

# THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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## Dear Sisters and Misters,

Happy New Year! May it be a healthy, productive one for us all.

In utter humility I approach my first President's Letter, aka my *Love Letter to Sisters in Crime, Part One*.

First of all, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to Margie Bunting for her stewardship of our newsletter, *The Stiletta*, which she has crafted into an exceptional publication.

I joined Sisters in Crime about twelve years ago. I was new to the Bay Area and had published my first novel, *Stinger*, a spy story set in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was based on a screenplay I'd written several years earlier in Los Angeles. Back then, few people had heard of Afghanistan, and I drew mostly blank looks upon mentioning the locale. Which was probably why my script was optioned but never produced.

I was fond of my characters, and when they asked me keep them in the world, I did. I learned that novel-writing and script-writing are vastly different endeavors. I've always been one for jumping in the water and learning as I go. And I did. Sometimes I cringe looking back at my early work, but it was a beginning. We all know the bravery required for even those simple words, Chapter One.

My publicist at the time, Kim McMillan, suggested I join a writers' group. Not much of a joiner (to my detriment in life!), I was raising a young child in Half Moon Bay and didn't want to miss a moment. However, I tiptoed forward and am so grateful I took her advice. In 2006 I attended my first Left Coast Crime in Seattle and was miraculously assigned a panel. Of



## CONTENTS

Page 1:	President's Letter
Page 3:	Exec Committee Bios
Page 6:	Upcoming Events
Page 7:	In Case You Missed It
Page 8:	Character Development in a Series
Page 10:	When Life Experiences Flavor Your Novel
Page 12:	Member Profiles: Thonie Hevron
Page 16:	Sue Grafton Tributes
Page 21:	From Our Retiring President
Page 22:	Member News
Page 24:	Question of the Quarter

## President's Letter, continued

course, I was terrified. What would I say? How could I speak in front of so many people?

I was equally terrified at facing the Saturday night banquet alone and friendless. Timidly I asked my co-panelists if I could join them, and they graciously welcomed me. One of these men, Rick Blechta, a Canadian, introduced me to Louise Penny – and it was at this event that she won her first major award.

When my daughter began high school, I had more time. Four years ago, my brilliant predecessor, Terry Shames, asked me to take over her Events position as she became SinC Norcal vice president. Again, I was terrified, but by then I had vowed to step into my fear. I accepted. What a growth experience that was!

Now I find myself president of our Sisters in Crime chapter. And am again fearful, this time of following in the gigantic footsteps (no offense, ladies) and dynamic leadership of Susan Shea and Terry Shames. I look forward to embracing the challenge.

I am telling you my story to urge each of you to consider stepping forward and becoming more active in our group. Please introduce yourselves to me or anyone on the SinC Norcal board during one of our meetings, or by email. There are many opportunities for service, networking, and great fun. I know my world has broadened and that yours will, too.

Sincerely,  
Diana Chambers  
President, Sisters in Crime, Norcal



# Introducing Our 2018 Executive Committee Members (and their 2018 writing/reading resolutions)

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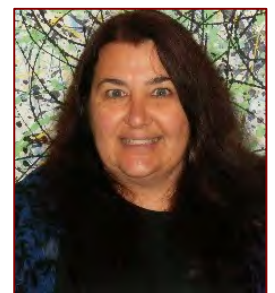
**DIANA CHAMBERS, President:** I was born with a book in one hand and a passport in the other. I began my early explorations in the library, plotting adventures on my world globe. After several years scriptwriting, I heeded my characters' call for their own novel. The first was *Stinger*, a spy story taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Continuing in the espionage genre, I am now working on a WWII novel set in Asia and Paris. For 2018 I have vowed a year of no shopping (except books!). [www.dianarchambers.com](http://www.dianarchambers.com).

**MARIELLA KRAUSE, Vice President/Secretary:** Known for my impromptu ukulele playing and my absurd love of cats, I'm also the author of *Terror in Taffeta* and *Dying on the Vine*, the first two novels in the Kelsey McKenna Destination Wedding Mysteries. While my given name is Mariella, I find "Marla" looks better on a book jacket, and I will answer to pretty much anything that begins with an M. I live in Oakland with my husband, Tim, two cats, and an excessive number of Apple devices. My writing resolution for 2018 is to finish the young adult novel I'm working on so I can get to work on my next Kelsey book! [www.marla-cooper.com](http://www.marla-cooper.com)



**ANA MANWARING, Treasurer:** I coach and edit through JAM Manuscript Consulting and teach creative writing at Napa Valley College. I am working on the third of the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventure trilogy, *Nothing Comes After Z*. I am a former lifestyle columnist, and my book reviews can be found at [www.anamanwaring.com](http://www.anamanwaring.com). For 2018 I am publishing book 1 of the JadeAnne Stone trilogy, revising book 2, finishing book 3, and completing the memoir of my years in Mexico. In my spare time I'm collecting and publishing my poetry.

**MALENA ELJUMAILY, Membership Chair:** I love to read mystery novels, especially those with cats on the covers. 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 even sell a few hats and scarves now and again. I live in Santa Rosa. I have about twenty 10-minute plays that have never been produced, and I vow to spend the time to review calls for submissions and send them out.



