

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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NOVEMBER 2018

Dear Sisters and Misters,

I joined the Northern California branch of Sisters in Crime around 2005-6 when I published my first novel. At the time, I was living in Half Moon Bay raising a school-aged daughter. I was also substitute teaching and writing. I enjoyed our quiet life and didn't leave town much.

So I attended few if any chapter meetings. However, it was nice to know the group was there—for later, when I was ready to step out. Even after I began participating, I didn't know the organization's true value. Of course, we have all learned an enormous amount about craft and the business of being an author, about website design and social media, etc. But there is also the deeper value of fellowship.

Per my *American Heritage Dictionary* (2100+ pages of print!), fellowship can be defined as the condition of sharing similar interests, ideals, or experiences; the companionship of individuals in a congenial atmosphere and on equal terms. Solidarity. Camaraderie. It's this comradeship and support that I find most valuable in Sisters in Crime.

Why else did Mariella, Ana, and Malena bust their butts to bring us the fabulous Mystery Intensive Workshop in early October? Why did busy and brilliant presenters Jess Lourey and Catriona McPherson spend hours and hours on our behalf? Why did past presidents Susan Shea and Terry Shames contribute years of their lives nurturing our chapter?



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President's Letter, continued

Why does Margie dedicate untold amounts of time publishing this quarterly newsletter on which she has put such a stamp?

We know what we share. We love words and stories and storytelling. We know the struggles and the intense joy. Many of us prefer the quiet. Many would prefer simply to read. We may be introverts or just plain shy. But we make our own safe space – together.

You'll probably read this in the all-too-brief interval between Halloween and Thanksgiving. Do attend the Authors' Showcase at Books, Inc., Saturday, November 3, 12:00-2:00 p.m. in the SF Marina. And do not miss our annual holiday party co-hosted with NorCal Mystery Writers of America, to be held again at Borderland Books, Saturday, December 8, 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the SF Mission. (Details elsewhere in this issue and on the website.)

We will toast a better New Year.

Sincerely,

Diana Chambers

President, Sisters in Crime, NorCal



Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

Saturday, November 3, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m.

Mystery Ink: Select Readings from Sisters in Crime

Books, Inc., 2251 Chestnut St., San Francisco

It's time again for our semiannual showcase, where SinC NorCal Sisters and Misterys with releases in the past six months will read us excerpts and give away copies! Where the release is a short story, the name of the anthology in which it appears is listed. We'll be hearing from the following authors:

Vinnie Hansen, *Santa Cruz Noir*

Rita Lakin, *Getting Old Can Hurt You*

Bette Lamb, *The Russian Girl*

J.J. and Bette Lamb, *Bone Point*

Andrew MacRae, *Shhh . . . Murder!*

Ana Manwaring, *Set Up*

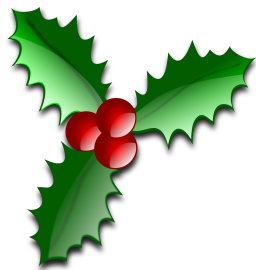
Gigi Pandian, *The Cambodian Curse and Other Stories*

Janice Peacock, *To Bead or Not to Bead*

Terry Shames, *Unloaded 2*

Anna Snoekstra*, *The Spite Game*

*Special guest Anna Snoekstra is a Sister from Australia who will be in California to meet with studio execs because her first book is being made into a feature film by Universal Features! She will be reading from her third book.



Saturday, December 8, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Sisters in Crime Holiday Party with Mystery Writers of America

Borderland Books, 866 Valencia St., San Francisco

It's the most wonderful time of the year because we're throwing a holiday party with our friends at Mystery Writers of America NorCal! We're providing scrumptious food and beverages, but we welcome your delicious dishes. Bring guests and join us for an afternoon of good cheer. Plus, here's your chance to do your holiday shopping and support our local independent bookstore. Purchase a book for a chance to win a \$100 gift certificate! Don't miss this hap-happiest happening. Check our website for directions and parking. <http://www.sincnorcal.org>

No Meeting in January 2019

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



In Case You Missed It . . .

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

August Meeting

Chocolate and more chocolate—what's not to like?! Attendees were treated by Janet Rudolph and Frank Price to all kinds of information about our favorite sweet treat--accompanied by samples, of course. And yes, there was a connection to mystery writing.



Janet Rudolph



Frank Price

September Meeting

SinC NorCal Member Jim Guigli is a firearms expert, and a good time was had by playing with plastic replica guns and holsters of all types. The goal was to jog writers' minds about how and why one of their characters might carry a gun.



(l. to r.) Laurie Sheehan, Jim Guigli, Mariella Krause, Heather Haven

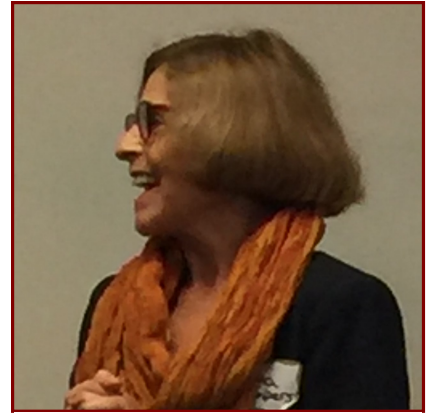
In Case You Missed It, continued

October Meeting

Writes Diana Chambers:

What a marvelous Saturday we had at our Mystery Writing Intensive Workshop! We were treated to a wealth of priceless material by Jess Lourey, Catriona McPherson, the dynamic duo of Gene Brenek and Marla Cooper, and State of the Industry panelists Laurie McLean, Hut Landon, and Mary Krueger.

