

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 3

AUGUST 2019

Dear Sisters and Misterys,

Happy Mid-Summer. As we read of heatwaves around the world, I have come to appreciate our mild Bay Area weather in a new way.

For this quarterly letter, I'd like to take the opportunity to call out two unsung—at least not “sung” enough—heroes of Sisters in Crime NorCal. They are modest women, happy to toil behind the scenes for no other glory than their own pride and commitment. They do not know I'm writing this.

For many of you, your initial contact with our chapter has been Malena Eljumaily, SinC NorCal's Membership Coordinator. And for many, she remains an ongoing contact and is always ready to answer a member's question or steer him or her in the right direction. As President, I turn to Malena frequently: she is our group's institutional memory. She is also a talented, witty, and award-winning playwright.

My other source is Ana Manwaring, NorCal's Treasurer. She, too, is generous in sharing her knowledge of the chapter's development over the years. Besides being an author, editor, and teacher, she is a trained accountant who keeps us on the straight-and-narrow. As Treasurer, she has the tremendous responsibility of handling the nuts and bolts of our legal and fiscal requirements. She set up our Square account and keeps the books on all events.

As you know, Sisters in Crime is a national organization that provides a fabulously useful umbrella to us all. There is



CONTENTS

- Page 1: President's Letter
- Page 3: Upcoming Events
- Page 4: In Case You Missed It
- Page 5: Hollywood vs. Reality
- Page 9: Our Texas Fan Club
- Page 10: Soliciting Your Short Stories
- Page 11: Where Did the Time Go?
- Page 13: New Siblings to the South
- Page 15: Comedy is Hard
- Page 17: Profile: Rick Homan
- Page 22: Thriller/Fest Impressions
- Page 24: Member News
- Page 26: *Fault Lines* Event!
- Page 27: Question of the Quarter

President's Letter, continued

strength in numbers! We have certain obligations to them, as well, especially the requirement that all local chapter members join the national group. Ana and Malena work together selflessly to keep an active, up-to-date membership list and to coordinate these actions with National.

I'm using a lot of adverbs in this piece, but these two women have tirelessly helped organize events, including our day-long workshops. They are present at every meeting, bring supplies, and usually stay long after everyone else to help clean up the venue so that we are always welcomed back. They do so quietly, with no desire for acclaim.

As our chapter grows and welcomes new members, I think this is a perfect time to bring the efforts of these women out into the open and to express our appreciation for their long service.

Thank you, Malena and Ana!

Before signing off, I want to remind you of NorCal's not-to-be-missed event August 3 at the Sausalito City Hall/Library (more details in this newsletter or at <http://www.sincnorcal.org/more-meetings/>) . The brilliant, internationally translated author and teacher, Nina Schuyler, will be presenting "How and Why to Write Stunning Sentences that Break the Rules." Bring your laptops or writing implements!

See you then.

Warm regards,
Diana Chambers
President, Sisters in Crime NorCal

Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

Saturday, August 3, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

How and Why to Write Stunning Sentences that Break the Rules, with Nina Schuyler
Sausalito Public Library, Edgewater Room, 420 Litho Street, Sausalito

How do you create suspense at the sentence level? How do you create speed? Longing? How do you write a sentence that jars the ear, creating unease? In this lecture, drawing upon published work, you'll learn all the things your English teacher didn't teach you from Nina Schuyler, award-winning author of fiction books, short stories, and the Small Press Distribution bestseller, *How to Write Stunning Sentences*. You'll learn about left-branching, right-branching, and mid-branching sentences. About sound and rhythm, and how a variety of sentences creates a flow. By the end of the lecture, you'll have written your own stunning sentences. Bring your laptop.

Saturday, September 7, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Cybercrime Heroes & Villains, with Robin C. Stuart
Half Moon Bay Library, 620 Correas St., Half Moon Bay

It takes all kinds. Highlighting the people side of cybercrime, Robin C. Stuart will reveal many insights into the state of cybercrimes and the people who perpetrate and solve them, with lots of time for Q&A. Robin is a veteran cybercrime investigator, consults on all things cyber security for Fortune 100 companies, screenwriters, and media outlets, and contributed to the *Handbook for Information Security*. She appears on panels at writers' conferences and was a significant contributor to the Tech Museum of Innovation's acclaimed Cyber Detectives interactive installation.

Saturday, October 5, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Essential Workshop on Writers' Finances, with Sophie Littlefield and Rachael Herron
Golden Gate Library, 5665 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland

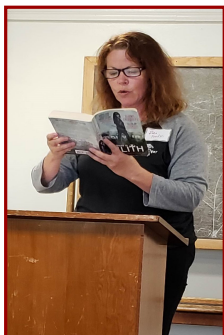
Authors Sophie Littlefield and Rachael Herron will help you clear out the clutter and make a plan for prudent financial management going forward into 2020. You won't want to miss their nitty-gritty and witty presentation. Sophie Littlefield is a master storyteller who has written dozens of novels for adults and teens and has won the Anthony and RT Book Awards. Rachael Herron is the internationally bestselling author of more than two dozen books, including thrillers, mainstream fiction, feminist romance, memoir, and nonfiction about writing.

For all three meetings, please bring a dish to share for the potluck and a book or books for the book exchange. Check our website for more details about the meetings and presenters.

In Case You Missed It . . .

May Meeting

Do you know what to do—and what not to do—when reading an excerpt of your work to an audience? If you attended the “From the Page to the Stage” workshop presented by Dana Fredsti, Lisa Brackmann, and David Fitzgerald, you do now! Attendees received valuable tips from the panelists, and the inimitable Heather Haven aptly demonstrated “what not to do” (not to mention David’s “interesting” Bible readings). In addition, some brave Sisters volunteered to read their work for Rita Lakin’s instant analysis and commentary. Thanks to all who participated in a fun event!