## 2018 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**HEATHER HAVEN, Event Coordinator:** I try to be a good human being and a good writer, but not always in that order. I am the author of the award-winning Alvarez Family Mysteries, Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries, standalone noir, *Death of a Clown*, and anthology, *Corliss and Other Award-Winning Stories*. **My resolution: Write a full-length Christmas RomCom and read at least one book from every published author we have in SinC Norcal.** The second part is going to take longer than the first, as we have so many good writers in the group. <http://heatherhavenstories.com>



**MARGIE BUNTING, Newsletter Editor:** Although I'm not an author, I'm an avid reader (~200 books a year), and I've loved serving as editor of *The Stiletta* for the past two years. I also keep busy as VP of Education for my Toastmasters club and as a devoted musical theater-goer, wife, mother of two sons, and first-time grandma. I am retired from my HR career and have a B.A. in French. **This year I'm going to jot down notes about the best books I read so if Lesa Holstine asks me to blog about my year's favorite reads again next year, it will be an easier task!**

**MARGARET (PEGGY) LUCKE, Anthology Coordinator :** 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 2018 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>



## 2018 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**MYSTI BERRY, Website Wrangler:** I am an award-winning writer of screenplays, short stories, and novels. After earning a BA in Linguistics from UC Santa Cruz and an MFA from University of San Francisco, I settled in The City's storied, forgotten neighborhood, OMI. My latest short story, "The Johnny Depp Kickline of Doom," was published in *Ellery Queen Magazine* last year, and I'm hard at work on another short story, a novella, and a novel. I share a little redwood box of a house with graphic novelist Dale Berry and three black rescue cats. **My 2018 resolution: Write more, complain less.** <http://mystiberry.com>

**TERRY SHAMES, Past President:** I am just coming off of six years working on behalf of our chapter. During that time I published six award-winning books in the Samuel Craddock series. But you won't get rid of me just yet. I am on the Anthology Committee for *Fault Lines*, the chapter's first anthology, and looking forward to being "just an active member" of the chapter. **My 2018 resolution is to write as much as I can as often as I can.** [www.terryshames.com](http://www.terryshames.com)



***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, 2017.** You can renew your Norcal membership on the [Norcal website](http://www.norcal.org) To renew your national membership, visit [www.sistersincrime.org](http://www.sistersincrime.org) and sign in with your username and password. You should be automatically prompted to renew.

In the November 2017 issue, Terry Shames emphasized 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!

## Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC Norcal Events

**Saturday, February 3, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.**

### ***Annual Meet & Greet***

*West Branch of the Alameda Berkeley Public Library, 1125 University Avenue, Berkeley*

For our first meeting of 2018, there will be announcements of exciting coming events, plenty of time to catch up on everyone's news, and a chance to meet this year's Executive Committee. We will also have a **book swap** at this event, so bring a book (or two) that you have read and can bear to part with, leave it on our book table, pick up any other book that catches your eye, take it home and enjoy! Also, it's a **potluck** so bring a finger food dish to share (no alcohol, please).

**Saturday, March 3, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.**

### ***Book Marketing with Social Media: How to Gain Followers and Sell More Books***

*Potluck (finger foods) and book swap*

*Golden Gate Library, 5606 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland*

**What's all this about "building your platform"?** Using social media to talk to your cousins and besties isn't going to sell many books. To sell books, you have to build a following. That means talking to strangers, just what your mother warned you against! Fear not, for digital marketing strategist Karma Bennett of Future is Fiction Communications is here to show you the ropes. In this presentation we'll discuss how to use social media to promote your book and your brand. This will be a lively presentation with pop culture references and attention-grabbing images squeezed in with so much useful information that you will definitely want to take notes. A sample of the topics includes: the best social network for YOU; what you should share; best practices for building a social media audience; whether and when to repost.

\*By the conclusion of the presentation, you will have an action plan for promoting your book on social media, personalized to what's best for your particular book.

**Saturday, April 7, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.**

### ***The Softer Side of the Criminal Justice System: Juvenile Offenders***

*Potluck (finger foods) and book swap*

*Edenvale Branch Library, 101 Branham Lane East, San Jose*

Judge Portor Goltz will talk about his eight years as the San Mateo County Juvenile Court/Traffic Hearings Officer, where he has dealt with drug trafficking, felons, theft, failed family relationships, and other problems plaguing our society today.

**Check our website and our Facebook page for more info regarding events venues and directions:**

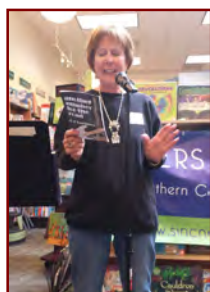
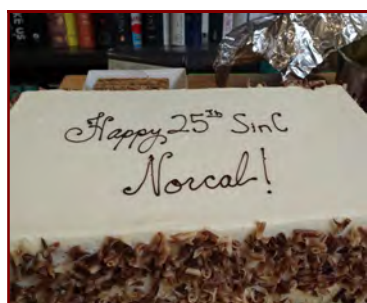
<http://www.sincnorcal.org> [Sisters in Crime Norcal Facebook page](#)

# In Case You Missed It . . .

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

## November Meeting

At our November Author Showcase we heard excerpts from new books read by Norcal Sisters and Misters, and some lucky attendees won those books (and had the opportunity to have them autographed by the author). In addition, we celebrated our chapter's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary!



Carol Verburg



Dana Fredsti



JJ and Bette Lamb



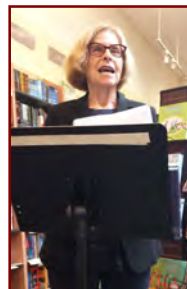
Peggy Lucke



Susan Shea



Vinnie Hansen



Diana Chambers



Terry Shames

## December Meeting



At our December meeting we celebrated the season by mingling with our fellow SinC members and our friends at Mystery Writers of America, by hearing about what both organizations have in store for 2018, and by sampling some scrumptious holiday goodies.



