

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime † Northern California Chapter

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Dear Sisters and Misters,

Whether you are a writer or a fan, you should consider attending a conference at some point. And if you want to go to the biggest wow-fest ever, it has to be Bouchercon. The Bouchercon held in New Orleans in September was one of the best ever. With almost 2,000 attendees, it was also the biggest. The organizers of the event are to be congratulated for not just wrangling the herd of writers, but also producing a smooth-running, terrific conference with way too many interesting and informative panels, way too many choices of events, and way too many outside attractions. Oh yes, and way too much rich food (groan). If you are a fan, the number of “star” attendees was over the top and, as always, most of them were gracious and approachable. In short, this was a “way too much” conference.

Our October workshop followed hard on the heels, and Ana Manwaring, Malena Eljumaily, and Jenny Carless are to be congratulated for their hard work, which paid off big time. We hope this will become a staple of Norcal Sisters in Crime, in our continuing efforts to support our writing community. One of the attendees said to me that she had spent a lot of money attending workshops and conferences, and that this was the best ever! Thanks to Kelli Stanley, Deborah Crombie, Helen Sedwick, and Cindy Sample for the incredible work they put in to make it such a glowing success.

Speaking of our writing community, I am thrilled to report that we now have over 130 members—a great number of participants. We can all learn so much from each other, so the more the merrier.

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President's Message, continued

In November, we look forward to another terrific Author Showcase. I am always blown away by the number of talented, hard-working authors we have in the Bay Area. One thing that occurred to me during the workshop is that it would be wonderful if we had a mentoring program for beginning writers. Of course the pre-published writer can join the Sisters in Crime Guppies, an ongoing sub-group that has been of enormous value. But if any of you out there are interested in teaming up with an experienced writer for more one-on-one help, please let me know and I'll see if I can match you with someone.

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

Elsewhere in this newsletter I've written a report on the Bay Area Book Festival.

Continue to watch the website for news of upcoming events. Elin Barnes has a lot in store for the coming year. And don't forget the holiday party, where we team up with MWA Norcal at Borderlands Books on December 10.

Hope you are having a great year. Thank you for your support for each other and for your continuing enthusiastic participation in Sisters in Crime.

Sincerely,
Terry Shames

Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC Norcal Events

Saturday, November 5, 12:00-2:00 p.m.

Sisters in Crime Norcal Author Showcase

Books, Inc., 2251 Chestnut Street, San Francisco

Please join us for another spirited event featuring readings (and prize drawings) by members with new books published since the June showcase. Show your support for participating authors, who include:

Elin Barnes

Janet Dawson

Mary Feliz

Sabrina Flynn

Heather Haven

Bette Lamb

Camille Minichino

Gigi Pandian

Ann Parker

Carol Verburg

Kirsten Weiss

Saturday, December 10 (please note - 2nd Saturday), 12:00-2:00 p.m.

Holiday Meet-and-Greet: Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America

Borderlands Books, 866 Valencia St., San Francisco

Again this year, we will be joining with the local Mystery Writers of America chapter to sponsor a holiday-themed social event, featuring fabulous food and brilliant company. We hope you can join us!



No Meeting in January 2017

As always, we'll be taking a break in January and will resume our monthly meetings in February.

HAPPY★NEW★YEAR

Check our website for more info regarding venues and directions: <http://www.sincnorcal.org>.

In Case You Missed It . . .

If you weren't able to join us at our August, September and October events, here's what you missed.



August Meeting: Animal forensics specialist Beth Wictim told us about her work as director of the UC Davis Veterinary Genetics Lab, investigating animals as victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators of crimes. She explained the retrieval and use of DNA evidence from animal blood, hair, bones/teeth, tissue, and urine/feces and how it can be used to help solve criminal cases. Don't be surprised if you see more references to "furrensics" in our writers' future offerings!

September Meeting: Firearms instructors Joe Torre and Denise King of the Milpitas Shooting Range walked us through a variety of firearms, including rifles, pistols and shotguns. They also gave us legal pointers and helped us understand what guns different types of characters might use. In addition, they had many guns on display for our perusal.



October Workshop: Process. Publish. Promote: More than 30 members attended the October workshop, which was a resounding success. In the words of



attendee Diana Chambers: Thanks to Kelli Stanley for her brilliant "Building Blocks of Character and Plot" discussion. To Deborah Crombie for her personal story of determination and talent-will-out. To Helen Sedwick for her sharp legal mind. And to Cindy Sample for her wild and witty "120 shades



of Marketing."