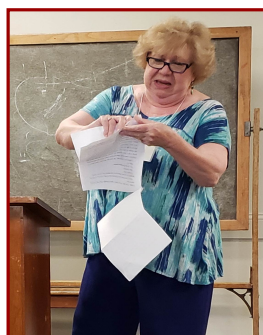
Dana Fredsti



Lisa Brackmann



David Fitzgerald



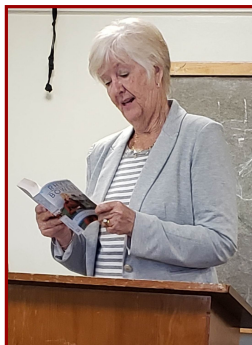
Heather Haven



Ana Manwaring



Claire Ortalda



Rhys Bowen



Judith Janeway

June Meeting



We were honored to have author extraordinaire Jane Cleland join us through the Sisters in Crime Speakers Bureau for a lively presentation on “Mastering Suspense, Structure & Plot.” The author of the popular Josie Prescott Antiques Mysteries and two award-winning books on the craft of writing gave us thirteen very specific recommendations for polishing and improving our work, led a question-and-answer session that could have gone on for hours, and graciously signed copies of her books.



Hollywood vs. Reality

by Adam Plantinga

As a working cop, I see the portrayal of police officers on the silver screen and in novels and often get a good chuckle. Fictional cops typically bear no resemblance to reality. Sometimes that's just fine—Hollywood police action is a lot more interesting to look at than real-life law enforcement work, which can be an arduous slog filled with lengthy police reports and follow-up that leads nowhere and waiting two hours for your drunk, scabby prisoner to be booked at county jail. But if you are going to write police officers into your book or screenplay, you should be well aware of the differences between fantasy and reality, some of which I have listed below.

Hollywood: The lone detective enters an incredibly dangerous situation all alone, insisting “there’s no time for backup.” And if she does call for backup, it takes forever for help to arrive, long enough for the hero to resolve the situation all by herself. She is also equipped with a flashlight that seems capable of illuminating only the first three feet in front of her.

Reality: There’s time for backup. It’s bad business to go after suspects alone. If there’s one suspect, at least two to three cops will respond. Two suspects? No fewer than four. Three or more bad guys? The whole shift is showing up. And when you get on the radio and call for help, your fellow cops will drop whatever they’re doing and come to your side. It’s like the bell-ringing scene at the end of *Witness*.

The reason for all this sound and fury is that the police aren’t superheroes. You succeed because you use training, tactics, and superior numbers. If you ever get into a tussle with someone, a citizen might ask you why it took six officers to take the lone suspect into custody. Why six? Your answer: because seven weren’t available.

Also, our flashlights work just fine.

Hollywood: The cops get DNA results back from the lab right away. The results pop up on a big screen computer that has all sorts of cool swirly graphics.

Reality: I had a burglary that happened in November, and I got DNA results from the scene the following July. Even for homicides, which are fast-tracked, the quickest turnaround for DNA results is probably going to be one to three weeks. We aren’t nearly as high-tech as fictional cops. The San Francisco Police Department was still using Polaroid cameras to take crime scene photos as recently as 2011.

Hollywood vs. Reality, continued

Hollywood: The cop confronts a gunman and tells him to drop his weapon. If the bad guy doesn't drop it, the cop will often warn him again.

Reality: Odds are the cop will shoot that guy right away. That is what police training dictates. As a firearms instructor once told me, "What are you waiting for? The guy has a gun, he's ten feet away, and you've got no cover. Shoot him." Warnings are fine when practical, but action always beats reaction since the bad guy can plug you before you even get a "drop the" out of your mouth. So shoot instead of chat. As a cop, if you want to go home in one piece, you don't give the bad guy a head start. Maybe it would be gentlemanly to do so. But you are a municipal police officer patrolling streets that are neither safe nor orderly. It's not a gentleman's game.

Hollywood: As soon as the handcuffs go on, the cop immediately reads the suspect his Miranda rights.

Reality: As a police officer, you are required to read someone his rights only after he is in police custody *and* you are about to interrogate him about an offense. Custody plus interrogation equals Miranda, not before. It is often tactical to wait to Mirandize a guy for a while because the offender may make a spontaneous, incriminating statement prior to formal interrogation that you can use to submarine him at trial. Also, in exigent circumstances where you may have a suspect who has discarded a handgun in a public place that some child could pick up, or if you have a kidnapping, where a victim's life may hang in the balance, you don't have to read Miranda at all. You just plunge right in with the questions. It's called the public safety exception to Miranda.

Hollywood: Your hero jumps in her ultra-efficient, lightning-fast cruiser and chases the suspect vehicle through a dozen jurisdictions. The pursuit comes to a halt only after the hero rams the suspect car and shoots out its tires.

Reality: While suspects may drive as recklessly as they wish, as a police officer, you have to drive with "due regard." That's the standard. That means at each intersection, you have to slow to look for oncoming traffic and take it easy on the hot dogging, even if you have your lights and siren on. Also, pursuit policies vary by department, but generally speaking, you are only allowed to pursue violent felons and, even then, you're not allowed to ram them. You may deploy spike strips to puncture the fleeing vehicle's tires, but you're not supposed to shoot out tires because firing at a moving vehicle is far more dangerous than practical. And there's always a supervisor listening to the chase on the radio who will terminate the pursuit if it sounds like things are getting out of hand.

Hollywood vs. Reality, continued

Also, in a pursuit the suspect vehicle may just flat outrun you. Police patrol cars aren't anything special. Their most exotic feature is anti-lock brakes, which let you steer even in a skid, but they don't have turbo-charged engines or double-reinforced tires. They're just big cars made in Detroit, painted in police colors, with some lights slapped on them. Sometimes their transmissions blow right in the middle of the chase. Sometimes you're at the station and you can't even get them to start because due to budget cuts, they aren't buying any new cruisers so your squad car has a hundred and fifty thousand miles on it and a brake pedal that goes all the way to the floorboard.

Hollywood: The cop protagonist recovers fingerprints off just about anything: rocks, stucco walls, quesadillas.

Reality: There are only a few surfaces conducive to the retrieval of fingerprints. Non-coated glass gives you the best shot, but many painted items are also good. Glossy paper and some metals, particularly aluminum, have a decent chance. I've heard of prints being taken off live plants before, and Band-Aids. But the list of surfaces where fingerprints don't show up is longer, and includes undressed wood, bricks, cloth, and, well, most everything else.