# Character Development in a Series

## by Priscilla Royal

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Part of the fun of a series is how events change a character. As a reader, I want to settle in with my favorite fictionals, find out what life flings at them, and learn how they handle it all. I care—passionately. That is one reason I love long series, each book being just a chapter in a very big novel. Peter Robinson’s Inspector Banks is a good example. Each book is a small step in Banks’ evolution. We see the break-up of his marriage, the growing up of his kids, the various love affairs and how he handles the relationships afterward. There are lots of secondary characters we care about. How will they change and will he ever get back together with . . . Well, that’s a spoiler. And we care about the small stuff. I got upset when Banks gave up (with good reason!) his favored whiskey, and, from the way Robinson has handled that detail, I wasn’t the only one!

Sometimes a writer gives a character some quirk or past that doesn’t really work long-term. Even the best do this. When I suspect this has happened, I want to see how the author gets around it and applaud clever handling. Ian Rankin first drew Rebus as a detective with a Bible always close at hand. For some reason this very Scottish Protestant detail never rang true to me. I don’t know if Rankin began to think the same, but the Bible disappeared early on. This was linked to Rebus’ growing disillusionment with the world and that worked for me.

Minor characters are very important in this process as well, not only in their relationship to the main guys but just for themselves. When I started my own series, I peopled it with ongoing fictionals and some that show up occasionally. As a reader, I often wonder what happened to “X”. Sometimes it is good to let the reader fill in the blanks. Sometimes it is fun to bring the character back. I have an anchoress who was introduced in the second book, shows up again in the fifth, the thirteenth, and may well drift through again.

Secondary characters take the heat off the main ones, and good writers know how to do this. Other than Sherlock Holmes, most primary characters welcome it when the spotlight shifts a bit to another compelling character. In Ann Parker’s Silver Rush Mysteries, I wonder how Inez Stannert’s young son will handle their long separation. What kind of woman is Inez’ sister? Will the vanished husband ever show or the Reverend pop back? Inez has plenty of stage time, but the secondaries are so fascinating that the reader is happy to be distracted.

Even though I love long ones, I am satisfied with a three- or six-book series if the character has evolved fully. That said, I’m disappointed when the author rushes character development. Yet there is a real problem in modern publishing with the author never knowing how long the series will last. This makes series creation much like TV series. How can one do proper character development when the series may be ended prematurely?



## Character Development in a Series, continued

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For thought-provoking solutions, I turned to TV, where I did see a couple of intriguing answers.

*Last Tango in Halifax* ended very abruptly. Yet the ending was oddly satisfying. As a fan, was I outraged? Yes. But the writer made it work artistically. Even with storylines left hanging, I realized that the final scenes of episodes throughout were often both completions and teases. I may have grieved, but I respected the way the ending was handled.

Another interesting solution was the *Home Fires* TV series about WWII, which ended despite fan outrage. The creators solved the problem by writing a book that contained the entire storyline to the end. Maybe an author contract could contain a clause that allows one to go the independent route if a series is dropped? Just an idea.

What those two examples suggest to me is that we writers are clever sorts. We are creative. We can work around absurdities like series cancellations. No, I won't suggest a good answer that fits for each of us, but I am willing to bet that those tiny examples just mentioned will allow your special imagination to flow.

Priscilla Royal writes the Prioress Eleanor/Brother Thomas medieval mystery series from Poisoned Pen Press. She grew up in British Columbia and earned a B.A. in world literature at San Francisco State. A theater fan, reader of history, mystery and fiction of lesser violence, she is a longtime member of Sisters in Crime. Her fourteenth and most current book is *Wild Justice*. <http://www.priscillaroyal.com/>



# When Life Experiences Flavor Your Novel

by JoAnn Smith Ainsworth



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As I wrote my World War II paranormal suspense series (wherein the U.S. government recruits psychics to find Nazi spies), it fit like a comfortable shoe. I had lived the times.

Everybody in the United States participated in this war, even we children. We saved our pennies for war bonds. We canvassed the neighborhood for tin cans and collected newspapers to recycle for the war effort.

All the neighbors had Victory Gardens because food was rationed. My family owned a double lot. The garden was planted in the 50x150-foot lot alongside the house. When harvested, the food was canned. We children worked in the garden and helped pick the crop. From fruit trees and berry bushes, we harvested the ingredients for jams and jellies.

Our home town was the railroad hub for anthracite coal from the mines farther north for delivery to factories in Philadelphia and New York City. When German U-boats were sighted off the coast, the sirens blared and blackout curtains (we used old blankets) were pulled tightly. We sat around the dining room table and listened to the radio for the All Clear.

During these war years, I saw the breakdown of societal norms that had been rigidly in place since Queen Victoria's time.

Men from late teens and into midlife disappeared from towns to reappear on battlefields. Those not physically fit for the battlefield did double shifts in factories churning out supplies and equipment for the military. My grandfather came out of retirement to return to the railroad as a brakeman, as did many grandfathers who gave up their leisure years to return to jobs that kept the country running.

Women, whose role had been confined to the household, retrained themselves for factories and office work. Grandmothers took over the rearing of their grandchildren.

While my characters are adults, not children, I remember the anxiety (and the fear that we might not win the war) that emanated from my family and the neighbors. We watched the relief or dismay on the faces of adults as they opened the daily newspaper and read page after page of columns of names appearing under Missing in Action or Killed in Action. Not finding the name of a neighbor or relative on those pages lightened the mood for the day. The opposite brought gloom.

I remember the day my Uncle Pat left the house in full Army infantry uniform and gear, knowing he would be shipped to the battlegrounds in the Pacific. I also remember (not quite a year later) the arrival of the telegram by Western Union messenger which told my Aunt Mary that her

## When Life Experiences Flavor Your Novel, continued

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husband had died on the island of Saipan from shrapnel wounds.

