

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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FEBRUARY 2019

Dear Sisters and Misters,

I want to wish you all a very happy and book-filled New Year! Although by the time you receive this, the holiday season may seem long ago.

We are entering 2019 in a spirit of welcoming the new. Your chapter will be making some changes in our means of communication and outreach. Stand by for more details. First, though, I want you to know that our beloved Mariella Krause has found her dream home in Austin, Texas and will be moving on—although she promises to remain a member of NorCal. It is our good fortune that author Susan Bickford has agreed to step into her very large shoes (no offense, Mariella!) as Vice President. Susan is a former tech executive with deep organizational skills and great ideas.

We are also terribly sorry to lose Myra Jolivet, who is juggling increased job responsibilities and family illness. At least, though, she is not leaving the Bay Area, and we hope to see her at many future meetings. Myra got our new Speakers Bureau off to a good start, and we're lucky to find her willing successor in Susan Kuchinskis, an author and journalist with a focus in digital technology. Susan K. will help us get going with Meetup, as part of our efforts to connect with the Bay Area writing community.

I'm super-excited to be spreading the word about a June workshop we are offering FREE to all members. Thanks to the sponsorship of Sisters in Crime National, the uber-talented Jane



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President's Letter, continued

Cleland will be presenting *Mastering Suspense, Structure and Plot*. This three-hour event will take place June 2, 2019 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Unity SF. 2222 Bush Street at Fillmore. Please read more on our website, including pricing details for non-members. For the first time, signups will be conducted via EventBrite—and limited to one hundred participants—beginning mid-February. Keep your eye on your mailbox and/or <http://www.sincnorcal.org/wp/>.

And finally, our chapter's first anthology, *Fault Lines*, will be published this spring—for which we owe a humongous debt to its editor, Margaret (aka Peggy) Lucke, as well as Past President Terry Shames for her vision and unflagging energy in advocating for it.

That's all for now. Back to work.

Sincerely,
Diana Chambers
President, Sisters in Crime, NorCal

P.S. Oh, yeah, lots more fab events you won't want to miss!



Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

Saturday, February 2, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Annual Meet and Greet

Sausalito Public Library, Edgewater Room, 420 Litho Street, Sausalito

Or is it “Greet and Meet”? Either way, come visit with your fellow sisters and misters at our annual February **potluck and book exchange**. What’s new with you? Do tell!

Saturday, March 2, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

On Fire

Burlingame Library, 480 Primrose Rd., Burlingame, a 94010

Ever wonder how the causes of fires are determined? How do investigators know when it’s arson?

Meet Christina Henry, a criminalist with the Santa Clara County Crime Laboratory since 2005. She works in the Chemistry/Trace unit, where she primarily analyzes evidence from fires for ignitable liquids. She also conducts substance analysis, fingerprint processing, and crime scene response.

Ms. Henry is certified as a Fellow in Fire Debris Analysis by the American Board of Criminalistics, a member of the Santa Clara County Fire Investigation Task Force, the CA Association of Criminalists, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and the Organization of Scientific Area Committees on the Fire Debris and Explosives subcommittee. She gives presentations and trainings to a variety of groups.

Bring something for the **potluck and** a book (or more) for our **book exchange**.

Saturday, April 6, 12:30-2:30 p.m.

Crime Time: Select Readings from Sisters in Crime

Books, Inc., 1344 Park St., Alameda

Looking for a new whodunit? Mystery solved! Join us as our chapter members read from their latest works, and we will also highlight the new SinC NorCal and Guppy Anthologies, The fun starts with our **potluck**, mingling and announcements, and our readers take the stage at 1:00. The reading is open to the public, so please invite friends to hear our members.

JoAnn Smith Ainsworth, *Out of the Dark*
Dana Fredsti, *Blood Ink*
Heather Haven, *Marriage Can Be Murder*
Rick Homan, *Dark Picasso*
Katherine Bolger Hyde, *Cyanide with Christie*

Ana Manwaring, *The Hydra Effect*
Maddy McEwan, *Tied Up with Strings*
Alec Peche, *The Girl from Diana Park*
Adam Plantinga, *Police Craft*
Sharon St. George, *Primary Source*
Kate Wyland, *Forearmed*

In Case You Missed It . . .

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

November Meeting

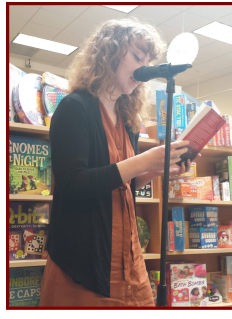
It was our second author showcase of the year, where our Sisters and Misterys read from their latest work for fellow members and guests and gave away copies in our drawing.



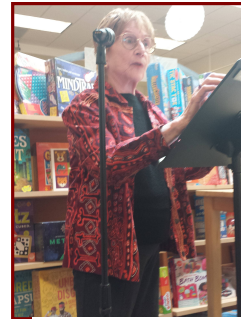
Ana Manwaring



Andrew MacRae



Anna Snoekstra



Bette Lamb



Gigi Pandian



Janice Peacock



Vinnie Hansen



Terry Shames



Rita Lakin



Mariella Krause

December Meeting

Delicious food, good company, and the holiday spirit were in evidence as the NorCal chapters of SinC and MWA joined together in our annual celebration of the season. Thanks to Terry Shames and Heather Haven for supplying the photos.



Introducing Our 2019 Executive Committee Members (and their 2019 writing/reading resolutions)



DIANA CHAMBERS, President: I was born with a book in one hand and a passport in the other. I began my early explorations in the library. From Paris cobblestones and Asian bazaars, I landed in Hollywood, where costume designing led to scriptwriting. Then my characters demanded their own novels. The first was *Stinger*, an espionage thriller set in Pakistan and Afghanistan. My latest, *Conspiracy of Lies*, takes place during the final days of Soviet Russia. I am working on a WWII spy novel set in Asia and Europe. I live in Sonoma County. My New Year's resolution is to clear my calendar as much as possible, stay off social media as much as possible, and really enjoy my work with a clear brain. www.dianarchambers.com.

SUSAN ALICE BICKFORD, Vice President: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and grew up in Central New York. After I discovered computer graphics and animation, my passion for technology pulled me to Silicon Valley, where I became an executive at a leading technology company. I now work as an independent consultant, and continue to be fascinated by all things high tech. I split my time between Silicon Valley and Vermont. *A Short Time to Die* is my first novel. My second novel, *Dead of Winter*, will be released in November 2019. <http://susanalicebickford.com/> My resolution is to keep building momentum writing novels and short stories.



CLAIRE ORTALDA, Secretary: My short fiction and poetry have been published in literary journals, earning me a few prizes along the way, such as the Georgia State University Fiction Prize and national Hackney Award. I've been associate editor and co-editor on several anthologies and was an associate editor for *Narrative Magazine* for five years. My fairly recent segue to mystery writing resulted in my first story in that genre, "Crime on Hold," being published in the Guppy anthology, *Fish Out of Water*. My mystery, *The Psychopath Companion*, was short-listed for the Del Sol Press First Novel Prize 2017 (judge: Hallie Ephron). My story, "Oglethorpe's Camera," was accepted into the Anne Perry-edited Mystery Writers of America anthology, *Odd Partners*, due out April 23, Ballantine Books. www.claireortalda.com My 2019 resolution is to get my rewrite of *Psychopath* and also my rewrite of a middle-grade mystery, *The Wedding Cake School*, completed and out the door, hopefully into the welcoming arms of an agent and/or publisher.



2019 Executive Committee Members, continued



ANA MANWARING, Treasurer: I coach and edit through JAM Manuscript Consulting and teach creative writing at Napa Valley College. I am a former lifestyle columnist, and my book reviews can be found at www.anamanwaring.com. My first JadeAnne Stone book, *Set Up*, was published in 2018. For 2019 I am publishing books 2 (spring) and 3 (late fall) of the JadeAnne Stone trilogy and completing my memoir of my years in Mexico. In my spare time I'm working with another poet to develop a workshop on making poetry chapbooks.