Mariella led the charge, doing a brilliant job as programmer, presenter, and moderator.



Diana



(l. to r.) Mary, Laurie, Hut, Jess, Catriona, Gene, Mariella

Ana and Malena handled a multitude of organizational tasks and provided a fabulous menu of dawn-to-dusk food—working constantly and quietly to smooth the way. In addition, despite having many personal challenges, Malena—as always!—went the extra mile with those wonderful cupcakes.

We're grateful to Myra for securing an absolutely perfect venue. Everyone pitched in on the PR/social end, but I'd especially like to call out Vera for all her efforts.

And to our special new volunteers—Mary Pyefinch and Amy Pabalan—thank you for stepping up and raising your hands.

What a great chapter we have. I am so proud of us all!!!



Mariella and Gene

Changing Horses in Midstream

by Heather Haven



Picture it: There are two horses standing in a stream. We're not sure why; reasoning cloudy. A person is sitting astride one horse but doesn't want to be. Possibly, s/he has been whispering in the horse's ear something like "let's get a move on, sport," but to no avail. Possibly, said horse is enjoying his tootsies being in the cool water.

S/he looks over at the other horse just lollygagging around and decides that's the saddle to be in. Several minutes later s/he is either swept downstream or trampled to death by two horses having had enough of this silliness. Which brings to mind another wise old saw: They died with their boots on.

So there I was, soggy boots and all, six months into writing a romance and wanting to jump into the saddle of suspense. My reasoning wasn't cloudy. I suck at writing pure romance. If I didn't know it then, I sure know it now. Frankly, if I hadn't been so stubborn, I'd have changed genres within the first three months. I was turning out the most boring drivel I'd ever written in my life. And I have been known to drivel with the best of them. I hated getting up in the morning, facing my computer, and this story. There was no longer any joy in writing. Something had to be done.

Enter a dead body. Suddenly scenes had a little zing, characters a bounce to their step using snappier dialog. Most importantly, there was the potential for a plot! Glory be.

Not that it was easy going. It was a nightmare, actually. Stuff like, where should the suspense go? And how much? And who should be the villain? Should I use a new character? An existing one? What should come out? Stay in? I would wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat with but one burning thought: Was I trying to meld a bicycle pump with a hat?

Wait, wait. Didn't Andy Warhol do that back in the 70's?

I'm good.

Wait, wait. It was a tomato soup can, not a bicycle pump.

I'm dead.

But short of writing me in as the *corpus delicti*, I persevered. If nothing else, for six months I'd been creating a back story for these people. I knew how every character would react to anything

Changing Horses in Midstream, continued

without even thinking about it. These past six months hadn't been a waste of time, I said to myself. Take note: it is amazing what you can talk yourself into when you have to.

When I finished (or ran out of anything else to put down on paper – take your pick), I sent it to three courageous ladies in my writing group in the hope they could help. They did not fail me. Their comments were honest and helpful. They are the best.

1 – C. offered great questions, reminding me about specificity. That's something you can only do at a certain point in a novel, she reiterated, but it's absolutely the most fun.

2 – M. said it started out as a love story and morphed into a mystery. While "it didn't bother me," she wrote, she was surprised. Uh-oh. That can be the kiss of death for any work.

3 – J. said it didn't have the Haven sparkle he was used to. Don't release it until it does. Better to miss this Christmas deadline, but turn out your best work. There's always next Christmas.

Words to live by.

Could I pull this together no matter what Christmas hovered nearby?

Dread to live by.

So I worked for two weeks, eight to ten hours a day, seven days a week. I was obsessed.

C. was right about specificity. I had a ball with that one. Now readers will know who, what, where, when, how, and why. So will I.

M's comment about the genre change was easily correctable. I immediately created two unsolved murders from two years previous. The past incident hovered over the characters and foreshadowed every scene. A very Nora Roberts approach to a romantic mystery. I try to learn from the best.

J's comment was the most haunting. Did it have the Haven sparkle? Yes, the novel grew a lot, changed a lot, solidified. I actually wound up liking it. But was it enough?

On September 1st I handed it over to my editor and told her I was too close to know anything anymore. She had to make the decision and I would abide by it. This was a first, but I had tried something new and it didn't work out the way I'd hoped. Them's the breaks.

Changing Horses in Midstream, continued

However, if it isn't good enough now, I will make it better, if it takes until Christmas 2050. Because that's what I do. I write novels. But I write murder/mystery/suspense novels with a *touch* of romance thrown in. You'd think I'd know that by now.

After all, this is novel number thirteen, bicycle pumps notwithstanding.