If a suspect touches a dusty surface, he'll just remove dust instead of leaving a print, and the kind of hard plastic most electronics are made of don't tend to hold prints because of their textured surface. Also, people leave more prints when it's humid out and their fingers are oily than when it's cold and their hands are dry. Manual laborers or workers who deal with chemicals for a living often have hands so gnarled and scuffed from their jobs that they couldn't leave prints at a crime scene if they tried. Baseball bats are notoriously hard to get prints off, even if they have a lacquered finish, because the wielder of the bat tends to grip the instrument so hard that fingerprints become pressure-distorted and unreadable. And then there are, of course, burglars who merely wear gloves, which you can buy for two and a half bucks at Costco, and foil the ID tech.

Hollywood: The cop hero gleans valuable information from the street hooker, who is his informant and perhaps even his love interest. The hooker is alluring, funny, helpful, and well-adjusted.

Reality: The vast majority of street prostitutes are out there on the corner because they are hopelessly addicted to narcotics and selling themselves means earning quick cash to get high. You will likely never encounter a street hooker with a sense of humor, or an athletic, winsome one with a heart of gold like Jamie Lee Curtis in *Trading Places*. Real prostitutes have faces so ravaged by street life—pockmarks, sores, caked-on makeup—that it's hard to look at them. They smell bad. They twitch. They have head lice. Drug addiction has made their daily existence lethargic and bleak, like the final stages of a progressive disease.

Hollywood vs. Reality, continued

Hollywood: Even the most willowy of cops kicks down the suspect's door in a single kick.

Reality: Doors, especially exterior ones, can be pretty tough to take down. Once it took me twenty-seven tries. I know this because there was a sergeant next to me counting out loud encouragingly. And the most effective means of entry isn't the manly snap kick where you face the door with your shoulders squared, but rather the ungainly mule kick, where your back is to the door and you lash out with your foot like Eeyore.

Hollywood: The male cops are ruggedly handsome and frequently shirtless, with toned, tan physiques. The female officers have shimmering hair with a lot of bounce to it and commendable skin.

Reality: We are not as gorgeous and dynamic as our fictional counterparts. Some cops look like they've been hit in the face with a crowbar. (Some have, in fact, been hit in the face with a crowbar. It's that kind of job.) And it gives me no pleasure to say this, but some cops are really fat. There's a tale of an officer in my department who was so corpulent, there was no uniformed equipment belt that would fit him, so he just put his gun in his front pocket. If cops looked like models, believe me, we'd be models. That gig would beat sprinting down some dirty alley after a knife-wielding meth addict any day.

Hollywood: Local law enforcement has just started investigating the big case when the feds swoop in with their trench coats and sunglasses and no-nonsense haircuts. One of the feds says, dismissively, "Thanks, Sheriff, we're taking over." A bitter argument about jurisdiction ensues.

Reality: If the feds show, and by the way, if they show, it is usually because one of the higher-ups from your department asked them to show, you probably have a massive migraine of a crime scene on your hands that involves something you don't deal with much (a train derailment, a nasty hazardous materials situation, a multi-state crime spree). So if some three-letter agency offers to be on point, your reaction is likely going to be: Thank you, Police Gods. The FBI really wants this mess? It's all theirs. Maybe you can still make your daughter's piano recital after all.

Adam Plantinga's first book, *400 Things Cops Know*, was nominated for an Agatha Award and won the 2015 Silver Falchion award for best nonfiction crime reference. It was hailed as "truly excellent" by author Lee Child and deemed "the new bible for crime writers" by *The Wall Street Journal*. It was also described by one Amazon reviewer as "kind of interesting but maybe a little overpriced." His second book is *Police Craft* (Dec. 2018). Plantinga was a Milwaukee police officer from 2001 to 2008. He is currently a sergeant with the San Francisco Police Department assigned to street patrol. He lives in the Bay Area with his wife and daughters.



Our Texas Fan Club by Bette Golden Lamb and J.J. Lamb

One of the collateral benefits of writing is meeting your readers—in person or by email, telephone, telegraph, smoke signals, and whatever.

Well, we recently found out we have a fan club in Belton, Texas, a quaint town on the Old Chisholm Trail, about an hour's drive from Waco. All of the members of the Belton Readers Club are either in or retired from the medical field. One of the members, Mary Hart, wrote to say, "Just finished *Bone Point*; it is a page-turner . . . stayed up late, just had to finish it."

Mary reported that in the Belton Readers Club, each member reads a different book and gives a book report when they get together. She also wrote that after one book club member read Bette's *The Russian Girl*, the group, enlarged by the addition of Mary's daughter, Carol, and her separate readers group, put on a Russian-themed dinner and discussed the book. (Mary is to the right in the bottom photo.)

This wasn't the first time we'd heard from Mary. We didn't recognize her name at first but wondered why her notes sounded like she knew us. Further, we'd recently had someone from Belton, Texas try to pull a credit card scam on us (no, it wasn't Mary!).

We did some digging and discovered that not only did we know Mary, we'd known her for a long time, but by a different last name. She and Bette worked for the same doctors many years ago here in Marin County.



Our Texas Fan Club, continued

It would have been nice to get in touch with Mary again, even if she hadn't mentioned *Bone Point*, *The Russian Girl*, and other books in our "Bone" series. Add to that the bonus of becoming acquainted with all the members of the Belton Readers Club.

Bette Golden Lamb and J.J. Lamb are co-authors of more than a dozen crime novels, eight in the Gina Mazzi medical thriller "Bone" series, and three standalones. Add to this a half-dozen single-byline fiction books. Their most recent offerings are: *Bone Point*, number eight in the "Bone" series; *The Organ Harvesters – Book II*, Bette's near future medical thriller; *No Pat Hands*, number four in J.J.'s Zach Rolfe PI series; and *The Killing Vote*, a joint-effort political thriller that reflects a lot of what is going on today.