What does this have to do with writing a paranormal suspense novel, you ask?

Actually, nothing specifically. What these experiences give me is an understanding of adults forced to give up their life plans and dreams to work for the good of their country. These examples of sacrifice carry over into my novels.

The heroine—a clairvoyant—has been warned by her family not to talk about her visions and predictions. Yet, those skills are the exact ones Uncle Sam needs for the government's decision to fight back against Hitler's occult group and to locate Nazi spies. She sacrifices her good relationship with her family and exposes herself to public ridicule to lead a team of psychics for the U.S. government—a crystal ball reader, a medium, a seer of ghosts, and a nurse with healing hands.

The hero—an engineer and naval commander—gives up his plans to use his engineering skills on the battlefields because Uncle Sam needs a skeptic to oversee the psychic team. The government wants someone who tests and measures before giving approval. This team of assorted people (whose particular psychic skills have not been previously measured or tested as to whether fake or real) proves to be a challenge.

The changes within families and the breakdown of societal norms are the bread-and-butter flavor of my novels.

And speaking of butter, it was one of those things rationed to be sent overseas to the battlefields. Instead, we had something new called oleo-margarine, which was white, the consistency of lard, and came in a sack like the one for a sausage. In one corner of the sack was a yellowish-orange-looking color. We children squeezed the sack until the color was distributed and the white had turned yellow like butter. It put me off butter substitutes for life.

While the series required that I create a story world (because I included the paranormal with the suspense), my life experiences during the war flavor how the characters interact with each other within that story world. The deprivations of the times find their way into the narration and settings. The need to win the war and the fears that the Allies might not win encroach into the dialogue.

When I look back at my novels, I'm surprised how much of myself I have put into them. You are probably like me and surprised at how much of your world view goes into your novels. Our life experiences flavor our stories.

JoAnn Smith Ainsworth experienced food ration books, Victory Gardens, and blackout sirens as a child. These WWII memories help her create vivid descriptions of time and place in her multiple-award-winning paranormal suspense series: *Expect Trouble* and *Expect Deception*. JoAnn has BA and MAT degrees in English and has completed her MBA studies. She lives in CA and has published six novels.

# Member Profile: Thonie Hevron

Fourth in a series to introduce our members to each other

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Meet Thonie Hevron, whose decades-long career in law enforcement ultimately led her to put that experience to use in writing mystery novels.

**Stiletta:** Your books are inspired by your 35-year career in law enforcement in Sonoma County. What were your early roles in your career field?

**Thonie Hevron:** I started at San Rafael Police Department in Northern California in the 1970's as a Parking Enforcement Officer—common title: meter maid. And yes, “Lovely Rita” was a popular song in those days, so I heard it often. Having been raised by an Army Master Sergeant, I was used to following orders and I expected others to do the same: don't park here. Some months after I started, a young motor officer took me aside and clued me in to the phrase “badge-heavy.” That conveyed an adversarial relationship between me and the public. This was an invaluable lesson for a 21-year-old meter maid. Previously locked into the “follow my orders” mindset, I learned there was another way to gain the public's cooperation: “There's space two cars down that will work better.” Once I learned the alternate way, combined with a little humor, my work life became much easier. This lesson has kept me out of trouble all my life. I also learned that doing my job well meant making some people unhappy. I learned to cope.

**Stiletta:** The bulk of your tenure in law enforcement was as a dispatcher. What made that role interesting and what did you learn from it?

**TH:** Every day was different. I never knew what to expect. Staying in a constant state of readiness for 8 to 12 hours is exhausting. It's so different from being on patrol (while in traffic or as a report car-community service officer). Being outside, I burned off energy constantly—in and out of the vehicle, directing traffic, walking beats. Inside, I sat. What I learned was I needed to balance my new sedentary job with some physicality. My fire captain husband had been working out in the firehouse for years. I joined a gym and it helped my mental function, too.

Also, I learned that people think in different ways. I could give the same direction to three people and each would have a different interpretation. I had to learn to listen instead of projecting my own expected answers. This has helped me write better dialogue. There are many more lessons I learned, but I don't want to run out of space!

**Stiletta:** You wrote technical manuals and newspaper columns before trying your hand at fiction. How did you make the transition from career-related non-fiction to crime novels?

## Member Profile: Thonie Hevron, continued

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**TH:** It wasn't as easy as I had imagined. For years I wrote police reports, then synopsis {"Just the facts, ma'am"}) of police, fire, and emergency medical incidents for dispatch. When it came to creative stories, the ideas were in my brain, but my first manuscript read like a police report—boring! Hmm. Back to the drawing board. That's where reading in my genre helped, as well as joining a writing club, finding a critique group and educating myself in the craft of creative writing. It took years of work and is still evolving. The one constant is accuracy. Hollywood and fiction portrayals of policemen have reached into the unbelievable for decades now. It irritates me because the public tends to believe that is how cops act. I have each manuscript vetted by several law enforcement officers for correct procedures, reasonable actions and interesting situations. Pick up a book and look at the blurbs some of these cops offer.

**Stiletta:** Tell us about your decision to self-publish.

**TH:** It's very simple. My previous publisher offered to return author's rights. She'd unfortunately suffered a serious health issue that threatened her return to business operations, so I opted to take my rights back. In self-publishing I had the control I wanted. My third book was under contract but hadn't been formatted yet, so I hired a local person to do the work and design a cover. I'm delighted with the results of both. However, while reformatting the older two books, I realized how time-consuming it was. So, now they're all up for sale, but I'm looking for a publisher who would be interested in republishing them in addition to the fourth book, now in progress.