MALENA ELJUMAILY, Membership: I love to read mystery novels, especially cozies, but also enjoy the occasional thriller. I belong to two book clubs; one has been meeting for 25 years. My short plays have been produced at various locations around the country. I also love to knit and am currently on a sock jag. I live in Santa Rosa. I have four novel ideas in my head, and 2109 will be the year I outline each one and decide which I should actually write.



HEATHER HAVEN, Events: I love being part of SinC NorCal, a great organization, a great group of people. I am the author of the award-winning Alvarez Family Mysteries, the Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries, the standalone noir *Death of a Clown*, the anthology *Corliss and Other Award-Winning Stories*, and the soon-to-be-published *Christmas Trifle*, Book One of the Snow Lake Romantic Mysteries. My ongoing resolution: Read as many of the talented NorCal authors' works as I can. <http://heatherhavenstories.com>

MARGIE BUNTING, Newsletter: I'm so thankful I've had the opportunity to be editor of *The Stiletta* for three years so far. Retired from an HR management career, I keep busy as VP of Education for my Toastmasters club and as a devoted reader, sweepstaker, musical theatergoer, mother of two sons, and grandma of two. Recently, I became one of the proofreaders of the national SinC newsletter as well. In 2019 I will continue to list all of the books I have read, along with a thumbnail review, in case someone asks me to contribute to a blog (see my post on my favorite reads of 2018 on *Les's Book Critiques*, 1/24/19).



2019 Executive Committee Members, continued

SUSAN KUCHINSKAS, Speakers Bureau: After holding down a series of random jobs – exercise demonstrator, office temp, stewardess, house painter – it was probably inevitable that I became a writer. I started my career as an architecture and design journalist and then moved into technology when the Internet became a thing. I cover automotive and digital technology as a freelance journalist, as well as writing content for tech companies. My science fiction/detective novel, *Chimera Catalyst*, was published in 2017, and the sequel, *Singularity Syndrome*, is due out this year. My crime stories have been published in *Switchblade*, *Shotgun Honey*, and our chapter's upcoming *Fault Lines* anthology. I live in Berkeley with my mate, a cat, a dog, and some 60,000 honeybees. <http://www.kuchinskas.com> **My 2019 resolution is to write more and submit more.**



MARGARET (PEGGY) LUCKE, Anthology: I fling words around as a writer and editorial consultant in the San Francisco Bay Area. My latest novel is *Snow Angel*, which features artist and private eye Jess Randolph in a search for a missing child. Other novels include *House of Whispers*, a tale of love, ghosts and murder on the Marin County coast, and another Jess Randolph adventure called *A Relative Stranger*. 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. **My 2019 resolution: To see the publication of my next novel, *House of Desire*, and to read more of the wonderful books by my fellow SinC NorCal members.** <http://www.margaretlucke.com>



TERRY SHAMES, Past President: I have served on the NorCal Sisters in Crime Executive Committee for seven years, two years each as Event Coordinator, Vice President, and President, and now Past President. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside so many dedicated committee members, as well as getting to know the inner workings of the organization and becoming acquainted with many members. I urge everyone to get involved. It's a great experience! **My 2019 writing resolution is to finish the first draft of the book I'm working on now and possibly write another Samuel Craddock novel. I also wouldn't mind finishing a first draft of a half-written cozy and revising a first draft that I've never done anything with.** www.terryshames.com





Journeying to Silver Rush Country

by Ann Parker

Readers of my Silver Rush historical mystery series are often surprised to find that I DON'T live in Livermore, Colorado (yes, there really is a Livermore in Colorado), but in Livermore, California. And that, furthermore, I am a California native, born and bred, who embraced science but ran away from history, when it came to my schooling.

The natural follow-on question: *How did you come to write a series set in 19th century Leadville, Colorado?*

I blame it on my family history.

Both of my parents were from Colorado, although they left as soon as they could and vamoosed to the San Francisco Bay Area post-World War II. As a family, we regularly visited the Colorado relatives, especially when I and my siblings were young'uns. One of my fondest childhood memories includes dancing around on the sidewalk during one of those magical Colorado summer thundershowers--the warm rain pelting down and soaking me through and through, the thunder booming overhead, and my grandfather yelling from the front porch, "Get in here before you get struck by lightning!"

Another favorite childhood activity was exploring the basements of my relatives' homes. (Hey, I was a California kid. We didn't *have* basements.) Those subterranean rooms were HUGE, stretching the length and breadth of the houses. One basement even included a small classroom, complete with ancient desks and a chalkboard, where my grandmother Elsie taught. These basements were all stuffed to the gills with old trunks, wardrobes, closets, hat boxes, cardboard boxes, bureaus, vanity tables, crates . . . you get the picture. Opening the drawers and lifting the lids was like a magic treasure hunt: we never knew what we'd find. We unearthed yellowed letters, "ancient" clothes from the 1900s and earlier, vintage photo albums, tintypes, abandoned sewing projects, dried-up ink bottles and old steel-nib pens, musty books. It makes me smile, even now, to remember the wonder of it all.

As you can probably tell, I was primed early to think of Colorado and "olden times" with great fondness. I also developed a keen curiosity about my ancestors and began trying to piece together the patchwork quilt of who they were and what their lives were like.

Journeying to Silver Rush Country, continued

Fast forward, many decades later, to a family reunion in the Colorado Rockies. It was a one-time gathering of the clan, with uncles, aunts (no grandparents, alas, as they were long gone), cousins, and so on and so forth. At that reunion, my Uncle Walt changed my life's course by saying, "You know, your Grandmother Parker (aka Granny) was raised not far from here, in Leadville."

Now, I thought I knew a fair bit about the family genealogy, but this was news to me. So I said something clever like, "No! I didn't know! What the heck is Leadville?"

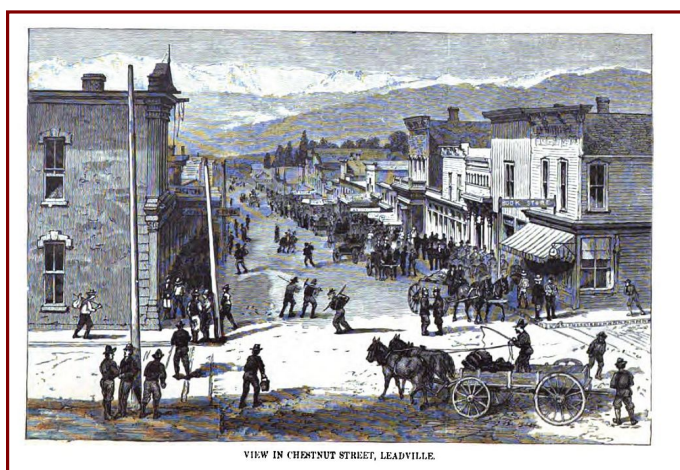
My Uncle Walt, an engineer by trade, got very excited and said, "You haven't heard about Leadville? It's a mining town, and was home to one of the biggest silver rushes in the world! And a real hell-raising place!" Seeing I was intrigued, he added, "Ann, I know you've been thinking about writing a novel. I think you should research Leadville and set a novel there."

Ooookay, Uncle Walt, I thought. After getting back to our hotel room and putting the kids down for a nap, I turned to Stephen Metzger's *Colorado Handbook* to find out more about Leadville.

I read this paragraph—

"During the early 1880s, Leadville was a rambunctious town with three breweries, brass bands playing every night along State St., drunken women driving carriages and smoking "long black cigars," fights, vigilantes, rowdy gambling halls where the mine owners played for large stakes, and general sense of silver-induced frenzy . . . One winter a gravedigger hit a silver vein while preparing to bury a body, and the cemetery was immediately staked out—the dead man was left in a snowbank, frozen stiff, until spring."