Soliciting Your Short Stories

Lorie Lewis Ham of *Kings River Life Magazine*—herself a mystery writer and long-time SinC member—has announced that the magazine has initiated a podcast called *Mysteryrat's Maze*, with episodes consisting of mystery short stories (about 2,000 words) and the first chapters of mystery novels, read by local (Fresno-area) actors. They are constantly looking for material, so if you are interested in submitting a short story or chapter for the podcast, or a story for the magazine (around 4,000 words), you can email Lorie at krlmagazine@gmail.com. Reprints are acceptable.

Margaret (Peggy) Lucke sent her short story from the *Fault Lines* anthology, "Two Hundred Miles," to Lorie and reports that she received a response the next day. Lorie indicated she liked the story and asked for a minor rewording of one brief and slightly risqué paragraph. Since Peggy feels that the story works coherently without it, she simply cut the paragraph. She had a contract the next day, although her story won't be on the podcast until early 2020.

Ana Brazil had a similar experience. Her historic ghost story, "Mr. Borden Does Not Quite Remem—," was published last October in *Kings River Life*, and it will be featured on the podcast in October 2019.

To listen to the podcast, you can go to <https://mysteryratsmaze.podbean.com/>. The magazine can be accessed at <http://kingsriverlife.com/>.

Where Did the Time Go?

by Janet Dawson



The first Bouchercon I attended was in 1988, in San Diego. I bought a book called *An Infinite Number of Monkeys* by Les Roberts. It was the first in the Saxon series, and the first book to win the St. Martin's Press/Private Eye Writers contest for Best First Private Eye Novel.

Les signed the book for me. He wrote, "Maybe one of these days you'll sign one for me."

And that's what happened.

Thirty years ago, in 1989, I wrapped up the manuscript of *Kindred Crimes*, the first Jeri Howard novel, and entered it into the contest. I'd spent several years and multiple drafts birthing that book, and it was time for it to leave the nest. I figured even if it didn't win, at least someone would read it. Maybe I'd get some feedback.

I waited. In the meantime, I found an agent, whom I fired the following year. I got a rejection letter from St. Martin's Press, accompanying a photocopy of the manuscript, and figured that was it. Except that the rejection letter didn't refer to the contest. It was the kind of form letter I would expect to get after sending a manuscript over the transom. I wondered about that.

Then, one morning in October 1989, the phone rang as I was leaving for work. It was Thomas Dunne of St. Martin's Press, calling to tell me I won the contest.

The rejection letter had been a mistake.

So that was the big splashy jump off the diving board for me, and for Jeri Howard. Thirty years later, the 13th Jeri Howard book, *The Devil Close Behind*, will be published in September.

It's been an interesting and eventful three decades. St. Martin's Press published *Kindred Crimes* in June 1990. When it first arrived at the San Francisco Mystery Book Store, I drove over there so I could actually see it on the shelves. The book got great reviews and several award nominations.

Then St. Martin's Press turned down the second book. My agent, the one I hired after I fired the first guy, sold books two through nine to Fawcett Books. I was on a roll!

Fawcett Books dropped me in 1999 and my agent dropped me a few years later.

Where Did the Time Go?, continued

Well, okay, I thought. Jeri and I have had a good run. There are other books I want to write.

So I did. The book that was supposed to be the 10th Jeri Howard became my standalone suspense novel, *What You Wish For*. And frankly, it turned out better that way,

The editor of Perseverance Press told me at a meeting that if I ever wrote another Jeri book, she wanted to publish it. I wasn't planning to, but I'd started a Jeri short story that wanted to be a novel. I finally gave up fighting it and said, okay, you're a novel. Then I emailed the editor and she bought the book, titled *Bit Player*. That became the 10th Jeri. Since then, that small press has published two more, *Cold Trail* and *Water Signs*, as well as the standalone and three books in my California Zephyr historical series.

Over those thirty years, I've written eighteen books, counting the work-in-progress, a dozen short stories, and a novella. It would be great to have another thirty years, since there are still books in my head, and I hope to get them out to readers.

Janet Dawson writes about Oakland PI Jeri Howard, who solves Bay Area cases. Her latest is the forthcoming *The Devil Close Behind*. Her Zephyrette protagonist, Jill McLeod, sleuths in the early 1950s aboard the old California Zephyr, most recently in *The Ghost in Roomette Four*. Find out more about Janet's work at her website, <http://www.janetdawson.com/>





New Siblings to the South by Mary Feliz

Coastal Cruisers (CC), the newest chapter in the Sisters in Crime international community, launched in June, serving siblings in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and southern Santa Clara counties.

“Thanks to our area’s 24/7 traffic, NorCal meetings and promotional opportunities in Oakland and San Francisco were getting farther away every month,” said CC founding member and president Mary Feliz. “With the round-trip journey taking well over four hours every month, several of us began talking about what else we might do with that time. Was there sufficient interest in forming a chapter between NorCal in San Francisco and Central Coast in Nipomo? Were folks able to help

in leadership positions?”

SinC National’s Chapter Liaison, Alec Peche, provided the group with a list of several dozen folks in their target area who were polled to assess interest in starting a new organization. “Alec’s help, knowledge of the SinC rules, and her energy made all the difference,” Mary says.

The founding group met in May, the first public meeting was in June, and SinC National chartered the group the following day. “Planning that meeting was very challenging,” says Member-at-Large Maddy McEwen. “We wanted it to be fun, but we also had administrative tasks to tackle such as voting in our board and approving our bylaws. And we knew our members would be traveling considerable distances in Saturday morning traffic.”

The first meeting promised coffee and snacks, door prizes donated by members, and a book exchange, as well as plenty of time for members to meet and schmooze.

In July, Coastal Cruisers hosted the Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Search and Rescue Team. In August, NorCal member and police psychologist Ellen Kirschman will talk about PTSD among first responders. Upcoming meetings will focus on craft, writer psychology, and lessons in Baritsu, the self-defense discipline employed by Sherlock Holmes.



Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue Team member Rocco Chappie helped the SinC Coastal Cruisers learn how to write search, rescue, and recovery scenes without getting lost.

New Siblings to the South, continued

“The first meeting solidified our vision,” says Publicity Chair Victoria Kazarian. “I ate breakfast before I left, had no trouble finding parking, and was home before lunch. Local meetings are so much easier.” Writers affiliated with SinC, Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, and California Writers Club attended, along with authors who hadn’t previously joined any writers groups.