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*. Heather is delighted and relieved to say her thirteenth book, *Christmas Trifle*, Book One of the Snow Lake Romantic Suspense Novels (and the one causing all the hoopla) is currently with her beta readers. *Christmas Trifle* is scheduled for a 'Christmas in July' 2019 release. [Heather Haven Stories – Mysteries with Wit](#)

Photo Booth

Robin Stuart (second from left) appeared in a panel at the Mystery Writers Conference in Corte Madera in September, moderated by fellow Sister and event co-chair, Cara Black. The panel title was "Hacking, Identity Theft, Phishing, Oh My!: An Introduction to Cybercrime. Other panelists were former FBI agent and crime fiction author George Fong and current FBI agent Elvis Chan.



Second Act: How to Create a Phenomenal Life After Retirement

by JoAnn Smith Ainsworth



At an age when most people have cut back on activities for their senior years, I launched a second career as the author of six published novels, with all it entails: production management, marketing, speaking engagements, and book signings.

I'm an example that the number of years carried around doesn't have to stop you. In my 78th year, I published two award-winning paranormal suspense novels, *Expect Trouble* and *Expect Deception*. In this series, the U.S. government recruits psychics to find Nazi spies during World War II. As a child, I did my bit for the war effort by collecting tin cans and newspapers from neighbors. I use these wartime experiences to bring historical authenticity to the series. *Expect Deception* was a 2016 finalist, Best Book Awards, Mystery/Suspense category. *Expect Trouble* was released as an audiobook in 2017.

I looked back at the goals I've had over my lifetime, and they included:

- to be educated
- to enjoy my jobs
- to see other countries
- to fall in love and build a family
- to become a published author

I accomplished all of those goals.

Recently, I looked at the actions I took toward these goals and distilled them down to six important tips that I call, **"Creating Your Dream" Tips**.

1. Start Now.

Whatever it is that you want, just start. No matter how crazy they might seem, get your ideas out of your head and onto a piece of paper. Give yourself ten minutes to write, then choose to pursue the one you are most passionate about.

When I looked at that first blank page of my first novel, I had only the foggiest idea what I would write. It was scary. If fear had stopped me, I'd never have become the author of six published novels.

Second Act, continued

2. Take Baby Steps.

While a few authors hit it big immediately, most of us get to our goals incrementally. Persistence and dogged determination win the race. Take the pursuit of your dream one day at a time and do it every day.

I learned early on that I couldn't jump ahead but had to keep plodding along day-by-day toward my goal. I'm a plotter. That's a writer that outlines and does the research before starting to write. I tried being a pantsler, a writer who can sit down and the story pours out as if seeing a movie. Couldn't do it. For me, the "baby steps" were choosing a time period (medieval), choosing a place (Great Britain), deciding on a story question (forced marriage vs. true love), developing characters strong enough to resolve the story question, developing the plot, and breaking all this down into scenes and chapters.

3. Get Excited.

It's your dream. Choose something you're passionate about and have fun doing it. Why spend the retirement years doing something you don't enjoy? Think positively – constantly. No one but you will be as excited about your goals and dreams as you are.

In publishing, especially in the early years, there is often disinterest and sometimes downright discouragement. Don't allow a lack of enthusiasm by others to affect you or your goals. Think each morning of the joy you felt when you first thought up your goal. Use that joy with the determination needed to keep taking those baby steps.

4. Create a Plan

Create a plan, preferably written, with short- or long-term goals, evaluate your goals frequently, and re-adjust where needed. Focus on desired outcomes.

As an author, I create a written marketing plan with tasks broken down month by month. Each task has a paragraph of comments on how I will go about accomplishing the task. Each is marked DONE when completed so I can quickly glance down the page and see what's up next – and how much I have already accomplished!

5. Team up with experts for motivation and support.

Let's say your passion is reading and sharing ideas from books but you don't know how to find people of like mind. You might try your hometown library or bookstore to find readers groups. If you are homebound, you can find readers groups on Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Meetup, and other social media sites. Goodreads is a site specifically catering to readers.

Second Act, continued

My own motivational experts are my critique partners, other authors, editors, reviewers, book publishers, and readers. Attending meetings to exchange real-life support stories and meeting the reading public buoys up my spirit and makes me feel less alone in my chosen industry.

6. Design a visual identity; it's all about perception.

Your product might not be a book, but whatever it is, you will still need to visualize the likely buyer and how your product benefits that person. Then modify and brand your product to appeal to that particular buyer.

Before I even finished my first manuscript, I branded myself as an author of historical romantic and paranormal suspense novels. I hired a marketing firm which created a logo with font styles and colors to match my personality and my writing goals. My website, stationery, and media release templates, along with my Facebook and Twitter pages, all blend together. It's all about perception!

I believe these six tips are flexible enough to use at any stage of life, particularly for seniors. Don't give up on your goals and dreams. Start now. Take baby steps. Stay excited. Keep focused. And most importantly, get going!

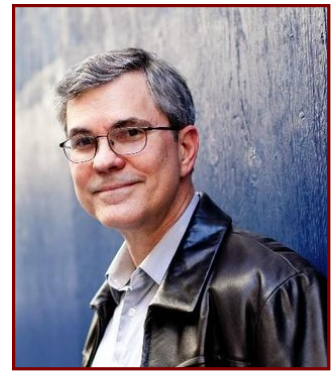
JoAnn Smith Ainsworth experienced WWII food-rationing, victory gardens and blackouts as a child. These memories create the vivid descriptions of time and place in her nail-biting Operation Delphi series, where psychics recruited by the U.S. government hunt down Nazi spies. Ainsworth lives in California and has six published novels. www.joannsmithainsworth.com



Member Profile: Reece Hirsch

Seventh in a series to introduce our members to each other

Meet Reece Hirsch, a partner in a San Francisco law firm who has four successful legal thrillers under his belt and a new book on the way.