--and I was hooked!



Silver Rush boom times in the business district of Leadville, Colorado, circa 1880

From there, it was simply a matter of following Uncle Walt's directions. I did the adult equivalent of rummaging through basements—haunting libraries, perusing old newspaper records, and reading fiction and non-fiction pertaining to Leadville's silver rush era in the late 1870s and early 1880s and about those times in general. I also did the adult equivalent of dancing in the Colorado summer rain the first time I went to Leadville. It was September, and the sky was spitting an early snow. I donned sturdy boots and my down jacket, then walked through

Journeying to Silver Rush Country, continued

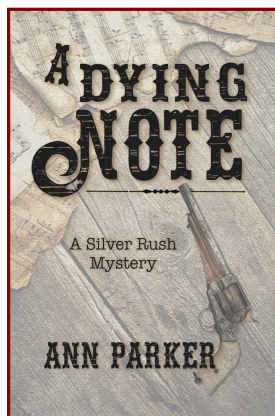
Leadville's Victorian-era downtown and hiked its historic mining district, trying to envision the area in 1880.

To create my female protagonist, I turned to my forbearers for inspiration. I gave her Granny Parker's maiden name, Inez Stannert, and Grandmother Elsie's olive skin, hazel eyes, dark brown hair, and cool demeanor. I gifted my fictional Inez with the spine and determination of all the women I'd known throughout my life and those I'd read about in my research.

When it came time to pen my novel (per Uncle Walt's exhortation), I wasn't sure if I was up to the task of writing fiction, although as a science writer I had crafted plenty of nonfiction. So, I wrote the first mystery in my series, *Silver Lies*, as an experiment. Six books later, I still approach each novel as an experiment. New characters, new bits of history, new topics . . . there is always something more to learn. More trunks to open and contents to wonder over.

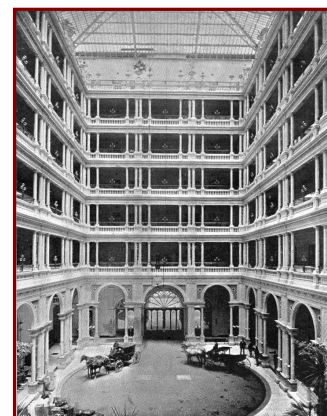


The physical model for the fictional Inez: my grandmother Elsie Richards (at about 18 years old)



Finally, in a serendipitous twist that I didn't expect or predict, my protagonist Inez Stannert is now following in the footsteps of my parents. In the latest book of the Silver Rush series, *A Dying Note*, the year is 1881 and Inez has moved to San Francisco.

The journey continues!



The Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the entrance and Grand Court, late 1800s

Ann Parker is a science writer by day and a crime fiction author by night. Her award-winning Silver Rush historical mystery series, set primarily in the 1880s silver boomtown of Leadville, Colorado, features saloon owner Inez Stannert. In the latest in her series, *A Dying Note*, Inez moves west to San Francisco and changes professions, but can't shake her past. *A Dying Note* was named Best Mystery, Fiction category, by *True West Magazine* and won the Colorado Independent Publishers Association's EVVY Award for crime fiction. It is also a 2019 nominee for the Lefty Award for Best Historical Mystery Novel. Find out more about Ann and her books (and her Wednesday Slang-o-rama blog) at www.annparker.net.

When a Writer's Publisher Sends a Surprise

by Terry Shames



Just before Thanksgiving, authors with Seventh Street Books got a surprise letter. I have always been proud to be one of SSB's authors, not only because it's a talented group, but also because the production values are high. The book covers, quality of paper, and serious editing have been a mark of this successful branch of Prometheus Books that has only been in existence for six years. The imprint is known for publishing a wide variety of mysteries that have garnered great reviews, a high number of award nominations, and, best of all, a lot of admiring readers.

The books run the gamut of the mystery genre: thrillers, police procedurals, historic, cozy, traditional, amateur, and professional detective. Among the authors are James Ziskin (his protagonist is a female journalist in the 1960's); Jennifer Kinchloe (historical LA); Mark Pryor (contemporary France, with a diplomat protagonist); Steven Cooper (police procedural set in Arizona, with a touch of paranormal); Susan Spann (16th century Japanese ninja detective); Adrian McKinty (Ireland during the troubles); Steve Goble (pirates!); and me (Samuel Craddock, chief of police in small-town Texas), to name a few.

The crux of the letter we received that Monday morning was that our parent company, Prometheus Books, had sold both its science fiction line and its mystery line. Seventh Street Books was, as of that morning, owned by a publishing company called Start-Media. This was less disturbing news than the announcement a couple of months ago that a major mystery publisher was shutting down altogether. Still, it was a little like someone kicking an anthill. We ants were alternately fleeing in every direction, squealing, or huddled together wondering what it meant. Would everybody be transferring to the new company? Not just authors, but would we lose our beloved editors, our cover designer, our promotion department, our acquiring editor? What about promotion? Would the new company help us get our books recognized? Would the company honor old contracts? Would some of our authors be kicked to the curb?

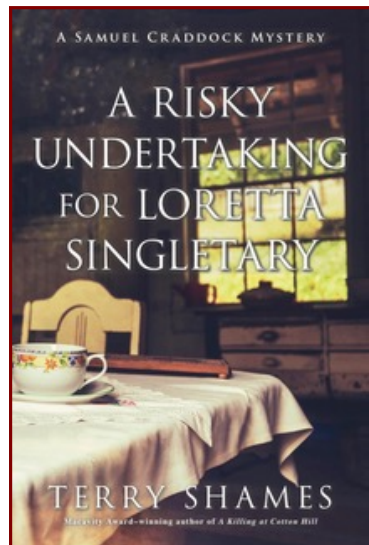
We heard nothing from the new company, which at first was unsettling. But then we realized we never heard much from Prometheus, either, so we realized that's the way it is done. There was an announcement of the acquisition on Start Publishing's Twitter feed, and that was it. Our communication liaison would continue to be our Senior Editor, Dan Mayer. That may not seem like much, but to us it was a huge relief.

When a Writer's Publisher Sends a Surprise, continued

My agent said this was something that she had gone through before, and that we should be patient until some of the details were taken care of. It was of great comfort to know that she was on my side.

Seventh Street authors have a private Facebook page and we have always used it liberally, asking each other questions from the mundane to the arcane. After the announcement, our FB group lit up with concern and curiosity. Answers were slow to come. We soon heard found out that our senior editor was the only support person moving with us. We also found out that our distributor would change from Penguin Random House to Simon and Schuster, and that the only big deal about that was that the books had to be moved from the PRH warehouses to the S&S warehouses. It was a relief to talk to bookstores and find out that PRH and S&S were comparable distributors. Some of us had outstanding payments due from SSB, and we were happy to find out that Start Publishing would be paying those.

Other information was slower to come. Poor Dan was swamped with questions and with details of the move, but he tried to get back to each of us right away to soothe our fretful author fears. He assured us that the new publishing house intended to keep the line the way it was—for now anyway.



The biggest snag was that all of our forthcoming books would be coming out later than originally planned. I was affected by this more than most because I had already set up bookstore appearances, guest blogs, interviews, and advertising because my next book was coming out in January. Not only did I have to put those events on hold, but I didn't have a new date. Not surprisingly, everyone involved was gracious about the change. And I recently found out that my new pub date is April 23—four months later than intended, but not a bad time for it to come out.

We still have questions. Will the physical quality of the books be as high? All I know is that they are keeping my cover, which I love, so I was relieved about that. Will the editing be as good? I am right now going over my edits that were turned in to me recently, and they look good. Still, part of me wants to sneak the manuscript to my former editor, whom I revered, and who saved my writing skin more than once with her astute and thorough editing. Has the new editor missed things? I suppose my readers will let me know!