**Stiletta:** You have written three mysteries to date. Are they a series? Please introduce us to your protagonists.

**TH:** Yes, it's a series, but I've written each book as a standalone. You can pick up *With Malice Aforethought* and know exactly who your protagonists are. They are Nick Reyes, a Sonoma County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) Deputy and Meredith Ryan, a SCSO Violent Crimes Detective. Nick and Merideth are partners who struggle with their personal and professional relationship, while solving crimes. With my experience in law enforcement, I like to give readers a glimpse of the battles cops face on the street and in the station. Often Hollywood stereotypes aren't at all true. Readers ask if I use real situations in my stories. I must qualify my answer: Yes, I use personalities (which I blend so as not to represent any one person) and general situations (some are universal in the business) but not actual incidents. That's where my creativity comes in—inventing believable, relatable situations for my characters to get into that move the story along.

**Stiletta:** What prizes have you won for your novels, and which gives you the most pride?

**TH:** My first-place win in Oak Tree Press' Cop Tales got me publication of *Intent to Hold*. The win led to publication of my first book as well. I've placed in three annual writing contests for the Public Safety Writers Association (PSWA). This is a group of law enforcement, EMS, and fire personnel (as well as non-public safety mystery writers) who write both fiction and non-fiction. The competition

## Member Profile: Thonie Hevron, continued

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is stiff so I'm proud of each of my awards. *Malice* also won the East Texas Writer's Guild Best First Chapter in 2015. Every award makes me proud. This year, I intend to enter more contests as well as the PSWA.

**Stiletta:** Your Amazon.com bio says, "She writes like she thinks: like a cop." Please elaborate.

**TH:** As I said earlier, I was raised by a US Army Master Sergeant Military Policeman/US Deputy Marshal. Dad was my earliest supporter. On a dare, I got my first job in law enforcement in 1973 at the age of 21. I think bottom line, cut to the chase. Cause and effect are front and center in my reasoning. It's what I know.

**Stiletta:** What reactions have you gotten from other law enforcement professionals with regard to your mysteries?

**TH** I've been very fortunate to get excellent reviews from readers. The blurbs on my book covers are often from police chiefs and industry leaders like Tim Dees. They all get what I write. Rohnert Park Police and Fire Director Brian Masterson said it best in his *Intent to Hold* blurb: "I am glad that in the end they [the detectives] prevailed and hit some true values in law enforcement, commitment and dedication to see things through to a successful conclusion."

**Stiletta:** Are you working on your next book? Please tell us a little about it.

**TH:** Yes. The working title, *Felon with a Firearm*, is in progress. It's early yet, but my goal for this book is to get a bit closer to Nick and Meredith. Like *Intent*, this adventure will be outside the scope of their profession. I'm planning less action and more mystery. Just to change settings up, the story flows from Petaluma to San Francisco, two places I've lived and loved.

**Stiletta:** Do you have any writing/publishing mentors or coaches?

**TH:** Oh my, yes! I have a cadre of mentors, but chiefly Marilyn Meredith. She's a prolific mystery writer who has published over 30 books. Marilyn has a positive but realistic attitude and so much experience that I go to her for advice. There are many other writers I learn from as I read or attend workshops--David Corbett on characters, Jordan Rosenfeld on scene construction, Ann Patchett for the beauty of language, P.J. Parrish for sub-plots, and finally, retired LAPD detective Paul Bishop, who led me to find my voice. Every time I read any novel, I learn. Once, on my way to a riding lesson to hone my dressage (equestrian) skills, my husband asked, "When are you going to learn how to ride?" Writing is like that--one can always improve. There's always something to learn. A good writer grows with every sentence.

## Member Profile: Thonie Hevron, continued

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**Stiletta:** You have been a member of Sisters in Crime for years, and you recently joined our Norcal chapter. What benefits have you gotten from SinC membership?

**TH:** I recently hosted a guest post by Terry Shames on my “Just the Facts, Ma’am” blog. I got to know her a bit and was as impressed as much by her professionalism as by her writing. She suggested joining, as had several members of Redwood Writers (of which I am a member also)—Ana and Malena. I had a chance to note the presentations at their meetings—I’d have loved to make the San Quentin field trip—and decided I didn’t want to miss another month. Unfortunately, I’m dealing with a family illness that takes much of my time. I don’t know how many meetings I can make, but the listserv, alone, is worth the price of membership

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

**TH** The basics are above—my law enforcement career enables/curses me to raise the bar for real police adventures. I’m always open to writers’ questions about the business. Additionally, I’m an avid (but not yet really good) horseback rider. I love dressage and, through my first book, discovered a passion for polo. I’ll write until I can’t tap a keyboard anymore because I love the worlds I create.

Thonie Hevron was interviewed by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime Norcal’s newsletter editor.



# Sue Grafton: Tributes and Memories

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## I Give You Kinsey for Eternity by Leslie Karst

The loss of Sue Grafton in the last days of 2017 came as a complete shock to most of us in the mystery community. Yes, she was 77 years old, with laugh lines and a head of silver hair. But to all of us who'd been lucky enough to hear her speak or have the opportunity to talk with her in person, Sue was ever the spunky young gal who brought Kinsey Millhone to life some thirty-five years ago.



Back in March of 2014, when I was still shopping my first manuscript to literary agents, I attended Left Coast Crime in Monterey, California (aka Calamari Crime), to which Sue Grafton had been invited as a guest speaker. My hope was to network and to gain new insights about writing mysteries, but most of all I needed a kick in the pants, for the “How-to-Get-an-Agent” dance had just about worn me down. And that conference did the trick, largely because of the inspiration I got from Sue’s heartfelt, wise, and funny-as-hell interview.