Stiletta: Prior to pursuing your law career, you earned a B.S. in journalism. Tell us about your experience editing and publishing an arts and entertainment magazine “back in the day.” Who was the most interesting person you interviewed for the magazine?

Reece Hirsch: I edited and published a free arts and entertainment newspaper called “Open City” in Atlanta in the 80s. I interviewed David Lynch when his film of “Dune” was released, and he was fascinatingly odd, as you might expect. But far and away my favorite was a telephone interview that I did with Ray Bradbury. Bradbury’s books, especially *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, had a huge impact on me. It can be a tricky thing to meet one of your heroes, but he was very generous and funny. I do remember, though, that he made a point of noting how much he disliked John Huston, who directed his script of “Moby Dick,” so I guess he was also capable of holding a grudge.

Stiletta: What made you transition from journalist to attorney, and what types of law do you practice?

RH: Running “Open City” was great fun, but it was also very difficult because we were trying to make ends meet solely based on monthly advertising revenue. I was looking for something steadier, and I figured that the ability to write also translates to a career in law. Now I practice privacy and healthcare law, which means that I know all about HIPAA, the federal healthcare privacy law. I also advise companies that are dealing with security breaches, hackers, and malware. Those experiences have driven the plots of several of my thrillers.

Stiletta: How did you decide to tackle writing crime fiction? And how do you manage to write while working full-time in a demanding career?

RH: I’ve wanted to write fiction ever since I was a kid. Journalism was originally my practical, fallback profession because I wasn’t prepared to attempt making a living as a novelist in my twenties. When I finally got serious about finishing a novel, I’d been practicing law for about ten years, so I figured that I should try my hand at a Grisham-esque legal thriller to draw upon that experience. That became my first novel, *The Insider*.

It’s not easy to find time to write while practicing law full-time, but I’ve developed a routine that works for me. I write a lot on the BART train commuting to my job in San Francisco, and on weekend mornings. I always took inspiration from the fact the Scott Turow is supposed to have written much of *Presumed Innocent* while riding the train to work as an Assistant US Attorney in Chicago. Of course, he got off the train after his first book, and I’m still on mine.

Member Profile: Reece Hirsch, continued

Stiletta: You first wrote a standalone, then three series books. How would you describe these books to those who haven't read them?

RH: All of my books are fast-paced thrillers with a bit of humor that touch upon cutting-edge privacy and cybersecurity issues. My four books are all legal thrillers, but not in the traditional sense. I've never written a courtroom scene.

Stiletta: Did you model your series protagonist, Chris Bruen, after anyone you know?

RH: I've worked with a couple of former Department of Justice cybercrimes prosecutors with backgrounds similar to Chris Bruen's, so there's a bit of them in the character. As with every protagonist I write, I have to admit there's also a bit of me in Chris, but he handles crises far better than I do.

Stiletta: Assuming your legal career is not always as exciting as Chris Bruen's, how do you get in the mood to write those fast-paced, edge-of-your-seat thrillers?

RH: I usually start by imagining what the worst possible day would look like for me or one of my clients. That approach has led me to stories about cyber-terrorism (*The Adversary*), Chinese state-sponsored hackers (*Intrusion*), and NSA domestic surveillance post-Snowden (*Surveillance*).

Stiletta: Please tell us about your next book and when it will be released.

RH: My next book will be the start of a new series for Thomas & Mercer featuring Lisa Tanchik, an FBI Special Agent who investigates cybercrime. It looks like the release date will be September 1, 2019. The first book in the series is loosely based on the investigation that brought down Ross Ulbricht, the founder of Silk Road, a Dark Web drug marketplace.

Stiletta: What are your proudest honors and/or accomplishments?

RH: I'm proud to have played a role in providing pro bono legal services to 826 National, the non-profit network of writing and tutoring centers for young people, since that organization was founded by Dave Eggers and Ninive Calegari in San Francisco back in 2002. I also served on the board of directors of 826 National for several years. 826 does tremendous work helping young people in underserved communities find their voices.

Stiletta: Who are your writing idols or mentors?

RH: When I was a kid, Ray Bradbury was the man. Now some of the writers who inspire me include Don Winslow, Megan Abbott, Richard Price, Jennifer Egan, Dennis Lehane, Robert Stone, Kate Atkinson, and Lou Berney.

Member Profile: Reece Hirsch, continued

Stiletta: You recently participated on panels at Bouchercon (Writing Technothrillers) and Thrillerfest (Dialogue), as well as local events. What have you learned from those experiences that could be helpful to less seasoned panelists?