When a Writer's Publisher Sends a Surprise, continued

Readers and fellow authors might be surprised to find out that the experience has drawn us SSB authors closer to each other. I am proud of the fine work produced by them, and I feel fiercely protective of their well-being with the new regime. Now that things have settled down, I'm ready to get back to writing. My biggest question now is, will the new publisher want more Samuel Craddock? Stay tuned.

I know that regardless of how earth-shaking it was to SSB authors, much of this is of little or no interest to readers. It's all part of the murky world of publishing that goes on behind the scenes. But it is an illustration of how chaotic publishing is these days. All we authors can do is keep on pumping out the best books we can write and hope they get to the readers.

Terry Shames writes the popular Samuel Craddock series, published by Seventh Street Books. The books have been finalists for multiple awards, winning the Macavity Award for Best First Mystery and an RT Reviews Critics Award for Best Contemporary Mystery of 2016. *A Reckoning in the Back Country*, seventh in the series, has been nominated for a Lefty award for Best Mystery of 2018. Terry lives in Berkeley, CA. She is a member of both NorCal Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America. For more, see www.terryshames.com.



What to Expect of a Mastermind Retreat

by Shelley Adina



Over the years I've gone to a few writers' retreats—from elaborate ones, such as teaching on a cruise (<https://cruisingwriters.com>) to anthology-based ones such as brainstorming weekends for the Corsair's Cove novels, to simple ones where a few of us hang out in someone's living room on a Saturday and pound out a chapter. Some retreats are so unstructured that people wander off and go home. Some require attendees to Stick To The Plan:

Breakfast/Morning Speaker

Lunch/Free Writing Time

Dinner/After-Dinner Speaker

Social Hour

Night Owl Sprint

In recent years, the trend has been for groups of writers who know each other and work well together (called "mastermind groups") to meet once or twice a year in a vacation location such as Las Vegas or Cabo San Lucas, and spend a week brainstorming their upcoming books in a hotel suite, round-robin style.



In September 2018, the writers' retreat I traveled to was nothing like any of the above. It was held in the French countryside in a 200-year-old manor house called Chateau JAC (<http://www.chateaujac.com/>), which is owned by an English couple and is the ultimate in dream spaces. Seven days, six bedrooms, six authors—Bella Andre, Nancy Warren, Jennifer Skully, Linda McGinnis, Jenny Andersen, and I. Nancy Warren and I are cozy mystery writers, and Jennifer Skully has a paranormal crime series.

But such a retreat doesn't just mean lying out

Mastermind Retreat, continued

by the pool (though that happens). It's a beautiful setting for a working week – since nearly all of us make our living by our writing. However, even the pantsers among us agreed that there ought to be a few expectations to make this time as valuable as possible for every author. As it turned out, there were only three: goals, productivity, and respect.

Goals

If you go to the effort of traveling to a new place to write, to say nothing of spending money to do it, it only makes sense to arrive with a goal. Mine was to get at least halfway through one of the novellas set in my Magnificent Devices steampunk world. The other authors came in with goals, too:

- Brainstorm and outline the next in a series.
- Edit an upcoming release.
- Make progress on a first draft.

Along with goals for our stories, we had goals for our careers. Mealtimes and evenings became valuable work time (yes, it's possible to eat pasta or do needlepoint with a notebook at your elbow). We came up with marketing plans, series ideas, and release schedule strategies for the upcoming year.

When did you ever take a break? I can hear you wondering. There was plenty of time for that, including a full day of sightseeing and shopping midweek in Toulouse. But as we all know, doing something you love isn't really work. Talking over my career with smart, creative businesswomen – who are also friends with my best interests at heart – is fulfilling for me and brings me joy. For me, doing that after supper is better than dessert.

Productivity

Some of us are morning writers. Some prefer the afternoon or night hours. Some of us just write all day and look up in a daze when it's time for dinner! But we all agreed that the writing hours of each author were sacrosanct. Retreats where sprints or important marketing talks are scheduled for 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. just make Linda and me run away and hide, while Nancy is energized. You can't force productivity on a writer with a schedule that suits the organizer, or is geared to the majority.

Usually we authors are self-aware enough to know when our best working hours are. It's important to give each other the freedom to work uninterrupted and guilt-free during those hours.

Mastermind Retreat, continued

Needless to say, if you're staying somewhere for a week, and you plan to be productive, the body has to be cared for as well as the brain. Dividing up domestic duties was surprisingly easy, and was agreed to in advance. Those who liked to cook, did. Those who didn't, washed and dried dishes. Someone took the trash to the end of the long drive. Each did her own laundry. Everyone went on grocery shopping trips (having two French speakers along was very handy here.)

Everyone kept the community spaces (sitting room, dining room, kitchen, library) neat and tidy, and packed up their things at the end of the day so the spaces could be enjoyed by everyone in the evening. Some took brisk walks through French hill towns for an ungodly number of miles (not me). Some were content to do laps in the pool or simply stroll around the estate's acres with treats in their pockets for Henri the peacock (me).

The logistics of feeding and watering authors can mean the difference between success and failure at a retreat. But if you approach it in the spirit of consideration and community, work turns into a joy. And it helped that the walkers always came back with treats from the patisserie!

Respect

You probably will have noticed that the things I've said about productivity are closely tied to the third expectation: respect. Interesting, right? Even at home, if the people around you have respect for your work, it's much easier to be productive. So with that expectation we discovered there are two secondary ones:

- Give privacy when it's requested.
- Do what makes you happy.

If I took a chair out under the sycamores to write in the company of Henri the peacock, it was because I'm used to working in the garden with my chickens around me. Working with a companionable bird nearby made me happy—and no one walked out to break the flow or frighten him off. If Bella was in the library making notes for her next contemporary romance in quiet privacy, she was happy—and no one went in to choose a book to read. Jenny and Linda



Top Row (L-R): Jenny Andersen, Linda McGinnis, Jennifer Skully; Bottom Row: **Shelley Adina**, Bella Andre, Nancy Warren

Mastermind Retreat, continued

liked to share the kitchen table, both because the WiFi was better and because they enjoyed each other's company. Each author's work style was respected, sometimes without even saying anything.

But when it was necessary to say something, respect made it possible to do so without hurt feelings. One day I went out for a swim and found Bella and Jennifer by the pool, in the middle of a heated brainstorming session for their next *Maverick Billionaires* romance collaboration. They simply asked for privacy and I vanished back through the gate with a smile. I could swim anytime. But stopping the flow of ideas was unthinkable.

No matter where you decide to have your writers' retreat—no matter its purpose, whether marketing masterminding, brainstorming plots, or writing as many words as possible—these three basic expectations of goals, productivity, and respect will stand you in good stead. The works created in a retreat from the world will go out into the world to make others happy. And that's the biggest goal of all for an author, isn't it?

Shelley Adina is the author of 24 novels published by Harlequin, Warner, and Hachette, and a dozen more published by Moonshell Books, Inc., her own independent press. She writes steampunk cozy mysteries as Shelley Adina, and as Charlotte Henry, writes classic Regency romance. She holds an MFA in Writing Popular Fiction, and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Lancaster University in the UK. She won RWA's RITA Award® in 2005, and was a finalist in 2006. When she's not writing, Shelley is usually quilting, sewing historical costumes, or enjoying the garden with her flock of rescued chickens. She is wondering where she can rescue a peacock.



Member Profile: Ana Manwaring

Eighth in a series to introduce our members to each other



A long-time SinC NorCal member and officer, Ana Manwaring is a newly-published thriller author.

Stiletta: Congratulations on your first published mystery novel! Tell us what it's about and your road to publication.