Thanks also to event organizers Ana Manwaring, Jenny Carless and Malena Eljumaily, who outdid themselves.



Report on the Bay Area Book Festival

by Terry Shames

On June 4 and 5, Norcal Sisters in Crime and Capitol Crimes SinC participated in the second annual Bay Area Book Festival in Berkeley. We had a great time and the weather was beautiful. We sold some books and chapter members had the chance to introduce themselves to the community. Our booth was paid for by a generous grant from Sisters in Crime National. Additional expenses were paid for out of chapter funds.

Participating in the festival meant a lot of work, some of which was associated with first-time participation. Even so, things went fairly smoothly.

We sent out a survey to those who participated, and here are some of the results:

Travel: Participants traveled from far and wide. A few were lucky to live close by. The farthest came from San Diego, but MOST participants traveled at least an hour.

Goals: Eighty-five percent of respondents said they met their goals, which ranged from checking out the festival to wanting to support SinC and connect with other members to meeting readers and selling books.

High points: The overwhelming response was that people loved the chance to be social with other sisters and misters – to meet members from the two chapters and to connect with old friends. Eighty-five percent also said they would participate again.

Disappointments:

1. Most thought that the one-hour selling slot was not long enough. I'm not sure how we will address this, as there is limited space and lots of authors, but we have taken note.
2. Some light traffic hours on Saturday and Sunday. One of the reasons was that the festival was too spread out. The festival organizers are aware of this and have promised to address the problem next year.

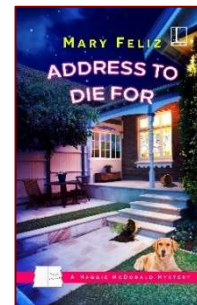
Suggestions: Most of them centered around problems with not enough space to browse and trying to entice people to stop by the booth. I won't go into them in detail, but if you are interested, contact me at terryshames@gmail.com.

In addition to the survey results, I had some thoughts about the festival. Several people put in enormous time and effort (you know who you are!). Some of it will not need to be duplicated, but in the future we may need to ask for additional volunteers. Also, now that we know how the booths "work," I think there could be much better use of the space. A huge thank you to those who participated and to those who answered the survey.



Promotion, Not Perfection

by Mary Feliz



Pushing my books promised to be one of the toughest parts of being an author for me. Despite a career in corporate communications, marketing is just not my thing. In fact, it scares me silly.

But it's part of being a published author, so I decided to start early when the stakes were small. Nearly a year before my first mystery was released, a friend told me she was holding a holiday craft fair featuring our mutual friends as vendors. I jumped at the chance to "practice my pitch."

I asked if it would be helpful to have someone to direct people to the different venues within her house where vendors were set up. She loved the idea. I knew I'd have a useful purpose other than promoting my books, so I could call the day a success even if I never mentioned my books.

Be Prepared to Improvise



First promotional items

I'd hoped to have cover copy for my promotional material, but as the date approached, I had to give up on that plan. Instead, I created a "series" graphic using artwork from my website, and I designed pens and bookmarks for my swag. Both were items I knew I'd want to bring to conferences when my book was released. Ordering test versions helped me learn the lead time required and which parts of my design worked and which didn't. I loved how both turned out, but next time I'd use fewer words and a larger font. Few people turned the bookmark over to read the back, and several people thought my character's name was my name.

On a whim, I made my "corpse cookies" and ordered crime scene ribbon and fabric from an internet vendor. With a black table cover, I was good to go. Based on the suggestions of friends, I planned to put bookmarks and pens in wine glasses. A gruesome "R.I.P." bottle of red wine picked up on the spur of the moment was fun to pair with the glasses. Driving to the event, I regretted not buying flowers or making a stand-up sign about the books. Next time, I promised myself, remembering that today's event was about practice, not perfection.

Promotion, not Perfection, continued



Corpse cookies

With a cooler full of water and snacks, I was set. After greeting my first ten customers, I realized I needed to talk more about my book and say it was a local murder mystery. The local angle was something the guests responded to.

By noon, I was out of cookies. Once people had sampled the cookies, they asked about the book, and it was easy for me to answer their questions. The oddity of having a “welcome” booth that sported tape blaring “CRIME SCENE – DO NOT CROSS” also sparked comments.