But what about the downside? “The time commitment was something we all needed to consider,” says Mary Feliz. “Writers need to write.” She added that she was bolstered by the number of volunteers who stepped into leadership positions, the expertise of the members, their energy, and their negotiating skills. “A significant number of potential recruits said they were interested but had a barrier to committing to a leadership role. We looked at those stumbling blocks and eliminated as many as we could, agreeing that we’d back each other up, share tasks, and shuffle responsibilities so no one’s writing life would suffer. We’ll shift our meetings from San Jose to Santa Cruz to Monterey and then back again, cruising from location to location, so that we will each have some meetings close to home and some in which we’ll endure the gnarly commute.

For more information or to join the group, check out these links:

Website: <http://sinc-coastalcruisers.com/>

Facebook: Coastal Cruisers – A Sisters in Crime Chapter

SinC NorCal, Mystery Writers of America, and Romance Writers of America members, sisters, misters, and all kinds of folx* are welcome at all Coastal Cruisers meetings. Meetings will be scheduled, whenever possible, on different Saturdays from NorCal meetings, in case you would like to belong to both chapters. For topics, times, and directions, consult our online calendar at: main@Coastalcruisers.groups.io.

**Folx is an alternative spelling of the gender-neutral collection noun folks. It is used to include LGBTQ, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people.*

Mary Feliz writes the Maggie McDonald mystery series featuring a California professional organizer and her sidekick golden retriever. *Address to Die For*, the first book in the series, was named a Best Book of 2017 by *Kirkus Reviews*. *Cliff Hanger* is her fifth book. Mary shares her writing time with the distractions of living on the shores of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. She is a Certified California Naturalist. Visit her website at <http://www.maryfeliz.com>.

Comedy is Hard

by Margaret Dumas



“Dying is easy,” says Peter O’Toole’s character in the film *My Favorite Year*. “Comedy is hard.” He’s quoting a legendary actor, and speaking about acting rather than writing, but his point still works. Comedy is hard. But it’s worth it.

I’ve been writing about comedy a lot lately, because my new series, the Movie Palace Mysteries, is set in a world where most of my characters are obsessed with classic films. So I spend a fair number of pages writing about classic films, and not just any classic films, but my favorites. (That was the dazzling revelation I had about halfway into the first book. Something along the lines of—“Hey, wait a minute—I’m the writer. I get to choose what to write about!” Out went Gary Cooper, in came Barbara Stanwyck, and I’ve never looked back.)

Not all the movies my characters reference are comedies. I’ve found myself writing about Bette Davis having a glorious diva-off with Gale Sondergaard in *The Letter*, about Eleanor Powell tap dancing her way into America’s heart in any *Broadway Melody* you can name, and about the brilliance that is Rosalind Russell in a lightning-quick battle of words and wits with Cary Grant in *His Girl Friday*. Some of these descriptions come more easily than others. (Seriously, I may never tackle a musical again. Who can describe an Eleanor Powell number with words? You just have to watch her. And I hope you do.)

But comedies . . . I fall for them every time. Which means I find myself having to write about them every time. Let me stress that I’m not talking about writing comedy. That’s its own delightful little hell. I’m talking about writing *about* comedy. And, in case you haven’t noticed, the surest way to take the last ounce of funny out of something is by talking about it.

Have you ever tried to describe a hilarious scene from a movie to your friends? How’d it go? Maybe it was fine if you were at a party and you’d all been drinking, but I can’t count on the benevolent influence of a few cocktails on my readers. Many of them seem to be inconveniently committed to their sobriety, particularly when reading. Trying to give a sense of the breezy, lighthearted banter between Cary Grant and Irene Dunne in *My Favorite Wife* is like trying to describe a soufflé, not knowing if your audience has ever seen an egg. Sure, you can resort to quoting dialogue (and I have), but the only way to convey breezy and lighthearted is to *be* breezy and lighthearted as you write.

Comedy is Hard, continued

For me, that means putting on the right movie to get in the breezy and lighthearted mood. Something like *The Philadelphia Story* for quick asides and wry, cutting comments. Or *Auntie Mame* for a heady mixture of smart dialogue and silly visuals. When all else fails, just about anything with William Powell and Myrna Loy will do the trick. (That works for dialogue as well. If I can hear William and Myrna saying it, my words just might be getting there. All hail *The Thin Man* in its many incarnations.)

But the challenge of dialogue doesn't even come close to the horror of describing physical comedy. Think of the crowded ship's cabin scene in the Marx Brothers' *Night at the Opera*, or of Judy Holliday playing gin rummy in *Born Yesterday*. (If you haven't seen her in *Born Yesterday*, you can find the gin scene on YouTube, although I would urge you to watch the whole movie. And if you've only ever seen the Melanie Griffith remake of the movie, please proceed to the nearest emergency medical center and have your eyes washed to remove whatever vestiges of that image may remain.)

My point is, sight gags are called sight gags for a reason. And yet I carry on. Because, really, the only thing that's harder than writing about the comedies I love is not writing about them.

I leave you with this link, because I could never do it justice in words (believe me, I've tried). Enjoy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7t4gmNYO-8>

Margaret Dumas writes books about smart, funny women who are searching for adventure, love, and the occasional murderer in the San Francisco Bay area. Her Married to Mystery series began with *Speak Now* and featured crime-solving couple Jack and Charlie Fairfax. Her new series, *The Movie Palace Mysteries*, began with *Murder at the Palace* and features Nora Paige, a band of misfit film buffs, and the ghost of an usherette named Trixie, solving crimes at the Palace movie theater. The next book in the series, *Murder in the Balcony*, will be out September 24.





Member Profile: Rick Homan

Eleventh in a series to introduce our members to each other

After a long career teaching Theater Arts and performing, Rick Homan retired to read and write crime fiction. He recently finished the fourth in his series.

Stiletta: You are the author of three Nicole Tang Noonan Mysteries. Tell us a little about Nicole and how you decided to write about this character.