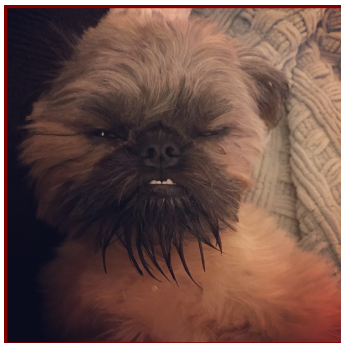
RH: If you have fun with a panel, the audience probably will, too. But it also doesn't hurt to have a few thoughts prepared going in. Also, a moderator can make an average group of panelists good, or can make a great panel boring. Pray for a good moderator who has done his or her homework.

Stiletta: You are a board member of the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, dedicated to rebuilding a village in South Sudan. What attracted you to that organization?

RH: My relationship with VADF developed from my work for 826 National because that charity was also founded by Dave Eggers, with proceeds from his book, *What is the What*, about Valentino Achak Deng and the "Lost Boys" of Sudan. VADF established the Marial Bai Secondary School in Valentino's hometown, which was destroyed during the war in Sudan. It was the first fully-functional high school in the entire region, where there are no other opportunities for students—especially girls—to continue their education past the elementary level. This year, the Marial Bai school will be transformed, through a grant from the government of South Sudan, into the Alok Girls' Academy, a boarding school for up to 144 young South Sudanese women.

Stiletta: You are a member of Mystery Writers of America and the International Association of Thriller Writers, as well as SinC. Why did you decide to join SinC and what has membership meant to you?

RH: The mystery and thriller writing community really is a community, and I think that's especially true in the Bay Area. I joined SinC to connect with more members of that community, once I figured out that you didn't have to be a "sister" to join. In the Bay Area, MWA and SinC seem to work hand-in-hand on so many events that it just made sense to be a member of both.



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

RH: I have a thing for Brussels Griffons—my dog, Dash (short for Dashiell), looks a little like a cross between Chewbacca and an Ewok.

Reece Hirsch was interviewed by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime NorCal's newsletter editor.

Add Water, Stir, and Kill

by Camille Minichino/Margaret Grace



I'm very excited as I open a package from my favorite online miniatures store. I pull out a tiny bathtub, a small doll, and some mini-tiles to lay down a floor. Just what I ordered. Any other customer would probably be constructing a cute dollhouse bathroom.



Not me. I'm setting up a crime scene. All I have to do is throw the doll in the tub, add "water" in the form of resin, and toss in a miniature appliance (tub is 5 inches long). I happen to have such an iron. There's no sizzle, but the doll is dead just the same.

The photo shows the scene in progress, before I stripped the guy and filled the tub completely.

I have a lot of friends in the miniatures community. They all have Victorian dollhouses or New England cottages or country farmhouses. On the other hand, I have a replica of a mortuary, based on the Periodic Tables mysteries, in which my protagonist has an apartment above her friends' funeral home. It wasn't easy to fashion the embalming table in the basement out of foil, but I had to, since no miniatures stores seemed to have any in stock.



Sometimes I make "cute" things, like the miniature casino I submitted to the Left Coast Crime conference in Reno this year. (The arms work, by the way, but only with mini money!) But for the most part, when I buy a set of dollhouse dining room silver, you can bet I'll pick out the tiny knives and sprinkle them with blood—uh, paint—in case there's a mini-murder by a mini-serial killer eluded by mini-cops.

"Why don't you ever write about romance instead of murder?" my husband asks me once in a while (when I have no crafts blades or scissors handy). "Don't you love me?" I can answer the second question (of course!) but not the first.

Add Water, Stir, and Kill, continued

Mystery writers and miniatures apparently have the same occupational hazard—twisting things, morphing scenes easily from an idyllic pastoral into a bloody crime scene.

Or is it just me?

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/>

Photo Booth



Dana Fredsti (right) and Lisa Brackmann at the launch of Lisa's book, *Black Swan Rising*, at Borderlands Books

(photo from Terry Shames)

"The Senior Sleuths" Mystery Series: Murder and Mayhem in A Modern Noir Style

by M. Glenda Rosen (aka Marcia Rosen)



In my *modern noir* stories, the hard-boiled detectives are soft-boiled sleuths whose inner shell is softer and gentler, although their outer shell is still tough. Of course, it doesn't matter—hard-boiled or soft-boiled—they can still be nearly beaten by the bad guys. But it is always the puzzle of the mystery and putting the pieces together to solve it that matters most.

Film noir movies are from the era of the great mystery writers' books, including those by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Ross McDonald, and others. Their writing and their black and white movies influenced my writing in recent years. I was always fascinated by how the characters acted and interacted. I especially loved strong women who influenced the actions and the outcomes.

My all-time favorite was "The Thin Man," where Nora Charles was certainly equal to Nick Charles, her charming husband. Smart, slender, attractive, and rich, Nick adored her. Now what woman doesn't want that?

The plot of "The Thin Man" was enhanced by humor, with the couple's dog, Asta, running amok at times and oddball characters from Nick Charles' past popping in and out. There was always a murder, or several of them, that had everyone, from police to Nick and Nora, in on the chase. In my series, "The Senior Sleuths," Dick and Dora Zimmerman and others take on similar roles.

According to Eddie Muller, "Noir Alley" host on TCM, "*Film noir* peaked as a popular genre of film during the mid-1940's into the 1950's. These films gave rise to iconic antiheroes such as Sam Spade, Mike Hammer, and Philip Marlowe. Though the stories change, the mood is the same in a *film noir*."