By the end of the day, I’d distributed 100 bookmarks and pens to probable readers who will likely tell friends about my books. And as the day wore on, my tagline tripped off my tongue. I’d asked friends and vendors to inspect my booth, eavesdrop on my pitch and offer suggestions for both. Their glowing reports and constructive critiques gave my confidence a huge boost. What I’d imagined as a shakedown tour turned out to be a perfect promotional opportunity I might have overlooked.

This summer, Kensington released the book. And that meant social media blitzes, talking to shop owners about carrying the book, a few book talks, and signings. None of which I’d done before. Again, I jumped into the deep end, saying yes to everything and asking a lot of questions.

I shifted my thinking. I wasn’t “doing marketing.” I was learning about how to help libraries, bookstores and publishers sell books. My goal became making as many mistakes as possible so that I could learn.

To my great relief, I discovered that libraries, booksellers and readers love books (what a surprise!) and authors. They want to help. They want to offer their expertise and were flattered to be asked to explain how things work.

Get Help!

When my book was released and I starting to have signings and give talks, I knew I needed to take cookies with me. They’d become my security blanket. But I learned that I couldn’t possibly create corpse cookies and sign books in the same week, let alone the same day. Luckily for me, one of the vendors at the original event was a baker. I contacted her again, told her what I wanted to do, showed her pictures, and gave her my budget. We came up with two types of cookies. I purchased a dozen of each from her, and if I need more, we supplement with less fancy but equally tasty chocolate chips, brownies, or plain sugar cookies. The cookies are popular and a great ice breaker. She’s giving me a discount because I offer repeat business and have referred a number of clients.



Cookies by Debbie Cunningham.
<http://www.thedessertstudio.net>

Promotion, Not Perfection, continued

Say Yes!

Knowing that I already had the cookies, bookmarks and table dressing made approaching my first actual speaking engagement much simpler. When a local library enthusiastically offered me a speaking gig, I said “Yes!” But when I returned to my car, I choked. What was I going to talk about? For an hour! Would anyone show up? Yikes!

Enlist Friends

First, I decided, I needed friends. What if I invited writer friends to share the event with me? If they invited their friends, we might just have a decent turnout. And if we didn’t, we’d have fun talking among ourselves. I asked two friends from Norcal SinC, and they both enthusiastically agreed. Suddenly, I decided our talk would be a good thing, a fun thing, and I stopped dreading it.

But what could we talk about? We were all very different, and our books have nothing in common except they all might end up on a mystery shelf. One is noir. One is a fast-paced, gritty police thriller. And mine is a cozy . . . with cookies and animals.

Experiment

I thought we might nab the widest audience if we talked about the world of publishing. Since nobody really has any clear idea where publishing is going, nobody could realistically question what we had to say . . . I hoped. Susan Bickford could talk about her traditional contract with Kensington for *A Short Time to Die* (Feb. 2017). Elin Barnes could talk about her indie career with *Smoke Screen* and *Justification for Murder*. And I could talk about my e-only contract with Kensington for *Address to Die For*, *Scheduled to Death*, and *Dead Storage*. The librarian loved the idea and printed up flyers. We told all our friends and our neighborhood networks, and we hoped for the best.

Keep It Light



On the evening of the event, I picked up my cookies and some others that Elin had ordered. Susan brought the creepiest grapes ever (“ghost fingers”). The room filled up and no one looked too scary. And we started to talk about our books. And we laughed and had fun. And the audience had fun. One guy in the front row fell asleep, but the rest of the crowd asked interesting questions. If we didn’t know the answers, we said we didn’t know and speculated. And we invited people to take our cards and contact us if they wanted to talk more. The library closing announcement came over the intercom, and everyone ignored it. They kept asking questions as they bought our books and helped us clean up our table and the room.

Promotion, Not Perfection, continued



(l. to r.) Librarian Amy Helmig, Susan Bickford, Mary Feliz, Elin Barnes

In the end, the library had to kick us all out, but we had a blast and we're pretty sure the audience did, too. The library loved us and wants us back. Best of all, I've uncovered the secret to this marketing stuff. If I can find a way to make it fun for me, I can enjoy it instead of fearing it. And every time I try something and have fun doing it, it makes clearing the next marketing hurdle easier.