So, as my tribute to Sue Grafton, I give you excerpts from the copious notes I took during that marvelous interview. (Although Sue’s statements are in quotation marks below, note that what follows is often mere paraphrase. Also, kudos must be given to interviewer Brad Parks.)

In person, Sue reminded me of her sleuth—sharp-witted and funny, with the mouth of a sailor, and clearly someone not to suffer fools gladly. She grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, by the way, and sounded like it, pronouncing her hometown as “Loh-vuhl.” “I have photos of my house in *Garden and Gun* magazine,” she told us with a grin. “Eat your heart out.”

*A is for Alibi* was the seventh novel Grafton wrote, and was published in 1982. “I’m starting the novel,” she told the conference audience, “and I see this book by Edward Gorey—*The Gashlycrumb Tinies*—a macabre poem with pen-and-ink drawings of children being done in various ways--and it gave me the idea for my series.”



“I grew up on Agatha Christie,” she said, “and I loved her. I just wish she had cussed more! But then one day I read Mickey Spillane and I thought, ‘Hot damn!’ The lights went on, and I start reading hard-boiled.

“I had worked at reception at St. John’s Hospital in Santa Monica, and the thing about hospitals is that there are always these people in crisis. You’ll notice that there’s a lot of medical stuff in my novels.”

Before starting the alphabet series, Grafton had worked for years in Hollywood writing screenplays. “I learned two things working in Hollywood,” she told us.



## Sue Grafton Tributes, continued

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"I'm not a team player, and I'm not a good sport. So I decided, I'm gonna get back to solo writing, because it's the only thing that's gonna save me. I got a \$10,000 advance for *A is for Alibi*, which sold 6,000 copies.

"My agent told me, 'You'll never make as much as you would in Hollywood.' Years later, all I had to say about that was 'ha ha ha!'"

She was asked about her concept of "the shadow" during the interview. "Your shadow is the pieces of yourself that you repress and deny," she explained. "It's your pettiness, your sense of humor. And once you shut it off, you've denied your true self with regard to your writing. For example, you meet someone and your shadow thinks 'yuck!' but your ego will tell you, 'well, that's not very nice.' But your shadow is right: that woman's gonna run off with your husband.

"You've got to listen to your shadow; she'll always tell you if you're off course in your writing, even when your ego tells you it's fine. I call this 'eating a death cookie.' I once threw away the first eight chapters of a book. It's very scary to have to start over; you feel stark naked. But once you have the courage to dump a book, you have the courage to trust the process."

Grafton was, at the time, at work on the X book. ("This is going to be about a xylophone, right?" the interviewer asked. "Yes," she replied, "and it's a vicious crime!" But she was going through a rough period of writer's block. "I'm stuck right now," she told us.

"I recognize that I've achieved a certain status in the mystery writing field, but it doesn't help when I'm working on the next book. Working on W, I got to chapter 32 of 36 and I realized, "I don't have a clue how to end this book! Talk about eating a death cookie. I'm sure there are writers who are still having a good time after writing so many books, but I'm not one of them."

The interviewer asked about her protagonist, and the fact that she's only aged a few years since 1982. "When I started, Kinsey was 32 and I was 42," Grafton said. "Now she's 38 and I'm 73." A beat. "I don't want to talk about how bitter I am."

"Would you ever let Hollywood make a movie based on your series?" the interviewer queried.

"I wouldn't sell the rights to Hollywood for five million dollars," she answered emphatically. "There was talk of a movie at one time, and you know who they thought of casting as Kinsey? Sally Struthers! I said, 'Have you even read my book?' I'm not doing it. Never. I don't need their money; I don't need their help."

Sue was asked during the Q&A at the end of the interview, "Are you going to kill off Kinsey at the end of the series?"

## Sue Grafton Tributes, continued

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“Why would I?” she answered. “I am Kinsey, and she is going to live long after I’m dead. I give her to you for eternity.”

All I can say is, thank you, Sue!

The daughter of a law professor and a potter, Leslie Karst learned early on, during family dinner conversations, the value of both careful analysis and the arts – ideal ingredients for a mystery story. She now writes the Sally Solari Mysteries (*Dying for a Taste*, *A Measure of Murder*), a culinary series set in Santa Cruz, CA. An ex-lawyer like her sleuth, Leslie also has degrees in English literature and the culinary arts. The next in the series, *Death al Fresco*, releases March 13. <http://lesliekarstauthor.com>

## *And More Sue Grafton Tributes . . .*

### **Kinsey Was My Model** by Glenda Carroll

If you enjoy mysteries, I am sure you have heard by now that Sue Grafton, the author of the alphabet mysteries, has died of cancer. She was 77. I first came across her whodunits when she was about five letters into the series. I think she had just published either *E is for Evidence* or *F is for Fugitive*. The woman I found inside the cover was Kinsey Millhone, a protagonist that didn’t know all the answers, ate junk food, had problems with relationships and used running along the Santa Barbara waterfront to help figure out problems. I related to all of that.



It would be about 25 years later when I published my first mystery about a female gumshoe who was just discovering her talents, strengths and confidence. Kinsey Millhone was my model and Sue Grafton my mentor (although she never knew it).

Sue wrote 25 books, spanning the alphabet from A to Y. Her books are published in 28 countries and 26 languages.

### Surreal Experience by Simon Wood



At Bouchercon in 2014, I had the surreal experience of Sue Grafton chasing after me with one of my books in hand, looking for an autograph.

Naturally, I had to get the moment documented.