Ana Manwaring: *Set Up* is the first in a trilogy set in Mexico against the backdrop of organized crime. Were there a prequel, we'd learn that JadeAnne Stone, the managing partner of an investigation firm in Sausalito, is restless and dissatisfied as an administrator. Her partner and lover is often gone, and she feels her relationship slipping away. When the CEO of a San Francisco bank operating a branch in Mexico City shows up with a briefcase full of cash and a demand to find his "lost" wife in the glitzy resort of Ixtapa, JadeAnne ignores the warning bells in her head and grabs a chance to prove her mettle, win back Dex and take a vacation. Of course, things start to "go south" when JadeAnne is kidnapped off a lonely Mexican highway and unwittingly enters a world of high-stakes oil politics, money laundering, and narco-trafficking.

Stiletta: How did your own experiences influence your novel?

AM: *Set Up* began in Mexico when a pig-faced narco-thug threatened me with his gun from his pickup bed as I drove south through Michoacán en route to Mexico City, where I planned to study Spanish and work on a novel. I stayed in Mexico for almost three years—yes, with my dog and VW pop-top camper—and took in as much of the people and Mexican culture as I possibly could. The Mexico in *Set Up* is a mirror of my experience. Oh, except for the money laundering and narcotics. At least not that I know of.

Stiletta: You envision the JadeAnne Stone Mysteries as a trilogy. When can we expect the next installment? Tell us something about it.

AM: *The Hydra Effect* is currently in the final stages of revision, proofing and design. I'm aiming to have it out in time to take to Left Coast Crime in the last week of March. The story is a continuation of JadeAnne's and Pepper's trip to Mexico, but now she's taken up residence in hottie Anibal's Colonia Condesa digs in Mexico City. He's convinced her to assist him in his investigation into the cartel dealings of his half-brother, the senator, and the duo discovers a secret cell deep in the basement of a cartel safehouse, containing a dozen or so children. Among the kids held are a pair of American sisters, aged fifteen and eleven. Jade assumes responsibility for returning these girls to safety, but nothing is as it appears and she must overcome unsurmountable odds to save them. Luckily the ally she's yearned for manifests to aid her quest.

Member Profile: Ana Manwaring, continued

Stiletta: You have your own consulting business. What types of services do you offer?

AM: My business is called JAM Manuscript Consulting, and I aim to “consult” on a wide variety of work. I love helping folks with early drafts and offer developmental editing, craft coaching and brainstorming. I also provide copyediting, proofreading and critique of manuscripts. I consult on poetry, short fiction, narrative essay and memoir. Occasionally I copyedit nonfiction, but my main focus is on novel-length fiction and memoir.

Stiletta: You also teach writing at Napa Valley College. How did you decide to start teaching, and what prepared you for this type of work?

AM: Blame it on Mom’s harping, “What are you going to do with an English major?” I took my BA at University of Denver in Elementary Education, although I wasn’t enamored of little kids. After Mexico, where I taught English to the front office workers of Cuernavaca’s leading newspaper to make ends meet, I took a job at San Rafael High School as an ESL classroom aide. I enjoyed it and grabbed an opportunity to earn a master’s degree in Linguistics/Teaching English as a Second Language at Sonoma State. NVC hired me to teach adult ESL after I received my degree. Shortly after starting my job, the creative writing teacher left and, knowing I wrote, the Dean asked if I’d step in for the summer class. Thirteen years later I’ve got three classes and a waiting list. I teach in the Classes for Older Adults program.

Stiletta: One of the things you teach is memoir writing. Tell us about a memorable experience you’ve had with your students.

AM: Since I work with retirees, my students come to class with a wealth of stories and often no writing experience at all. One 80+-year-old came in with a sheaf of stories about growing up Jewish in Brooklyn. The stories were funny and the writer captured the voice of a little girl well, but she didn’t know how to write a coherent sentence or develop a paragraph. She’s stuck with it for four or five years now, and not only can she effectively use punctuation, she’s been picked up by a podcast producer to read her “Kosher Style Stories” as a regular podcast. At 86, Barbra Hana-Austin still comes to class to polish her stories before airing.

Stiletta: Before trying your hand at a novel, you published stories in anthologies and wrote poetry. What were your proudest accomplishments in this area?

AM: I’m proud of my work with the early CWC Redwood Branch anthologies. I was included in and worked on eight of the publications, helping to shape them from selection through editing through publication. I have fiction, memoir, narrative essays and poems in 15 anthologies. I’m proudest of my inclusion in “Sonoma Squares,” a serialized two-part mystery story set in Sonoma County and published in the *Press Democrat*. Both years it ran, I wrote chapter 7. The deal was, the

Member Profile: Ana Manwaring, continued

authors only had a sketchy outline and had no idea what the other writers were writing. It turned out well.

Stiletta: You also blog on various sites. What inspires your blog posts, and where do you blog?

AM: I blog mainly at my Building a Better Story site (accessed from my website) that I started as a class blog. I write about craft sometimes, the writing life, and I post my reviews of books I read and enjoy (mostly Sisters' books). I haven't been a good blogger this past year, posting mainly when one of my students sends me something to publish. I enjoy helping "my" writers get started. I have two more blogs. One, In the Shadow of Sonoma Mountain, I use to post my columns from the six years I wrote for a local paper. Now that *Set Up* is published, I'm getting back to blogging again. Look for new book reviews of your favorite NorCal writers, and then some. I need some inspiration!

Stiletta: Your official bio says you have branded cattle and consulted brujos, among other things. Please tell us more – inquiring minds want to know!

AM: My uncle was a cattle rancher for years outside Tres Pinos. He always invited the city cousins down for branding. I loved the ranch, the rodeo and riding Big Bun through the California countryside with my cowboy cousins. The branding was exciting, but it may be why we eat no beef at home – heartbreaking hearing those calves bawling after being burned.

Regarding the brujos (witches), one time in Amatlán, a tiny village in the state of Morelos, I visited a renowned *curandero*, a natural healer, when my Mexican boyfriend broke my heart. The healer took one look at me and said, "Girl, you got it bad!" (Or something I took to be that, anyway. He spoke Nahuatl.) He then poured off a potion of cloudy liquid from a whiskey bottle filled with dead scorpions and instructed me to take some every day to ward off the pain. It didn't strike me as a natural healing. Later I was outside on my cell phone (fighting with Fernando) and put my hand on the top of the stone wall. Something wiggled under it and I pulled away to find a big angry scorpion waving his tail. That elixir may not have cured heartache, but it sure inoculated me against scorpion sting. The Tepotztlán area is infamous for its scorpions. Note: I get my revenge on the bad boyfriend in book 2.

Stiletta: Also in your bio are references to visiting every California mission and working for a private investigator. Please tell us more.

AM: As part of the California elementary school curricula, fourth graders study the California missions. I loved that unit, and one spring break my parents packed us three kids into the station wagon and we drove the Mission Trail. I somehow managed to get my hands on a couple of the pen and ink drawings of the missions that Mom and Dad collected, and I am still fascinated by that period of history. After all, the Spanish (from Mexico) started the missions.

Member Profile: Ana Manwaring, continued

As for the private investigator I worked for? The agency was called Miller Valis Associates, I was the bookkeeper and an occasional assistant to one of the partners (Miller) in his sub rosa investigations. The firm primarily ran insurance scam investigations, but we had a big case right after Marcos was ousted from the Philippines. We were hired to follow a Filipino woman 24/7 for the month of December to photograph her movements and her contacts for our reports to the client—“Louie” with no last name, but carrying a fat bag of money. The woman lived in Diamond Heights, San Francisco. With two possible exits from her home, we kept two teams going all the time. I took the night shift with the PI, who was my boyfriend. The woman had a baby and an extended family, and every night around 11:00 she sailed out of her garage in a shiny black Camaro, down the hill to the Daly City bowling alley, and played for hours before going home. Finally, an unknown man showed up at the house. “Louie” collected our photos and the firm received final payment. We never knew why we surveilled the woman or who these people were. A point of excitement on stakeout: many nights a car full of Filipinos surveilled us as we watched the house. I got out of our surveillance van and approached them once, but they zoomed off. Later we learned “Louie” was the head of national security for the Philippines. For readers of *Set Up*, JadeAnne’s partner Dex bears a certain similarity to PI Miller.