Rick Homan: I wrote about an amateur sleuth because I enjoy the genre. I made my amateur sleuth a professor because I was a professor for thirty years. Early in my career, I taught at a couple of small, liberal arts colleges in a part of the country I wasn't familiar with, so Nicole gets her first job at a similar college in a place she has never visited.

In other ways, I reached outside my own experience to create a more interesting hero. I made my sleuth a woman so she would rely primarily on her wits, rather than her fists. I made Nicole Chinese-American so she would feel like a fish out of water when she arrives in rural Ohio. Though I was a professor of theater arts, I made Nicole a professor of art history because I didn't want my former students trying to guess which character represented whom.

Nicole is not an eccentric genius in the mold of Arsene Lupin, Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe, Hercule Poirot, and many others. Rather than making brilliant deductions, she solves crimes by collaborating. She's constantly bouncing her ideas off her friends, asking people their opinions, and consulting experts. Also, she is persistent.

Stiletta: What's next for Nicole, and when?

RH: In the first three books, Nicole's knowledge and skill as an art historian enables her to solve murders on her campus and in adjacent communities. In the fourth book, *Dark Portrait*, she takes a research leave and spends it back at home in San Francisco. Sure enough, a body turns up in the Presidio, and the case has an art history angle. I hope to publish it later this year.

Stiletta: When you majored in English literature at Notre Dame University, what kind of career did you have in mind?

Member Profile: Rick Homan, continued

RH: When I chose English as my major, I was thinking that spending most of my time reading poems, plays, and novels sounded lovely. In my junior year I thought, “This is going well; maybe I’ll just keep doing it.” I was very fortunate to be able to make my living as a professor.

Stiletta: You went on to earn your M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Minnesota. Are those degrees in English as well? What was the subject of your doctoral thesis?

RH: My M.A. and Ph.D. degrees are in Theater Arts. At Notre Dame, when I wasn’t reading and writing for my English courses, I acted in plays and played guitar in coffee houses. In my senior year, I was accepted to graduate programs in both English and Theater. I guessed that it might be easier to get a job in theater and chose that route. As it turned out, it wasn’t easy to get a job in anything, but I managed to keep going as a theater professor.

Many people look back on their doctoral dissertations as youthful indiscretions. I am one of them. My title was *T.S. Eliot as a Dramatic Realist*. I do find his five plays fascinating, though I admit they are probably not due for revival. However, I felt somewhat vindicated when the musical, *Cats*, was a big hit.

Stiletta: You spent some time as an actor in Philadelphia—how did that come about and what were your favorite roles. Do you still act?

RH: Throughout my academic career, I published history and criticism in academic journals. In theater arts, professional performance is equivalent to publication, so for refreshment, between articles, I auditioned at area theatres. I was cast in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. These were not leading roles. As T.S. Eliot wrote, “an attendant lord, one that will do/To swell a progress, start a scene or two.” Often I also played guitar for these shows, improvising or writing the music I played.

I also performed with small companies, often ones producing new plays. My favorite role was that of a backwoods patriarch, a moonshiner who terrorizes his family in a play called *Da*. We had good reviews, and my friends were surprised to see me playing such a character, I’m happy to say.

When I retired in 2006 and we moved to San Francisco, I continued for several years, acting and composing with small companies doing original plays. I enjoyed the spirit of a group attempting something that had never been done before. I stopped acting five years ago, when I decided to make writing novels a full-time job.

Stiletta: How did you transition into a long-term career teaching performing arts at the university level, directing plays, and publishing scholarly articles?

Member Profile: Rick Homan, continued

RH: After graduate school, I was a full-time academic for thirty years. My acting was always a part of that profession.

Stiletta: What are your fondest memories from those years?

RH: My fondest memories are the opening nights of every play I directed on campus with a cast and crew of students. I would arrive at the theater around 6:30 p.m. to make sure everyone and everything were ready. After sharing lots of excitement and encouragement with the company, I would tell the stage manager, “It’s your show,” and go to my office, usually at 7:30.

Then I would have half an hour of wondering, “What if we’re wrong? What if all those decisions we made during design conferences and a hundred hours of rehearsal really don’t make sense?” This was a dreadful feeling, because at that point there is nothing a director could do. Even after thirty years I felt this every time.

Then the show would start. I would sit in the back row, watch the audience and listen to them. When they began to react in unison—a gasp, a laugh, even a “pin drop” silence—I knew we had them. From there on I could sit back and watch the actors and technicians share a story we had come to love. It was such a pleasure.

Stiletta: Your bio indicates you did some research into the character of Dracula. Please tell us a little about what you learned.

RH: In the fall of 1989, I directed a stage adaptation by Hamilton Deane and John Balderson of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. This play has a long, successful track record, and our production was popular on campus and in the community.

I became curious about the co-writers, and discovered Hamilton Deane was a British actor of the early 20th century who wrote the adaptation and starred in it. He made Dracula a sophisticated, continental aristocrat. Nowhere in Bram Stoker’s novel does Dracula wear formal evening dress and an opera cape. When most people think of Dracula, they are thinking of Deane’s character, not Stoker’s.

Deane was so successful with the play, an American producer bought the rights and hired John Balderston, a Hollywood screenwriter, to improve the play and write the film adaptation. Bela Lugosi starred in both. Balderston made Dracula’s victim, Lucy, the daughter of Doctor Seward and the fiancée of Jonathan Harker. These changes, along with some others, turned Dracula into a seducer, and the resulting sexual overtones have played out in vampire stories ever since. By contrast, in Stoker’s novel, Dracula is a repulsive, demonic blood-sucker.

Member Profile: Rick Homan, continued

Stiletta: What made you decide to write crime fiction, and what tips would you offer to authors who have not yet been published?

RH: With retirement came time for things like watching old movies. I noticed Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* was based on a novel by Patricia Highsmith. I read the novel and was so taken by it that I read all twenty-two of her novels and many of her short stories.

At that point, I thought I would try and write a novel like hers. I learned, as Flannery O'Connor said, "Everyone knows what a story is until they try to write one." It took me two years to be ready to submit that first novel. I still haven't published it.

A tip: If you set a manuscript aside for two months, six months, or a year, re-reading it will be a revelation. You will have learned so much by writing something else in the meantime, you can do a lot of your own editing.