Like every other part of writing, promotion can be a challenge, but I can do it. I like learning how bookstores operate, what I can do to help them, and why they say no to some of my proposals. I'm keenly interested in all parts of this business and eager to learn when they have time to teach me, which is most of the time. People like to talk about what they know.

And as long as I'm learning, I'm having fun. Marketing? Piece of cake . . . or cookie, as the case may be.



Mary Feliz called Silicon Valley her home for 30 years and learned firsthand that the high-tech heartland is really a series of small towns filled with quirky characters and customs. She's worked in the Fortune 500 world and for mom-and-pop enterprises, competed in whale boat races and done synchronized swimming. She attends professional organizer conferences in her character's (professional organizer Maggie McDonald) stead, but Maggie's skills leave her literally in the dust.

Writing Comedy is Serious Business

by Heather Haven



For as long as I can remember, lurking inside me was the heart of a comedy writer. I wanted nothing more than to be writing funny quips for people, like Woody Allen did for Sid Caesar on “Your Show of Shows,” back in the fifties. I couldn’t image a greater existence.

I was hardly more than a kid when I got my very first job as a writer in New York City, writing funny ads and commercials for No Soap Radio. There were four of us and every day we sat around a table coming up with funny scenarios, gags, and punchlines. Not only was I in heaven, but I got paid a weekly salary!

Of course, the salary was so low I had to work in the theater at night just to make ends meet. No Soap Radio was a short-lived chapter in my career, but the things I learned sitting at that roundtable with those talented writers held fast for the rest of my writing life.

The art of comedy is serious business and you’d better know your business. You’d better know timing, delivery, and what the funny words are. By funny words—and most people don’t think about this—I mean words that automatically cause people to smile or chortle. For instance:

Orange? Not so funny. Kumquat? Funny.

Move? Not so funny. Jiggle? Funny.

Glasses? Not so funny. Spectacles? Funny. Or maybe more funny. Wait a minute. Maybe not so funny.

Testicles? Whoops! Never mind. But in comedy, write toward the unexpected. It often gets a laugh.

Back to words. If you don’t have the words in the right order, with the right rhythm and cadence, it’s probably not going to work, no matter which words you’ve chosen. This is why comics will work on a one-line joke for weeks until they get everything right.

One of them was Rita Rudner. I worked with Rita on Broadway when she played Lily St. Regis in *Annie* back in the 80’s. Rita went on to have a great career as one of the few female stand-up comics who was funny while still being a lady. No vulgarity with that one; the humor was in her ideas and imagery. I was at *Annie* helping with costume changes, subsidizing my day job. Rita knew that job was as a comedy writer.

Writing Comedy is Serious Business, continued

So many times she would run off stage for a quick change and crack her latest version of a joke, interchanging a word or two to make it better. As I helped her in and out of costume, we would discuss why today's version was better than yesterday's or maybe not so good. After the show, I would often go to the comedy club where she was performing, probably The Improv, to see how the audience liked her latest take on the joke. The structure of the sentence always, always, always made a difference in the laugh.

Speaking of comics, have you noticed they often talk in combative terms? "I slaughtered 'em last night." "Man, that audience was murder." "Go out and kill 'em, pal." Phrases like that.

There's a reason why comics are so serious about their laughs. If you don't get the laugh, you might as well be dead.

During *Annie*, one of my humorous one-act plays, *The Closet Corpse or Will The Real Dead Body Please Stand Up?* was in limited-run off-off-Broadway. What off-off-Broadway really means is there is no union involved, unlike Broadway. Equity actors can, however, get permission to perform in a non-union play unsalaried or, if they're lucky, a split of the box office take. The actors in my play were seasoned performers and knew their stuff.

One actor, however, didn't think the new rewording of a line was going to get a laugh. We both became a little hard-nosed about it. She said it didn't seem funny to her. I said to trust me, the audience will laugh. That night the rewritten punchline got a huge laugh, and she was surprised. Maybe I should have told her when you throw in the word 'kumquat,' you've got a better chance.

I've found writing a novel is pretty much the same approach. Imagery, rhythm, cadence, and the right choice of words blending together can create a sock-o punchline. And with a funny mystery series, the corpse better be laughing when it hits the ground.

Otherwise, you're dead.

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

Images of Bouchercon 2016 -- New Orleans



Susan with SinC founder Sara Paretsky



Swag from Heather and Cindy



One of Ellen's panels



SinC National Board, including Gigi and Susan



Getting ready to parade in the rain!