Typical *film noir* scenes use shadows, dark streets, neon signs, murderers and murders, plus ominous actions and characters. They take place in a city like New York, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas. Muller describes the characters: "The men and women of this sinister cinematic world are driven by greed, lust, jealousy, and revenge." So are my bad characters.

I'm having a great time creating murder mysteries in a *modern noir* style. In the second decade of the 21st century, the once hard-boiled masculine detective now has a new, softer voice,

“The Senior Sleuths,” continued

and there are new heroes and antiheroes. My stories have soft-boiled sleuths. Of course, they still encounter plenty of murder and mayhem.

As for me, I grew up in an unusual, and sometimes outrageous, environment. It wouldn't take a genius, a psychiatrist, or a 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 his associates.

As an only child, I created stories in my head with characters to keep me company. Writing became my dream, my ambition, and eventually my passion. What a wealth of material there was for me to claim!

I visited my dad's gambling hall, where a card room was hidden behind closed doors. In our kitchen at home, I saw my dad count “the take” from football and baseball bets. He was a fancy dresser, and some of my friends described him as a Damon Runyon character. I wrote a story about him and my mother in which I called her his “gun moll.”

Writing murder mysteries is a way for me to use some of what I saw and experienced and turn it around into stories that entice and entertain readers. Believe me . . . I saw and heard a lot! I have been able to put these family experiences to use. No doubt, thanks to my father, writing mysteries is in my DNA!

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 and received an honorable mention from the 2018 Public Safety Writers Association and from the 2018 Las Vegas Writers Festival; Book #2, *Dead in Seat 4-A*, will be published in February 2019. She frequently speaks about writing mysteries and has had numerous articles published 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*. She has given writing workshops, 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. She lives in Carmel, CA. www.theseniorsleuths.com www.levelbestbooks.com



Lynda Scott, Private Eye

by Vinnie Hansen

Lynda Scott is my writing group’s Clark Kent, looking oh-so-mild-mannered. But in reality, she worked as a private investigator from 1985 to 2007. Since the heroine of my Carol Sabala series ends up as a PI, I’ve been eager to pick Linda’s brain. Recently I had the opportunity.

Lynda had many advantages when she started her career with Mike, her husband. Through his work as a U.S. Deputy Marshal, Mike had connections to many attorneys, the bread-and-butter employers for PIs. Also, when Mike and Lynda went into operation as private investigators in Utah, the state had “basically nothing” for requirements except a city business license. Later, the State Department of Public Safety required a Private Investigator license, but by that time, the couple had so many operating hours that they were grandfathered in. (There are still states where one can hang up a shingle and declare him or herself a shamus with little-to-zilch for training.)

Because of Mike’s contacts, Scott & Associates never advertised their services, which included: asset, background, fraud, locates, and civil services; accident investigation; surveillance; witness coordination; and personal protection.

The business grew by word of mouth. Mike brought in the clients, but Lynda was the agency’s secret weapon. “Women were not expected to be PIs at that time.” The two often worked insurance claims. When Lynda interviewed men in the construction industry or in law enforcement, they would talk to her in “technical language they didn’t expect me to understand,” holding forth because they didn’t perceive her as a threat.



Lynda’s background in real estate and banking also gave her expertise in background checks, and she gained a reputation for putting people at ease in witness coordination interviews from her work with the public in real estate.

The couple specialized in civil rather than criminal cases. Their one criminal case took them into dangerous territory. A defense attorney employed them to verify his clients’ alibis and testimony. Since his client was an alleged drug trafficker, the case put Lynda and Mike into contact with unsavory characters not prone to tell the truth.

Lynda Scott, *Private Eye*, continued

But civil work, such as verifying disability claims, could also lead to the dark side. By the time an attorney flagged a claim, Linda estimates ninety-five percent were proven false. “One fellow, in particular, was interesting.” Due to a stated work injury, the guy had knee surgery, recovered, but continued to collect benefits. When he realized their investigation might reveal his false claim, “he tore his knee apart with a pen.” They were not able to prove his self-mutilation. People can sink to great depths for money, whether a case is civil or criminal.

Lynda and Mike practiced the classical gumshoe arts of surveillance and dumpster diving. They once watched a man claiming a work-related injury chase his dog about the yard. His dog had a chicken in its mouth, and when he finally dropped it, the supposedly incapacitated man chopped off the chicken’s head with an ax. So much for that back injury! Dumpster diving foiled individuals who violated the Non-Compete Agreement after leaving a company. Like many criminals, they disposed of the evidence in their trash, and Lynda and Mike simply fished it out.

In our writing group, Lynda submits ghost stories and segments from an historical novel. On the other hand, I’m a crime fiction writer. In my Carol Sabala series, the protagonist wants to be a private investigator and eventually does become one. It’s part of Carol Sabala’s character arc. Naturally, I’ve wanted to interview Lynda since she first joined our group and am glad we finally had the opportunity for this interview. Thank you, Lynda!

We now both have stories in the newly-released anthology, *Santa Cruz Weird*, put together by local mystery writer Nancy Lynn Jarvis. Included among the authors are several other members of Sisters in Crime.