Stiletta: What motivated you to join Sisters in Crime (both NorCal and Guppies), and what benefits have you gained from your membership?

RH: When I was struggling through multiple edits of my first novel, I attended writers' events and conferences to find out what I didn't know. At a couple of these, members of both SinC NorCal and SinC Guppies recommended the association and their chapters as offering help for beginners. I wasn't finding writer-to-writer help anywhere else so I joined.

I have received and I continue to receive help from both chapters. I can post rookie questions on forums and get replies within 24 hours. I can attend local meetings and benefit from the experience of people doing the same thing I'm doing.

I must say *SinC Links*, from national, is my all-time favorite benefit. That's how I learn about issues writers face and how they may affect me.

Stiletta: You blog on [your website](#). What topics do you blog about the most?

RH: I blog about the mysteries I read. My list of favorite authors is strangely weighted toward novelists of the 1950s. I guess I'm just an old-fashioned guy. I also blog about movies based on those novels and other thrillers.

Other sections of my blog are devoted to San Francisco and the Presidio. I have in mind writing some suspense novels set here. I suppose I'm sharing my research for them in advance.

Member Profile: Rick Homan, continued

A section called “Nicole’s World” shares my research into the locations in Ohio where the first three books are set. The fourth book is set here in San Francisco because Nicole takes a research leave from her university.

Stiletta: What else would you like your fellow members to know about you?

RH: Walking has become crucial to my health and my creative process. Now that I have the luxury of devoting myself full-time to writing, it is far too easy for me to stay in all day. Living in the city allows me to walk more and drive less. I’ve even started substituting walking for riding the bus.

When I started walking more, I noticed it clears my mind. If I’ve pounded out several pages and have to stop, I walk someplace to have lunch and stop at a grocery or pharmacy on the way back to do some shopping. When I get home, I’m ready to write more pages.

Bonus answer: My career in theater gave me some skills that have helped me write mystery novels. It also gave me an obstacle to overcome.

The most frequent compliment I get from fellow writers is “good dialogue.” I think this is because I spent my adult life reading, teaching, memorizing, and performing some of the greatest dialogue ever written. I often write a scene entirely in dialogue and later add descriptions of the setting and of the characters’ movements and appearance.

Also, in improvisation we learned to create a scene by answering the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) and acting a scene with only that information. If I’m setting up a scene or stuck on a scene, I focus on those questions.

Writers are taught “show, don’t tell.” Ironically, my background in theater caused me to take that too far. In drama, everything is showing, there is no telling. In my first attempt at writing a novel, I wrote only what one would see and hear if one watched a scene on stage or screen. This created a problem.

Readers would say, “I don’t get it. What happened?” I would say, “He deceived her by avoiding her question.” Readers replied, “I see that now, but I didn’t get that when I read it.” I learned I also had to tell the reader what happened by adding thoughts from one character’s point of view, such as, “He kept his expression neutral, hoping she wouldn’t repeat that question.”

Rick Homan was interviewed by Margie Bunting, Sisters in Crime NorCal’s newsletter editor.

ThrillerFest Impressions

ThrillerFest 2019, “The Premier Conference for Thriller Enthusiasts,” was held July 9 to 13 in New York City, with a few SinC NorCal Sisters and Misters in attendance.



Susan Bickford in front of the Mysterious Bookshop in NYC

Susan Bickford: ThrillerFest seemed smaller than usual and I didn't see many of my peeps. I saw NorCal folks Mysti Berry, Camille Minichino, and Ann Parker. [Reece Hirsch attended, too.]

I did have a great time, but for the first day it felt a little like the first day in a new school. However, I forced my more introverted side to remember that I was there to network, and I made a bunch of new friends.

It really is an industry conference. Everyone is either a writer or works in publishing. A fair number of press people, too. To me, it feels rather serious in a good way. Book/reader conferences such as Bouchercon and Left Coast Crime are more relaxed, IMHO. I love talking to readers, even if they don't know my work. It's a different groove.

Observations:

- There were 34 debut authors at the Saturday Debut Breakfast. I think there were fewer than 20 when I was in the debut class. ITW does a great job with debut authors.
- I was on a panel about Dialogue. Bad Language got the most laughs. I thought the quality of the panels was very good this year.
- There was a blackout on the west side of Manhattan starting just before the banquet, but it didn't affect us.
- My Kensington editor, Michaela Hamilton, joined me at our banquet table along with Paula Munier (agent and author) and other authors, including some who aren't published yet. It was wonderful to see how generous Paula and Michaela were with their time in a relaxed, chitchat setting. Michaela said she had talked to eleven or twelve authors in the PitchFest.
- The President of Taiwan was staying at the hotel. There was a huge banquet with security galore, long lines to get through metal detectors, and many protesters outside. An interesting distraction.

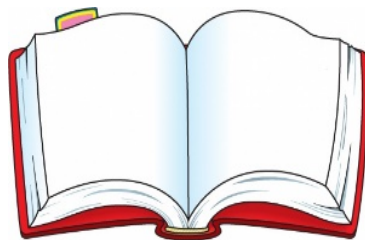
ThrillerFest Impressions, continued

- I'm not that fond of the Grand Hyatt, although the location is great. This time, the lights in my room were blinking on and off according to their own inner timing. I had to remove the light bulbs to sleep. It is going to be torn down in a couple of years.

ThrillerFest photos from **Camille Minichino and Ann Parker:**



Reece Hirsch



Member News



New Releases

Margaret Lucke's short story, "Two Hundred Miles," has been selected to be featured in the Mysteryrat's Maze Podcast, a crime fiction podcast produced by *Kings River Life Magazine*, early in 2020. This story appears in Sister in Crime NorCal's anthology, *Fault Lines*, which was published earlier this year and of which Margaret is the editor.

Maddy McEwen's story, "Jealous of the Daylight," has been published in *Moon Magazine's* anthology, *Out of This World*.

Eileen Rendahl's short story, "Concealment," will appear in an MWA anthology, *Life is Short and Then You Die*, coming out in September. The anthology is being edited by Kelley Armstrong and has stories from Rachel Vincent, RL Stine, Barry Lyga, and more.