Norcal's awesome auction donation



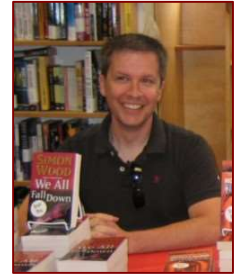
Terry with Lesa Holstine



Moderator and outgoing SinC President Catriona

Shelf Life: Self Worth

by Simon Wood



A friend sent me this cartoon a few weeks ago and it made me laugh, but it burned a little bit too. Exposure is the E-word of the writing world.

"We pay in exposure" is an all too familiar phrase that's always heartbreaking to hear. It's heartbreaking because you've put a ton of time into writing a book or story, working on your craft, and building your skill set, just to hear someone tell you that's all great, but I'm not paying for it. It puts the writer in a tricky and awkward bargaining position. On one hand there's a publishing credit up for grabs and on the other there's obscurity. A fight breaks out in your mind. *Yes, there could be a paying opportunity around the corner and maybe I should wait for it, but it doesn't seem to be in sight at the moment, and this offer is, so should I give this one up and hope it leads to something...although it burns to give my work away...urrrghh...* You see the writer's plight.

Shelf Life: Self Worth, continued

Yes, I gave stories to magazines and websites in the early years. The credit was worth more than the cash...well, that was my thinking/delusion. When I look back on everything, it's hard to tell whether the exposure argument got me anywhere or not. I know it cost me a few times. I gave a couple of stories away that ended up being wanted by some very high-profile anthologies which I lost out on because I'd given up first rights when I gave the stories away for exposure. Note to budding writers: you lose your first rights when you give a story away for exposure and that can be expensive in the long run.

I think the issue with the exposure argument is that the writer is giving away something tangible (e.g., the story/book) for something intangible (e.g., exposure). And that's where the heartache and soul searching occurs. You've put blood, sweat and tears into something and someone is effectively saying it's worthless. Now, I will say no one that ever asked me to give them a story did it to rip me off. They were honest and well-meaning people who didn't have a way of monetizing their endeavor themselves.

A point came where I said to myself, exposure isn't enough. Validity and legitimacy in what I write comes with a paycheck. I took the adage, "People don't value anything they don't pay for," to heart. It became my hard and fast rule when I went full time as a writer. It might seem mercenary of me, but it has to be that way. I can't afford to give things away now because the bills don't get paid otherwise. Ask yourself, would you do your job if the employer didn't pay?

There are exceptions to the rule, such as charity-related events, bookstore signings, etc.

The thing I have to keep ever mindful of is – a day away from the computer is a day away from completing a book, so I have to be compensated for that. And you know what? Taking this hard line didn't hurt me. Yes, I lost some opportunities, but I gained new ones.

At the end of the day, I can't say I won't give something away for exposure purposes but it will be a calculated risk that I can live with (and without bitching after the fact) and not a flight of fancy. Storytelling is a serious business as well as a creative pursuit.

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

Writers' Police Academy: Getting Down & Dirty in Wisconsin

by Vinnie Hansen



Many Norcal Sisters have attended the Writers' Police Academy (WPA) in the past—some multiple times. I'm late to the party, with my first time at the conference being August 2016 in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The WPA is a small conference (about 300 attendees) at which law enforcement officers, firefighters, private investigators, and EMTs work hands-on with writers who are eager to get their facts straight. Writers learn to handcuff, lift prints, and shoot. Participants examine blood splatter and practice takedowns. All kinds of fun stuff!



During my class on Defense and Arrest Tactics, I learned how to transform a flinch into a combat stance, baton snapped and in position, my hand in a pincer grip. I'm ready to swipe a knee and then backhand the other.

The conference offered nine special classes. I received both of my top two choices: a field trip to the Green Bay Correctional Institution and "shoot/don't shoot" scenarios. I'm happy to report that I didn't shoot anyone I wasn't supposed to.



Lee Lofland, the organizer of WPA, starts each program day with a bang. The first day, attendees arrived at the technical college where classes were held to find a staged car collision. We watched from the sidelines as paramedics,



firefighters, and police officers worked their magic.

The amount of knowledge I gained from my four days is too extensive to share here, so I'll offer just the following nuggets:

- A person can bleed out in three to five minutes.