Vinnie Hansen fled the howling winds of South Dakota and headed for the California coast the day after high school graduation. She’s now the author of numerous short stories, the Carol Sabala mystery series, and *Lostart Street*, a cross-genre novel of mystery, murder, and moonbeams. Still sane(ish) after 27 years of teaching high school English, Vinnie has retired. She lives in Santa Cruz with her husband and the requisite cat.





Advice, Given Loosely

by Rita Lakin

... through the words of famous people

“Run mad as often as you choose, but do not faint.” *Jane Austen*

Since the novels I write are aimed at senior women, I’ve had the temerity to start each book with a quotation in order to advise, inspire, or merely amuse. Here they are in no particular order:

“Never go to bed mad. Stay up and fight.” *Phyllis Diller*

“Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and visit now and then.” *Katharine Hepburn*

“What is the secret of your life? Tell me that I may make mine beautiful, too.” He replied, “I had a friend.” *James Russell Lowell*

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.” *George Carlin*

“You don’t stop laughing when you grow old. You grow old when you stop laughing.”
Anon

Through the years, multitudes of quotes came along on this topic:

Advice on Writing

“Start telling the stories that only you can tell, because there’ll always be better writers than you and there’ll always be smarter writers than you. There will always be people who are much better at doing this or doing that – but you are the only you.” *Neil Gaiman*

“Write without pay until somebody offers to pay.” *Mark Twain*

“Breathe properly. Stay curious. And eat your beets.” *Tom Robbins*

“Writing isn’t about making money, getting famous, getting dates, *making out* [cleaned up two words] or making friends. In the end it’s about enriching the lives of those who will read your

Advice, Given Loosely, continued

work, and enriching your own life as well. It's about getting up, getting well, and getting over. Getting happy, OK? Getting happy . . . this book . . . is a permission slip: you can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will. Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art. The water is free. So drink. Drink and be filled up." *Stephen King*

10 Steps to Becoming a Better Writer

"Write.

Write more.

Write even more.

Write even more than that.

Write when you don't want to.

Write when you do.

Write when you have something to say.

Write when you don't.

Write every day.

Keep writing."

Brian Clark

And of course, those old staples:

"Write what you know."

"When in doubt, throw it out."

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

What are *your* favorites?

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



The Tragic Reality of True Murder Stories

by Myra Jolivet

As Sisters (and Misters) in Crime, we create characters and sophisticated plot twists around murder. I think for most of us, it's about the element of story and the mind candy created in the journey of mystery. But, when those elements are not made up, the result is real human tragedy.

I'm not sure if many of my Sisters and Misters know that before politics and PR, I was a television news anchor and reporter at many organizations. I have filed my share of real-life murder stories and stood over many real-life victims.

My former profession and my current venture into writing mysteries grabbed the attention of producers of two reality shows; the most recent is the upcoming "Murder in the Family," hosted by Geraldo Rivera. The series will debut on November 3 on the REELZ cable network. The show will tell the tragic stories of celebrity families marred by murder. I don't yet have the date of my segment (it was taped months ago), but I will help to tell the story of Kelsey Grammer, the star of "Cheers" and "Frasier." Grammer's father and sister were murdered within two years of each other, and for decades he struggled with the incomprehensible loss.

I hope you will watch the show. Here's a link to more information:

<https://www.thecinemaholic.com/murder-in-the-family-with-geraldo-rivera-reelz/>

At six years old, Myra Jolivet was a poet and playwright, holding SRO productions in her backyard in Berkeley. That led to a 20+-year career in TV news, politics, corporate communications, and non-profits. When her children went off to college, she gathered the nerve to begin a series of cozy murder mysteries, the Sarah Doucette Jean-Louis mysteries, stories that had lived in her for decades. Sarah's life is a blend of Myra's own California and Louisiana Creole cultures, helping her create a world of mysticism, murder and humor. Myra is a public relations executive in Silicon Valley. She has a son who is a surgeon and a daughter, an investment banker, and three granddaughters.



Fault Lines: A Progress Report by Margaret Lucke

SinC NorCal is proud to announce that, yes, we will soon publish our first anthology in our 25-year history. The stories have been selected and the editing and production processes are moving forward. The chapter itself will be the publisher. We plan to put this book out in the first quarter of 2019, in time for Left Coast Crime.

The anthology is called *Fault Lines*, and we have an outstanding lineup of stories.

Ana Brazil, "Kate Chopin Tussles with a Novel Ending"

Jenny Carless, "The Water's Edge"

Diana Chambers, "Trip to Paradise"

Carol Elkovich, "True Culprit"

David Hagerty, "SPEDing Toward Self-Destruction"

Vinnie Hansen, "The Last Word"

Katherine Bolger Hyde, "Trouble at Tor House"

Judith Janeway (Judith Wrubel), "Get a Life"

Mariah Klein, "Whose Fault?"

Mariella Krause, "17 Ways to Kill Your Co-Worker"

Susan Kuchinskas, "No Fault Murder"

Deborah Lacy, "Please See Me"

Bette Golden Lamb, "The Old Studio"

J.J. Lamb, "Two Buck Hitch"

Margaret Lucke, "Two Hundred Miles"

Susan C. Shea, "The Champagne Girl"

Robin C. Stuart, "SegFault"

Nancy Tingley, "IF, IF, IF"

CJ Verburg, "Birdbrain"

Fault Lines Anthology, continued

We received many great submissions, which made the selection process both fun and challenging. All submissions were read blind (readers did not know the authors' names) by at least three people. Thank you to the submissions and selections team: Mysti Berry, Margie Bunting, Pat Dusenbury, Heather Haven, Thonie Hevron, Mariella Krause, Rita Lakin, Margaret Lucke, Ana Manwaring, and Terry Shames. Margaret Lucke is the anthology's editor and project coordinator.