### Her Voice Guided Me by Vinnie Hansen



I discovered Grafton early in her alphabet series. I'd consumed mysteries since I got to chapter books, but after I graduated from Nancy Drew, it seemed they were all by guys—the MacDonaldis, Elmore Leonard, Robert Parker, Rex Stout. When I discovered Grafton, a female writer with a spunky, female protagonist, I fell in love. I'd wait for her books to come out and buy them in hardcover.

When I started to write mysteries, her voice guided me. Later in life, I met her at a Left Coast Crime convention. We were alone together at a table in the book room. I was so intimidated and amazed. I barely managed to speak. One of my regrets is not making more of that opportunity. At the time, only a few years ago, it seems, she was so vibrant. It's shocking that she's gone.

### I Knew Her When . . . by Terry Shames



and serious about writing.

Back in the 80s, when I was thinking I wanted to be a mystery writer, I attended a small writer's conference called the Cabrillo Conference. One of the attendees was Sue Grafton, newly minted star author. Her *A is for Alibi* had burst on the scene as a totally new kind of female detective novel. I walked into a small gathering of people that included Sue. She looked up and said, "Hey there, girl, come over here and sit by me." She had such a southern accent! She was warm and friendly—

## Sue Grafton Tributes, continued

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After the conference, we stayed in touch and talked on the phone occasionally. She recommended me to a new agent. Once she called me to talk to my husband about some medical question in the book she was working on. When my son was born, Sue had a daughter living in Berkeley and she came by to see the new baby. We sat on my porch and talked about babies and writing.

Here's something that a lot of people don't know: Sue wrote a couple of books before she wrote her first Kinsey Millhone. How did I find that out? When my son was one year old my husband and I went to Perth, Australia for a two-month sabbatical. One day I was browsing in a used bookstore. My eye was caught by an author's name—Sue Grafton. But it was on a book I had never heard of. I read the bio on the back and sure enough, it was "our" Sue. In the "missed opportunities" department, for some reason I didn't buy the book. When I got back and saw Sue, I told her what had happened. She squealed and said words to the effect that it was a "learning" book.

Eventually we drifted apart. I heard of her often, of course, but by the time I started writing in earnest, she was the "famous" Sue Grafton and I was too shy to reach out to her. Here's the full circle part of the story. The next time I met Sue in person was when we were both nominated for Best Novel at Left Coast Crime in 2014. She was a classy woman, a true role model, deserving of her fame. When I heard she had died, it took a little part of me, as it did for so many whose lives she touched.

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*We'll miss you, Sue!*



## From Our Retiring President

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### Dear Sisters and Misters,

As of January 31, I retired from six years of being a board member and officer of SinC Norcal. I wanted to take the opportunity to thank everyone for your support during those years.



I still laugh when I think about my first venture into the world of doing SinC business. At the time, Dana Fredsti and David Fitzgerald had been doing the work of both president and event planner for the chapter. I took it for granted that they loved it! And if you love something, you never want to quit, right? (Ha!) So when they invited me out to have a glass of wine to discuss whether I was interested in taking over as event planner for the following year, I told myself I had to be really persuasive so they'd choose me to do it. Who knows why I thought people would be lined up to vie for the position? All I know is that I wanted to do it. We were all delighted when I said yes.

It was one of the best jobs I ever had. The two subsequent members who went on to hold the position told me that they never knew it would be so fulfilling.

After two years I became vice president under Susan Shea's capable leadership as president. Another fulfilling experience. And finally, for the past two years I've worked as president. It has been a grand ride. The executive committee that I worked with was simply the best. Every single person amazed me with her commitment and determination. I've been so lucky!

As is customary, I am continuing on the board as an emeritus member for two years, to support the organization with my experience. With that in mind, I'm going to be working with Margaret (Peggy) Lucke to put out our first chapter anthology. I'm excited to get into the thick of it.

Now I want to welcome Diana Chambers, the new president. I know you will give her the support I enjoyed. So, here's the baton, Diana. Enjoy.

**Terry Shames**

## Member News



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### ***New Releases***

*Death al Fresco* by Leslie Karst, book #3 in the Sally Solari culinary mysteries, on March 13 by Crooked Lane Books. Leslie is also excited to announce that she has signed a contract with Crooked Lane for book #4 in the series.

*Wild Justice* by Priscilla Royal, book #14 in the Prioress Eleanor/Brother Thomas medieval mystery series, on February 3 by Poisoned Pen Press

*With Malice Aforethought* by new Norcal member Thonie Hevron, book #3 in the Nick and Merideth mystery series, on July 31, 2017

*Time Shards* by Dana Fredsti and David Fitzgerald, book #1 of a trilogy, on January 30 by Titan Books

*City of Sharks* by Kelli Stanley, book #4 in the Miranda Corbie series, on March 20 by Minotaur Books

### ***Public Appearances***

On February 8 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., JoAnn S. Ainsworth, Peggy Lucke, and Kate Jessica Raphael will host a panel discussion on mystery writing at the San Francisco Public Library, Civic Center, 100 Larkin Street. A book signing will follow.

On February 12 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., JoAnn S. Ainsworth will speak to AAUW members about her WWII paranormal suspense series, wherein in the U.S. government recruits psychics to locate Nazi spies, in the ballroom at Cardinal Point, 2431 Mariner Square Drive, Alameda.

On February 24, Priscilla Royal will be at The Poisoned Pen Bookstore in Scottsdale, Arizona from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. with Donis Casey and Dennis Palumbo to talk about their books.

On March 10 from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m., Shelley Adina will speak on a panel discussing “Collaborative Creativity for Writers” with a focus on multi-author series at the Vancouver Island Romance Authors chapter meeting, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.