Writers' Police Academy, continued

- If someone is bleeding out, I can now improvise a tourniquet with a two-inch-wide band of material and something to twist it up good.
- In hand-to-hand combat, the rule is “flesh to bone and bone to flesh.” In other words, palm jab your opponent’s chin, but use a fist in the gut.
- An officer’s vest weighs about 6 pounds. The belt and equipment add many more pounds, but better to sweat than bleed.
- Officers wear tee shirts to prevent chafing from their equipment.
- The police do NOT tell people to stay in town. That could constitute arrest.
- Miranda Rights are given only in cases of a custodial interrogation.
- Officers are twice as likely to kill themselves as kill another.
- What is an officer’s most important tool? His discretion.
- Racking a gun might sound macho, but officers carry their weapons “locked and loaded.”
- K9 officers are so well trained, they won’t go #2 without permission.
- If you want to be a hero, join the fire department.

In addition to a greater understanding of and appreciation for the demands on first responders, I left the conference with a plethora of business cards, contact numbers and addresses of professionals willing to help attendees with future questions.



Officer Dernbach with Pal. Pal uses wind scent to locate missing persons, good and bad, then bites and holds until commanded not to. He does drug sniffing, too.

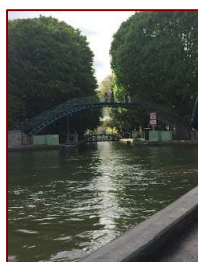
Vinnie Hansen fled the South Dakota prairie for the California coast the day after high school graduation. A reading addict since childhood, Vinnie is now the author of numerous short stories and the Carol Sabala mysteries. *Murder, Honey* is now available in the best-selling e-collection, *Sleuthing Women: 10 First-in-Series Mysteries*. The seventh installment in the series, *Black Beans and Venom*, was a finalist for the Claymore Award. Still sane after 27 years of teaching high school English, Vinnie has retired and lives in Santa Cruz, California with her husband and the requisite cat.

Europe by Train: Paris and the Van Gogh Trail (part 1)

by Diana Chambers



From Zurich, our TGV—Train Grande Vitesse—is smooth and speedy, and by mid-afternoon we have arrived at the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Soon we are standing on rue Chateau d’Eau, outside of the courtyard of what will be our home for three weeks. Three flights up the polished oak stairway and we enter what was once probably an attic, then a servant’s room, now an elegant artist-writer’s loft.



After ten days of pleasure-travel, I am eager to begin my research for two different book projects, both historicals. Here in Europe, you take in the history with every breath, every step. Our first steps take us to the nearby Canal St. Martin, a familiar and now very trendy *quartier*.

We have dinner at Fric-Frac, a casual-cool spot on the canal, then stroll back to our studio.

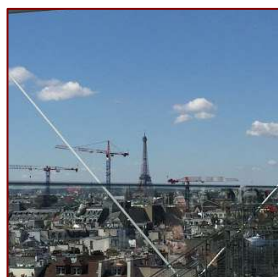


The next day we head for the modern art museum, Centre Pompidou, and, like everyone, head first for the exterior escalator with its world-beating view.



We’re here to catch the last day of a major Anselm Kiefer retrospective. A German born just after WW2, Kiefer deals with the legacy of this conflict in large and powerful multimedia works of crematoria, burning fires, desolate landscapes. I am surprised to learn that one of his great influences was Vincent Van Gogh,

a subject of my research. In fact, as a student, Kiefer followed the Van Gogh trail that we too are here to take.



We lunch at the rooftop restaurant. Lovely, but \$9 for a bottle of water? I have forgotten to order a (free) *carafe d’eau*, available everywhere. Later I wander other floors, recognizing the hand of Master Matisse.



Europe by Train: Paris and the Van Gogh Trail (part 1) Continued

A day later we are aboard another train for Arles, where Van Gogh produced some of his most famous work – including my favorite, *Starry Night Over the Rhone*.



We connect through the ancient Roman town of Nimes, where I pause before this plaque in memory of deported Jewish children.

Our train to Arles is late, but we enjoy our time in the station's café. We ride the train with some *sympathique* locals who tell us that these yellow fields we have admired are rapeseed, widely used to produce canola oil.



We soon arrive in Arles, this station rural and small. I like it already! We walk along the Rhone to our hotel, just inside the old city walls.



Hotel du Musée is a restored, centuries-old villa with two lovely courtyards.