Stiletta: You have been the Treasurer of SinC Norcal and a member of the Executive Committee for many years. What is the most challenging part of your Treasurer role?

AM: Because we’re a small branch, the bookkeeping and reporting have been easy. But we’re growing and have more programs now, I can no longer pull off little reports typed up in Word. I’m in the process of setting up a double-entry accounting system. The challenge is figuring out the software! I studied accounting and taxation and ran an accounting office for years before I went back to school for my master’s degree.

Stiletta: What has your membership in SinC meant to you?

AM: Everything! I have met people I like, who inspire and educate me in the writing life. Our group is convivial, generous, and helpful. I love that we can drink wine at many of our meetings—we’re not a stuffy, rule-riddled group at all! When really well-published luminaries take the time from their busy schedules to be kind to a newbie, it says a lot. This is what SinC is to me: writers helping writers and having fun doing it.

Stiletta: You received the 2011 Helene S. Barrnhardt award for service to the writing community. What specifically led to your receiving that award?

AM: When I got back to writing in the early 2000s, I joined CWC Redwood Writers. We were about 35 people then and set our mission to grow the club, which we did. In two years we had 200 members; in 4 years, 350 members. We did it through really good programs. I was the founder of the

Member Profile: Ana Manwaring, continued

Redwood Salon, a bi-monthly themed potluck literary event (once held in a yurt in Sebastopol). I was also founder of the anthology launch party and reading, producer and stage director of the Redwood Stage at the Sonoma County Book Festival for 4 years, co-executive editor of the Vintage Voices anthology, and editor, proofreader, selection committee, etc. of subsequent volumes. In addition, I was co-founder of the library literary reading events and founder of the memoir contest and the critique clearinghouse. But as bookkeeping is really a boring job, I think I got the award for that.

Stiletta: Is there anything else you would like your fellow Sisters and Misterys to know about you?

AM: I'm a nature girl. I have bird juju. I talk to the owls and frogs—and they reply. I'm currently taming the skunks who feed on dropped seed from the bird feeder. They love apples, bananas, and pineapple, detest carrots, and come for dinner when I call. I love to hug trees and dig in my garden. My husband and I sleep with our cat, Alison. My chocolate lab, Chocolatte, lived 17-1/4 years, from 1992 to the day the Olympics opened in 2010. She was born in Mexico City, given to me as a gift by the bad boyfriend, and became fully bilingual. We all heard Chocolatte bark goodbye outside the bedroom window in the wee hours a week after her death. We miss her still.

Ana Manwaring was interviewed by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime NorCal's newsletter editor.

DON'T FORGET! If you haven't yet renewed your membership in both our Norcal chapter and Sisters in Crime's national organization, **both expired effective December 31, 2018**. You can renew your NorCal membership on the [Norcal website](#)

In the November 2017 issue of *The Stiletta*, Terry Shames emphasized then-national SinC President Kendel Lynn's excellent reason for being a member of our national organization: "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 formidable force."

It is expected that NorCal members are also members of the national organization, and membership fees are reasonable. There's no time to lose to keep the valuable benefits that are part of SinC membership!



Writing Mysteries . . . Is It a Mystery?

by M. Glenda Rosen (aka Marcia G. Rosen)

Your first sentence, moreover your first paragraph, should grab your reader . . . maybe even by the throat like a good murder!

Writing a mystery book or series is akin to putting together a puzzle with a thousand pieces. Where should you begin? Do you start the puzzle with the corner and edge pieces, providing details on the main characters including the heroes and criminals? Or do you start in the middle, revealing up front the murder and complexity of the story plot?

Whether you start with corners, or center pieces, what matters is sticking with your structure and then pacing the plot. You need to keep it moving forward by creating suspense with clues and mysterious happenings.

In the television mystery series “Columbo,” the murder always took place at the beginning of the story. The seemingly flustered but persistent detective follows various suspects and clues to eventually catch the murderer. In other television mysteries, you follow the path of an ordinary citizen—writer, baker, doctor, librarian or florist—who is captivated by certain events and incidentally gets involved in solving crimes. These amateurs just can’t seem to help themselves, even when following the clues leads them to danger.

From these types of mysteries known as cozies to *film noir* with gangsters and hard-boiled detectives to terrifying thrillers, mysteries have long appealed to the reader and viewer. As a writer, you can choose your own style, your own way of creating characters and stories of murder and mayhem, and your own way of presenting clues and suspects leading toward solving the crime. Yet, there are certain elements essential to a good mystery, which can take the reader on a fascinating ride through a criminal’s mind and the minds of those who reach into that mind to catch them.

Yes, everyone has a right to remain silent! Even you . . . right to the end. Of course, you eventually have to get the bad guys to talk or confess or have someone give them up. Along the way, you are also on the chase with your characters through conflict, danger and mystery. However, your intent is to capture your readers!

You want your readers to become involved and interested in your story so they follow the clues you leave, and they attempt to solve the crimes along with you. Don’t make it too easy: there should be a number of possible suspects. Enhance the plot with character conflict and red herrings

Writing Mysteries, continued

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that might confuse and steer the reader away from the real murderer. The bad guy can also lead the reader astray by placing suspicion and blame on someone else.

A good mystery story includes: an intriguing plot, interesting characters (often with unique characteristics), descriptive places and locations that set a mood, interesting and controversial dialogue, clues (real and false) leading to the bad guys (and gals), and a bit of humor. Be clear about your point of view. Is it from the perspective of the main character as in Sue Grafton novels or a third person as in Raymond Chandler mysteries?

Ultimately, you want to be able to explain your characters' motivation for their criminal behavior. Common sources are anger, hate, power, money and, of course, revenge. Revealing truths, secrets and lies with stories of betrayal and vengeance with surprise endings leaves your reader wanting more – especially in a series!

Although you might think it strange, I suggest you ask yourself what your motivation is for writing or wanting to write mysteries. In my mystery series, "The Senior Sleuths," the actions of my senior characters, Dick and Dora, often reflect my truths about life and relationships.

I grew up in an unusual, and sometimes outrageous, environment. It wouldn't take a genius, a psychiatrist or palm reader to figure out the genesis of my fascination with crime and criminals. In "The Senior Sleuths," Zero the Bookie is a version of my dad, and several other characters are based on a few of his many associates.

Our history and experiences can define us, inspire our actions, and, as writers, impact our words and stories. Mine most definitely have. My father was a small-time gangster. Really! I certainly saw and heard a lot!

M. Glenda (Marcia) Rosen's newest mystery series features the delightfully humorous antics and serious crime-solving of "The Senior Sleuths." Book #1, *Dead in Bed*, launched in February 2018. Book #2, *Dead in Seat 4-A*, will be published in February 2019. Book #3 will be published later in 2019. She frequently speaks about writing mysteries and does book signings at various conferences and has had numerous articles published such as "The Gangster's Daughter" in *Mystery Scene Magazine*. Marcia previously published four books in her "Dying to be Beautiful" mystery series and is also the author of *The Woman's Business Therapist* and the award-winning *My Memoir Workbook*. For a dozen years she has given writing workshops on "Encouraging and Supporting the Woman Within You" and "Now What? Marketing Your Book." She was founder/owner of a successful marketing and public relations agency, has been a frequent guest speaker, created several radio and TV talk shows, and received numerous awards for her work with business and professional women. She was chosen "Woman of the Year" 2005 by East End Women's Network, and serves on the board or is a member of numerous writers' organizations. She lives in Carmel, CA. Member: The Mob Museum, Las Vegas, NV www.theseniorsleuths.com



Member Profile: Margaret (Peggy) Lucke

Ninth in a series to introduce our members to each other

Head honcho of our upcoming anthology, Peggy Lucke is also an accomplished writer, publisher, teacher, and much more.