## Member News, continued

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### *Awards*

In November, Patricia Canterbury was honored to be chosen as the 2017 Sacramento Chapter of National Council of Black Women's recipient of The Literary Award for her outstanding contribution to the literary scene.

Judith Newton's *Oink: A Food for Thought Mystery* received a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*.

### *Miscellaneous*

Priscilla Royal will be starting a blog after February 1 at her website, [www.priscillaroyal.com](http://www.priscillaroyal.com).



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The poster features a jagged black line across the middle, resembling a fault line. The text is in a mix of red and black fonts.

## Question of the Quarter



**What is the most interesting or surprising fact that you have learned in researching your books?**

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I learned heroin was legal in the United States with a doctor's prescription until 1924. **Tish Davidson**

The 2002/2003 SARS epidemic, which killed almost 800 people, was spread from Hong Kong to countries all over the world through people who pushed an elevator button in the hotel where they were staying. **LB Hunter**

In 2003, I went to a performance of *The Play of Daniel* in Berkeley, put on by Aurora Theatre and the Pacific Mozart Ensemble. It was a 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century liturgical drama. What surprised me was how closely it resembled a mini-opera, complete with individual parts, a chorus of evil counselors and roaring lions for special effects. Needless to say, it had to show up in a book: *Valley of Dry Bones*. **Priscilla Royal**

In *Dead in the Water*, a car drives off a cliff into the Pacific, north of Santa Cruz. I was talking to an EMT/lifeguard and asked about using the Jaws of Life to extract the person in the car. He said they don't call it that. To them, it's just "the tool." As in "get me the tool." **Glenda Carroll**

When doing research for *The Fifth Reflection*, I read widely about detecting deception. This excerpt from "Lies That Fail" by P. Ekman and M. Frank in *Lying and Deception in Everyday Life* by M. Lewis and C. Saami made me smile: "A Duchenne smile involves contraction of both the zygomatic major muscle (which raises the corners of the mouth) and the orbicularis oculi muscle (which raises the cheeks and forms crow's feet around the eyes). A non-Duchenne smile involves only the zygomatic major muscle. Research with adults initially indicated that joy was indexed by generic smiling, any smiling involving the raising of the lip corners . . . More recent research suggests that smiling in which the muscle around the eye contracts, raising the cheeks high (Duchenne smiling), is uniquely associated with positive emotion. The Pan Am smile, also known as the Botox smile, is the name given to a fake smile, in which only the zygomatic major muscle is voluntarily contracted to show politeness. It is named after the now defunct airline Pan American World Airways, whose flight attendants would always flash every passenger with the same perfunctory smile. . . Chronic use of Botox injections to deal with eye wrinkle can result in the paralysis of the small muscles around the eyes, preventing the appearance of a Duchenne smile." **Ellen Kirschman**

I've learned so much interesting stuff that I don't know where to begin. But here's a tidbit, gruesome, but interesting: A person can bleed out in 3 to 5 minutes. **Vinnie Hansen**

I learned the hard way that Cinco de Mayo is NOT Mexican Independence Day. One of my unenlightened characters in the Periodic Table Mysteries called it that, only to be reprimanded by a



## Question of the Quarter, continued

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professor from Mexico City in an email when the book was released. She didn't tell me when Mexican Independence Day was, however, so it was up to me to research it. Surprise: although all the hoopla is around May 5, Independence Day is September 16 (1810), when a revolt started against the Spaniards. May 5 is the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, a holiday in honor of a military victory in 1862 over the French forces of Napoleon III. Was I the last to learn this? **Camille Minichino**

The most surprising thing I've learned from my research came from piecing together historic records for a novel-in-progress called *After the Gold Rush*. While investigating the fatal shooting of crusading San Francisco newspaper editor James King, I discovered a shocking reason why King was such a loose cannon. His adored older brother, Henry, was supposed to meet James and his family when they arrived from Georgetown. Henry missed that rendezvous because he never returned from an expedition with John C. Fremont. The famous California explorer's egotistical miscalculations led most of his men to freeze or starve to death. Henry King was eaten by his desperate comrades. **Carol Verburg**

While researching non-profits in San Francisco for a character's backstory, I came across 826 Valencia. Their mission: "supporting under-resourced students aged 6-18 with their writing skills, and [helping] teachers get their students excited about the literary arts." Reading up on their volunteer requests, I was both stunned and thrilled to learn there's an opportunity to combine writing with philanthropy. Maybe our chapter could work with 826 Valencia on a one-off or ongoing volunteer event? Their website: <http://826valencia.org/volunteer-tutor/> **Robin Stuart**

Thanks to cables and telegraphs, news traveled quicker than we might expect in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America, and people across the country could read the same (international, national, state, and local) news *at almost the same time*. For example, on December 17, 1888, a man claiming to be Jack the Ripper abducted a woman in Montreal, Canada. Within a few days, information about that attack showed up in newspapers in Brooklyn NY, Burlington VT, Lebanon PA, Port Huron MI, Little Rock AR, Wahpeton SD, Pullman, WA, and Sacramento CA. **Ana Brazil**

I'm continually surprised by my research—both by profound discoveries and through uncovering trivial-but-cool bits of history. An example of the former was the "Rice Bowl Party" that was a key setting and theme for *City of Dragons*. An example of the latter is the fact that my favorite San Francisco skyscraper, the "McAllister Tower" at 100 McAllister Street, was formerly the William Taylor hotel and Temple Methodist Episcopal Church, completed in 1930. The experiment of hospitality within a religious setting and a "dry" policy (no liquor) failed financially—the building became the Hotel Empire by the time of my series, set ten years later. You can, however, still see traces of the church in the gothic windows of the lower part of the building. **Kelli Stanley**

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

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

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

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

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