We are following Vincent's route in Arles, seeing the very spots where he painted some of his most famous work. The city has erected plaques showing the painting in front of the actual view. There is a monument to Vincent himself at the park.



I am also trying to visualize the town as it was 100 years ago, streets my characters might have walked and worked.

Europe by Train: Paris and the Van Gogh Trail (part 1) Continued



I visit the cemetery, another step back in time. We reach the Yellow House, which we later learn was bombed during WW2 and later built with different proportions.

The walls are hung with period photos and I am back in time.



Inside I meet the owner's daughter, who tells me her father will soon arrive with old documents of the period to show me. The



We next go to the Square du Forum, the setting for Van Gogh's Café de Nuit. Ahead is the Roman Coliseum.

We find the hospital where Vincent was treated after cutting off his ear, but where is the courtyard scene?



Returning to the river, we see our own Starry Night over the Rhone.



Down the lane from our hotel is a Provençal resto built inside the old wall. Our pizza is excellent, testifying to this region's Mediterranean roots.



It's but a few steps back to our hotel, where we fall into bed.
(Look for Part 2 in the February 2017 issue.)

Diana Chambers is SinC Norcal's current Vice President and the author of two Nick Daley Series books: *Stinger* and *The Company She Keeps*.



Member News

New Releases

Address to Die For by [Mary Feliz](#), debut novel in the Maggie McDonald Mysteries, July 19 by Kensington Lyrical Underground

Scheduled to Death by [Mary Feliz](#), book #2 of the Maggie McDonald Mysteries, January 2017 by Kensington Lyrical Underground

Deceptive Practices by [Simon Wood](#), book #4 of the Bay Area Quartet, November 15 by Thomas & Mercer.

Michelangelo's Ghost by [Gigi Pandian](#), book #4 of the Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt Mysteries, October 2016 by Henery Press

Rotten Dates by [Vinnie Hansen](#), book #3 in the Carol Sabala Mysteries, re-released October 2016 by Misterio Press

A Life for a Life: A Mystery Novel by [Lynda McDaniel](#), October 15 by Lynda McDaniel Books

An Unsettling Crime for Samuel Craddock by [Terry Shames](#), prequel to the Samuel Craddock series, January 3, 2017 by Seventh Street books

"*The Glass Birdhouse*" by [Carole Price](#), published in *Happy Homicides #4: Fall Into Crime*, an anthology of stories by 13 mystery writers

New Contracts

[Carole Price](#) has signed a contract with Black Opal Books to publish *Vineyard Prey*, third in her Shakespeare in the Vineyard series.

Nancy Tingley has signed a contract with Swallow Press/Ohio University Press to publish her first mystery, *A Head in Cambodia: A Jenna Murphy Mystery*.

[Ellen Kirschman](#) signed a contract with Oceanview for book #3 of the Dot Meyerhoff mystery series, *The Fifth Reflection*, to be released in July 2017.

Awards

"*Blood on the Stairs*" by [Jim Guigli](#) won first place for unpublished short fiction in the 2016 Safety Writers Association annual contest and will appear with several other Sacramento stories later this year on Amazon.

Miscellaneous

[Ellen Kirschman](#) now blogs regularly on The LadyKillers.

Question of the Quarter



It would surprise people to know that I . .

. . . rode Mongolian ponies with the cowboys who came to our yurt. *Patricia E. Canterbury*

. . . am the ninth of ten children. *Vinnie Hansen*

. . . worked backstage on Broadway as a dresser for 10 years on shows including: Same Time, Next Year; Pippin; Annie; A Chorus Line. *Heather Haven*

. . . have been entering sweepstakes for 25 years; prizes included a Caribbean cruise, a week in a luxury resort in Turks & Caicos, \$1,000, and a year's membership to Massage Envy. *Margie Bunting*

. . . never graduated from high school. *Susan Bickford*

. . . wrote my first mystery series when I was in middle school; it was called *The Winstons*.
Elin Barnes

. . . was born in Sarasota, Florida, home of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus; my mother was a performer and my father was an elephant trainer. *Heather Haven*

. . . once sang in a rock band called The Possums, a short-lived band with a lot of toothy members . .
. and we were loud. *Terry Shames*

. . . was once 6 feet tall and blonde (joke); I was once a probation officer. *Ellen Kirschman*

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 **Elin Barnes**, Event Coordinator (belinbs@gmail.com), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter Editor (mbunting@sbcglobal.net), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions

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