs me—the characters, setting, story, and style. Lehane developed at least a half-dozen characters I truly care about, and the setting is so richly crafted I felt I was there. The story engrossed/moved/intrigued me from start to finish. If I were to teach creative writing, this would be our textbook. **Lynda McDaniel**

I wish I'd written *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) by Patricia Highsmith. Tom Ripley is one of the most complex characters in crime fiction, giving us reasons to understand him, to sympathize with him, to admire him—wanting him to get caught, hoping he goes free—keeping us in suspense throughout the book. He is at times coolly confident, and other times guilt-ridden and obsessive. He's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) stretched into a series. **Camille Minichino**

Wish I'd written Martin Cruz Smith's historical thriller, *Rose*. Beautifully engaging and layered, it features a hero and heroine who are equally vibrant, bruised, and resourceful. *Rose's* final sentence is so satisfying that it makes me want to reread the story immediately. **Ana Brazil**

I wish I had written *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. Nobody could weave characters, suspects, and plots like she could. She is still my hero. **Heather Haven**

I deeply, passionately wish I had written *Persuasion*, but Jane Austen beat me to it by about 200 years. Why? Several perfect character studies, a strong sense of satire, the kind of romance that keeps you on the edge of your seat—will they or won't they?—and a well-described physical setting that plays an important role in the story. Anne Elliott, who has paid a terrible price for giving in to the biases of her family, intrigues me. Captain Wentworth, proud, conflicted, desirous of a wife, must, I feel, be pushed toward our Anne because we know they're meant to be together even if he doesn't. As many times as I have read it or watched the wonderful movie, I can never rest until they do find each other, even though I know the ending hasn't changed in two centuries. Now that's good writing! **Susan Shea**

Question of the Quarter, continued



Any of the crime fiction in the Wyatt series by Australian writer Garry Wisher. Why? Because they are written from the point of view of the criminal, who is definitely a bad guy but who comes across to the reader as sympathetic enough to carry an entire series, and this is hard to do well. **Tish Davidson**

Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel, 1942 by Richard Brautigan. This novel blows up the conventional style of P.I. stories while embracing the classic elements. It totally works. **Jim Guigli**

The novel I wish I'd written is just about anything by Laura Lippman. I'm a huge fan. **Patricia Dusenbury**

I wish I'd written *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson or Kent Krueger's *Ordinary Grace* or Allen Esken's *The Life We Bury*—mysteries wrapped in gorgeous prose. **Vinnie Hansen**

If you have any suggestions for future **Questions of the Quarter**, please send them to mbunting@sbcglobal.net

Memories of Boucheron 2017



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), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter Editor (mbunting@sbcglobal.net), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions.

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