Stiletta: Thank you for wrangling our first SinC NorCal anthology, *Fault Lines*, into existence! How did your previous experience prepare you and what were your main responsibilities?

Margaret Lucke: I was honored to be asked to take charge of the anthology. Producing one has long been a dream of our chapter, and I'm delighted to help it come true. We have a book in the works that we are all going to be proud of.

I've had many years of editorial experience, working for publications and organizations, and—what's most relevant here—doing developmental editing for more than 50 authors of fiction and memoirs, many of them repeat clients. I've also been told I have good organizational skills, although anyone who sees the disheveled state of my desk won't believe that.

As the project coordinator, I convened the initial planning meetings, helped to organize the submissions and selection of the stories, and am supervising the production process. But only part of the credit should be mine. Many SinC NorCal members have made invaluable contributions. Together we have a very strong team.

Stiletta: What was your biggest challenge with respect to the anthology, and when will it be available?

ML: Figuring out the process. Because this is SinC NorCal's first anthology, we've had to come up with our policies and procedures regarding submissions, story selection, editing, production, and marketing. We're not reinventing the wheel, as we have the experience of our fellow SinC chapters and other publishers to draw upon, but everyone's experience is a little bit different and we've wanted to determine our own best practices. I've been documenting what we've done, so the next anthology, should we decide to do another, should be much easier.

Our goal is to have the book published in late March, in time for Left Coast Crime and other springtime events. That will be a challenge, too, but so far we're on track.

Stiletta: Your most recent mystery is *Snow Angel*, released in late 2017, which has a 5-star rating on Amazon. Tell us about your protagonist, Jess Randolph. Will we be seeing her again? And why did you wait 26 years after the Agatha-nominated *A Relative Stranger* to continue her story?

ML: Jess Randolph is a San Francisco-based artist and private investigator who views both of her dual professions as a way to seek out truth. While there was a long gap between the novels, Jess has

Member Profile: Margaret Lucke, continued

appeared in several short stories in the interim, most recently “A Fine Day for Murder” in the 2016 ebook anthology, *Happy Homicides 3*. The next Jess Randolph novel is in the works.

Stiletta: Another of your books, *House of Whispers*, has a supernatural element. What inspired you to take on this type of mystery?

ML: A fellow author invited me to have dinner with her and an editor of a line of paranormal novels. Claire Scanlan was born during this meal. She is a reluctantly psychic real estate agent who specializes in haunted houses.

House of Desire, the second Claire Scanlan novel, will come before the end of this year. In this story, Claire teams up with a time-traveling “soiled dove” from the 1890s to solve a murder in a historic San Francisco mansion.

Stiletta: You teach classes, facilitate workshops, and write books on how to write mysteries and short stories. What rewards do you gain from teaching?

ML: There are so many rewards! Teaching has given me valued friendships and many kinds of inspiration, as well as material for nonfiction books. (I’ll be publishing one soon on creating great characters.) One of the greatest rewards is all I have learned about the craft of writing and other subjects. I learn as much, if not more, from my students as they do from me.

Stiletta: I understand that you have written scripts for mystery weekends. What’s the secret to a successful mystery weekend? Have you ever attended one yourself?

ML: I attended the mystery weekends that I wrote scripts for, and they were a lot of fun. The fun came from several elements:

Drama. Some of the participating guests were actually actors, who played out the story in front of everyone, from the first “murder” on Friday evening through the big confrontation scene at Sunday brunch when the villain was unmasked.

Suspicion. The guests didn’t know the actors’ identities until something happened—for instance, until one of them fell face-first into his chocolate mousse at dinner, having been “poisoned.” That way, everyone participating became a suspect as well as a detective. The killer might even be on your team.

Exploration. On Saturday the teams of guests were sent out to discover clues so they could piece together the story and solve the crime. Clues would be hidden at local points of interest, such as a museum or winery, giving everyone a chance to discover the area (Silicon Valley, Sonoma Wine Country).

Member Profile: Margaret Lucke, continued

Sleuthing. Having gathered their clues, the team members spent Saturday evening matching wits and collaborating to come up with their team's solution to the mystery. To keep things fair, all clues were available to every team.

Prizes. While the team coming up with the most accurate solution got the biggest prize, we also had prizes in categories such as Funniest and Most Creative. Everyone went home a winner.

Stiletta: You are also editor and publisher of Oakledge Press, an independent publishing imprint. Whom do you represent, and how do you have time for this in your busy career?

ML: In addition to my own work, I've published *The Law in Charity*, a wonderful western by amazing author Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, who has published nearly 100 novels in a variety of genres. I'll be doing two other westerns in that trilogy, as well as a romantic comedy by Rita Lakin.

I enjoy the publishing process, which nicely meshes various aspects of my skills and experience. But time management is always a challenge. If anyone has tips to offer, I'm listening.

Stiletta: You maintain your first book was written at the tender age of 5 years old. Have you always wanted to be a writer?

ML: I created that first book as a birthday present for my dad and called it *We Are Going to a Birthday Party*. I wrote the story—well, dictated it to my mom, who typed up my words—and drew the illustrations. I cut a cover out of oilcloth and Mom helped me bind the book with yarn.

I could not have been more excited. My first book! Nothing beats the thrill of holding your first book in your hands. Okay, it was a bit short of plot and the character development left something to be desired. But a story had emerged from my imagination and been captured in this set of pages. And the most important literary critic in the world, my dad, said it was wonderful.

Stiletta: Your official bio says you have been a “registered agent of a foreign country.” What did that entail?

ML: It wasn't as cloak-and-dagger as it sounds. One of my early jobs was working in the Public Information Office of the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC. I oversaw their library of wonderful National Film Board films and helped put out a small, more or less monthly magazine to explain Canada to Americans. American citizens who work at other countries' embassies are required to register with the US State Department as agents of a foreign government. Strictly routine, but it makes for a good entry in a “secrets you don't know about me” game.

Stiletta: Besides being a member of SinC, you served two terms as President of MWA NorCal. What have you gained from membership in these two organizations?

Member Profile: Margaret Lucke, continued

ML: I've gained so much! Support and encouragement, valued friendships, knowledge about writing craft and the publishing industry, the realization that writers aren't imbued with special magic but they're people like me and I can do what they do. Most likely my books would never have been written had I not joined MWA and SinC. I can't recommend them highly enough.

Stiletta: What do you count among your greatest accomplishments?

ML: My books, of course, and other books that I've helped bring into being through my work as a teacher and editor. A marriage that has succeeded through many years, both thick and thin. Being a stalwart friend who can be counted on. And soon I'll add *Fault Lines* to that list.

Stiletta: What else would you like us to know about you?

ML: Margaret is my name on the B things—birth certificate, bank account, and byline. Many friends call me Peggy, a standard nickname for Margaret. Others call me Daphne, the name of a character I portrayed in a college play.

My website is <http://margaretlucke.com>, and I can also be found on Facebook (Margaret Lucke) and Twitter (@margaretlucke.com).

Margaret Lucke was interviewed by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime NorCal's newsletter editor.



Member News



New Releases

The publishing date of Terry Shames' next Samuel Craddock mystery, *A Risky Undertaking for Loretta Singletary*, has been changed to April 23, 2019. BookPage named the book their Top Pick for Cozies in the new year.

Ana Manwaring published her first suspense/thriller set in Mexico, *Set Up: a JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventure*, on November 1, 2018 in paper and digital formats.

Kate Wyland will publish *Forearmed*, book #2 in the Horses and Healing Mystery series, on March 1.

Public Appearances

On February 12 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., JoAnn Smith Ainsworth will be on the AAUW Panel of Sisters in Crime authors at Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church

On February 18, Terry Shames will be in the line-up for Noir at the Bar in Austin, Texas.