Why is the book called *Fault Lines*? The most obvious reference is to earthquakes and to the seismic activity and susceptibility that many people associate with Northern California. But a writer's imagination can take the phrase in many other directions.

Fault can also refer to blame, liability, guilt, culpability, weakness, accountability, error, imperfection, criticism, condemnation, failing, foible, frailty, defect, flaw, weakness, sin, no-fault divorce, etc.

Lines can mean not only cracks in the earth but also pencil marks, family and ancestral connections, boundaries, lines drawn in the sand, cord or twine, fishing equipment, etc. Not to mention the lines the author is putting on the page.

You can look forward to an anthology filled with wonderful reading.

Margaret Lucke flings words around as a writer, editor, and teacher of fiction writing classes. Her most recent novel is *Snow Angel*, about the frantic search for a child who goes missing just as her father is about to testify in a high-profile murder trial. She is also the author of two how-to books on writing and the editor of the *Fault Lines* anthology. Visit her at www.margaret.lucke.com

Member News



New Releases

The Cambodian Curse and Other Stories, a locked room mystery collection by Gigi Pandian with stories from the Jaya Jones universe of characters, October 16 by Henery Press

Dark Mural and *Dark Exhibit* by Rick Homan, books #1 and #2 in the Nicole Tang Noonan Mysteries, September 25, self-published on Amazon

Terry Shames' short story, "Bring It," will be included in *Mystery Most Edible*, the 2019 Malice Domestic anthology.

Getting Old Can Hurt You, by Rita Lakin, book #7 in the Gladdy Gold series, is now out in its British version.

Awards

A Dying Note, book 6 in Ann Parker's Silver Rush historical mystery series, recently received two awards from the Colorado Independent Publishers Association (CIPA): first place (gold) for the Mystery category and second place (silver) for the Historical Fiction category.

Miscellaneous

The Lambs, Bette and J.J., were offered an audio contract from Books in Motion for their new Gina Mazzio book, *Bone Point*, even before the novel was released. Books in Motion will now have produced audio versions of all eight books in the series. They also requested to read Bette's new standalone, *The Russian Girl*, for possible release in audio. Another morale booster was word from *The Writer* that one of J.J.'s short stories was short-listed for the magazine's "The Coming Changes" contest.

Question of the Quarter



What literary character (from your own or another author's writings) do you aspire to be?

I can't say I aspire to be like any particular character but I admire the innate decency of Donna Leon's Brunetti, and I find much to relate to in Ann Cleeves' Vera Stanhope character. ***Priscilla Royal***

I'm stuck but my husband wants to be Louise Penny's Chief Inspector Armand Gamache. Honorable and ethical Gamache teaches his rookies four sentences they need to say and mean: "I don't know"; "I need help"; "I'm sorry"; and "I was wrong." ***Ellen Kirschman***

Initially I had a hard time coming up with an answer. I've read so much that trying to pick a favorite book or character is almost impossible. Then I noticed it could be a character from my own writing and got an idea. So, I choose Harriet Holden from my first book, *Wyoming Escape*. Commonly known simply as Harry or Aunt Harry, she runs the family guest ranch and is a no-nonsense, down-to-earth character who takes care of her family and friends. Nothing much fazes her, including nasty drunks, someone running from the law, or a dirty cop. She's got the well-tested, grounded self-confidence that I wish I had more of—in addition to being loved and respected. ***Kate Wyland***

Okay, I'll play. I want to be the character in my own mystery series. Gladdy Gold is smart and wise and funny and younger than I am. And married to a smart and wise and funny guy. ***Rita Lakin***

I don't aspire to be a literary character. All right, I'll play. When I was sixteen I wanted to be Peter Gunn. Tall, thin, Ivy League suits, cool jazz. ***Jim Guigli***

Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Not only did he aspire to do the right thing during a difficult time, but he had just the best name! Imagine going through life with the name Atticus. ***Heather Haven***

Actually, I love Gina Mazzio, RN from our eight-book Medical Thriller Series. Who wouldn't want to be a savvy Italian ex-Bronxite who takes tons of chances in order to help others in trouble? When Gina's there, no one walks alone. ***Bette Golden Lamb***

No doubt a little late in life for me, but I sure as hell would have enjoyed being Travis McGee in that wonderful series by John D. McDonald. I also kinda like my own series character, Zachariah Tobias Rolfe III. If for no other reason than he lives in Nevada rather than Florida. ***J.J. Lamb***

Jo from *Little Women*. Relentless, determined, passionate about writing and being a published author. I feel I have aspired to that since I was 14. ***Marcia Rosen***

Question of the Quarter, continued

I would like to be Harry Potter because my travels are limited by my age, and I would need to use magic to go on ventures. *Bourne Morris*

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



It's All about YOU!

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

Please contact **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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