In mid-February, Dietrich Kalteis will interview Terry Shames for his blog, Off the Cuff. Here's a link to the site: <http://dietrichkalteis.blogspot.com/>

Awards

Ann Parker's *A Dying Note* was named Best Mystery in the fiction category of *True West Magazine's* "Best of the West 2019" list: <https://truewestmagazine.com/best-west-2019-western-books/>

Ann Parker's *A Dying Note* is long-listed for the Martin Cruz Smith Award in Suspense/Mystery by the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association (NCIBA): <http://www.nciba.com/book-awards.html>

Lots of NorCal members have been nominated for Lefty Awards at the upcoming Left Coast Crime in Vancouver. For Best Humorous Mystery: Leslie Karst for *Death al Fresco* and Catriona McPherson for *Scot Free*. For Best Historical Mystery: Rhys Bowen for *Four Funerals and Maybe a Wedding*; Laurie R. King for *Kingdom of the Mad*; and Ann Parker for *A Dying Note*. For Best Mystery: Terry Shames for *A Reckoning in the Back Country*. Congratulations to all!

Question of the Quarter



What was the most memorable thing that happened to you in 2018?

Definitely having my short story accepted into the *Fault Lines* anthology. It will be my first crime fiction credit and has already paved the way for an exciting 2019! ***Robin Stuart***

Having my historic pre-teen novel, *The Case of the Bent Spoke*, submitted for the Newbery Award. ***Pat Canterbury***

As it happens, I had a fairly memorable year, though not necessarily for the best reasons. The good part was getting an offer of publication for my first novel, from a wonderful editor at a terrific small press. Needless to say, I was over the moon; a great deal of champagne was drunk. Unfortunately, that terrific small press was Midnight Ink, and at around the time the wonderful editor was getting my feedback on cover designs, her bosses were deciding they didn't want to be in the mystery publishing business anymore, and that was the end of that. (There was more drinking at this point, of a different sort.) The good news is that my most excellent agent was able to get my rights back, so that series will live to fly another day, and 2019 is a new year. Let's hope it's a better kind of memorable. ***Daisy Bateman***

Unfortunately, that would be the death of our friend, James Aschbacher. James decided to become an artist when he was in his forties. He taught himself and developed a whimsical style, becoming a powerful figure in the arts community of Santa Cruz. He encouraged and supported my husband's participation in Open Studies, Art & Chocolate, and Hearts for the Arts, championing and fighting for the inclusion of abstract art. But our friendship extended well beyond that.

In addition to his paintings, James created murals throughout the county. Danny and I can see one from our house on the elementary school at the end of our street. It's titled "Community Spirit," which really says it all about James. His playful wooden figures grace a playground. His art forms the logo for a local pasta maker and lives on the cover of an X-tra Large CD.

As ebullient as the champagne he drank every night, James was larger than life, so it was such a shock to his wife, family, friends, and community when he dropped dead from a stroke on April 25 at the age of 66. ***Vinnie Hansen***

The most memorable happening of 2018? A reasonable topic for the beginning of a new year. But I've never liked this kind of question. Or the kind where you have to list your favorite books or movies or socks.

Question of the Quarter, continued

I like Margaret Atwood's answers. Interviewer: What's your favorite book? Atwood: The one I'm reading. And another time: Interviewer: If you could take only one book to a desert island, what would it be? Atwood: Only one? Then I'd take the biggest I could find.

I can never best Atwood, but the Question of the Quarter got me thinking.

Why don't I like "best of" or "most of" questions? Because as soon as I answer it, something will immediately come along that's more or better.

So I'll limit myself to today, when the best thing that happened was when a stranger in a long grocery line took pity on my struggle with a walker, left her spot and ushered me to the customer service counter, where I got serviced immediately. Thanks, stranger! *Camille Minichino*

Wow, that's a tough one. A year is a long stretch of time (seems to get shorter every year). I'm beginning to realize that sometimes the most memorable things that happen aren't necessarily the best things. Early in the year, Bill Crider, a man who meant a great deal to his fellow authors, passed away. I think of Bill and his generous spirit often. On the brighter side, a memorable event was getting to present the Edgar Award for Best Paperback Original at the annual MWA awards banquet. Another high point was being nominated for a Lefty Award, Funny, it seems that most of my memorable moments involve writing. And there is one more small, but delightful thing that happened. I don't think of myself as a short story writer, but I had a story accepted for the 2019 Malice Anthology, and had a short story published in *Unloaded 2*. So, all in all a good writing year! *Terry Shames*

In 2018 I found out that I could write short stories. Years ago, while my novel was languishing between potential publishers, a good friend urged me to write short stories. But I kept telling her, "I'm a novelist. I'm a novelist." This year, another one of my friends died, just when I was digging into writing my second Fanny Newcomb mystery. Since I was that friend's Trustee, my entire life was upended with completing her final wishes. I had no energy or time to work on a novel. But I had smaller moments that were still my own, and since SinC had called for submissions to the *Fault Lines* anthology, I gave short story writing a try. Big surprise: I loved it! Bigger surprise: my short story, "Kate Chopin Tussles with a Novel Ending," was accepted into the anthology. And then I wrote "Miss Evelyn Nesbit Presents," which was accepted into Elizabeth Zelvin's proposed *Me Too: Crimes Against Women, Retribution, and Healing* short story anthology. So 2018 has been memorable for my short story writing and acceptance. *Ana Brazil*

2018 was a trying year. My mother went into hospice care and our business lost its biggest account. A million other little burrs dug into our sides all year, but 2018 will go down as the year of travel. We spent NYE in Vegas, visited Vancouver and Victoria in May and Berlin in November. It's even the year my first novel traveled from my computer into the public domain! But the most memorable

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thing? The blooming rhododendrons crowing the Butchart Gardens in a riot of colors . . . or was it spying an orca with two babies pacing our boat in Howe Sound just outside Vancouver? *Ana Manwaring*

Knee replacement surgery. I learned to never, ever let a mystery writer take an opioid! By the time I left the hospital, I had changed “who done it,” “why done it,” the subplots, and the title of my next book! *Priscilla Royal*

Last summer my daughter and I traveled to south China, most memorably its staggeringly beautiful borderlands with Vietnam and Burma. I was researching WWII Kunming, site of a major US base and transportation hub for the “Forgotten War.” Our travels were mostly by bus and train, so we were able to see lands still untouched by the country’s monumental (both good and bad) development. Starvation is almost non-existent these days; there is a rousing middle class that has embraced consumption (you should see the malls and luxury-model cars!); environmental degradation is criminal. Even though many of my book’s locations have been built-over, the geography and people remain. I’ve blogged about the trip, with the final posts still coming. Please start at the beginning: <http://dianarchambers.blogspot.com/2018/07/china-past-present-and-future-part-1.html> *Diana Chambers*

My health has been my big issue in 2018. First, I had to wear Una boots (wraps) for swollen legs and feet, a side effect of lymphoma meds. That meant not being able to wear most of my shoes. Next came a pick line in my arm for six weeks. It was that or lose two toes. It seems to be okay now. Most recent, my gallbladder attack on Christmas day. Surgery is looming, but in the meantime I have a line into the gallbladder. Normally I’m a healthy person, but age, or whatever, is catching up with me. I hesitated to share this, but many are worse off than me. I’m expecting a happy, healthy new year. *Carole Price*

Accidentally buying a house in Austin! I say “accidentally” because we didn’t have any plans to move there. But when we were visiting our friends last summer, we went to an open house in their neighborhood. I loved the house, and even after it sold, I kept thinking, “Wow, it would have been so cool if we could have bought it.” Then, just a couple of months ago, it came back on the market. Long story short, we’re moving end of March! I’m excited, but I’m sure going to miss everyone. *Mariella Krause aka Marla Cooper*

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

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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 **Heather Haven**, Events ([heatherhavenstories \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:heatherhavenstories@gmail.com)), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter ([mbunting \(at\) sbcglobal.net](mailto:mbunting@sbcglobal.net)), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions.

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