The Twice-Hanged Man, Priscilla Royal's 15th Prioress Eleanor/Brother Thomas medieval mystery, will be released August 6 by Sourcebooks.

A Short Time to Die by Susan Bickford will be released as a mass market paperback on August 27. It will include an excerpt of *Dread of Winter*, which comes out at the end of October from Kensington Books.

M. Glenda Rosen has two new books to be published by Level Best Books: *Gourmet Gangster: Mysteries and Menus by The Family* (with her son, Jory Rosen) on November 5, and *Dead in That Beach House*, book #3 in the Senior Sleuths series, in February 2020.

Faye Snowden is returning to the writing scene with *A Killing Fire* on August 22 from Flame Tree Press.

Ana Brazil's historic crime story "Miss Evelyn Nesbit Presents," will be released on September 3 in *ME TOO Short Stories: An Anthology*. The anthology is edited by Elizabeth Zelvin and published by Level Best books.

The Devil Close Behind by Janet Dawson, book #13 in the Jeri Howard Mystery series, will be released September 9 by Perseverance Press.

Murder in the Balcony by Margaret Dumas, book #2 in the Movie Palace Mystery Series, will be released September 24 by Henery Press.

Member News, continued

Public Appearances

Rhys Bowen has a book launch on August 6 at Book Passage in Corte Madera for her new Lady Georgie novel, *Love and Death Among the Cheetahs*, and another at Copperfield's in Santa Rosa on August 7. After she returns from her book tour, she will have an event at Books, Inc. in Palo Alto on August 29. All three appearances are at 7:00 p.m. Rhys says she always loves seeing friendly faces!

Margaret Lucke will appear on a panel of editors at the October meeting of the Peninsula branch of the California Writers Club on Saturday morning, October 19, in Redwood City.

Margaret Lucke, Heather Haven, Janice Peacock, Laurie R. King, and Michael Cooper will take part in a Mystery Week panel at the Lafayette Library on Friday evening, October 25.

Awards

Vinnie Hansen's WIP, a literary suspense novel titled *The Gun*, is a finalist for Killer Nashville's Claymore Award.

JoAnn Smith Ainsworth received the Triple Crown Award from Toastmasters International for winning three educational awards in a six-month period ending June 30. The award was presented in July at Toastmasters Leadership Training in Pleasanton.

Ann Parker's *A Dying Note* is a Foreword Indie finalist in the mystery category. The same book is a finalist for the Killer Nashville Silver Falchion Award in Mystery.

Training Presented

Susan C. Shea will be on the faculty of the August Mystery Writers Conference, August 22-25 at Book Passage in Corte Madera. One of her assignments is a "writing intensive" with Hallie Ephron. Robin C. Stuart will also be on the faculty for this popular local conference. You can catch her on the panel, "Hacking, Identity Theft, Phishing, Oh My!: An Introduction to Cybercrime."

Margaret Lucke will teach a 10-week course called Mystery Writing for UC Berkeley Extension this fall. The class will meet Tuesday evenings, September 24 to November 26, in Berkeley. For more info and to register, go to extension.berkeley.edu and put Mystery Writing in the search box.

Margaret Lucke will be one of the featured authors at the Writers Boot Camp weekend that will be presented at the Town Square Library in Vacaville on September 28 and 29. She will be doing presentations on creating compelling plots and suspense.

Member News, continued

Susan Bickford and Terry Shames will each teach a seminar at the Writing Workshop of San Francisco on August 10. Susan will present “How to Write, Polish and Publish Your Great Mystery/Suspense/Thriller,” and Terry will present “Novel Building: What Comes After What If.” For details, you can click on: <https://writingworkshopsanfrancisco.com/schedule/>

Miscellaneous

M. Glenda Rosen is launching her Mystery Lovers Podcast in August. Guests are welcome. Contact her at mysteryloverspodcast@gmail.com.

The next issue of the *Mystery Readers Journal* will focus on Private Eyes. If you write a P.I. series, consider writing an author essay for this issue: 500-1,000 words, first person, up close and personal about yourself, your books, and the Private Eye connection. Think of it as chatting with friends and other writers in the bar or café. Add title and two- to three-sentence bio/tagline. Deadline: August 15. Send to janet@mysteryreaders.org.

Fault Lines Event!

Robin Stuart has arranged for our *Fault Lines* anthology to be featured in a panel discussion at Book Passage in Corte Madera on Sunday, September 29 at 4:00 p.m. The panel will feature anthology editor Margaret Lucke and four *Fault Lines* contributors—Judith Wrubel (writing as Judith Janeway), Deborah Lacy, J.J. Lamb, and Robin C. Stuart.

All *Fault Lines* contributors who attend will be acknowledged.

We invite and encourage all Sisters in Crime members to attend this special event to support our panelists and anthology.

Question of the Quarter



What are your favorite mystery book blogs and why?

Dru's Book Musings, hands down. Dru Ann Love is warm, well read, and unassuming. She insists she doesn't write reviews, but merely lets readers know what books she likes and why. I wish all reviews were that simple. More pretentious souls will try to demonstrate how smart they are. Dru lets her writing do the talking. If you're tired of snobbish literary reviewers who sniff at genre fiction, you'll love Dru's website. ***Mary Feliz***

Miss Demeanors because I'm a member. The content is equal parts fun and inspiring. Other favorites are Writer Unboxed, Career Authors, and Jungle Red Writers for their content and perspectives on writing, publishing, and life. ***Robin Stuart***

I follow three blogs— Louise Penny, The Kill Zone, and The Passive Guy. I follow Louise as a fan and to understand what she is doing from a marketing perspective. The Kill Zone has many blog postings on the craft of writing. The Passive Guy is more about the business side of publishing with a leaning toward indie publishing. Louise's blog is delivered monthly, while the others are daily. ***Alec Peché***

There are so many good ones. I hate to list, but I will mention two: Mystery Fanfare by Janet Rudolph and The Rap Sheet. Both are well-designed (no swirling ice cream cones or death by a thousand exclamation points) and packed with information on books to read as well as upcoming mystery TV series. Mystery Fanfare posts lists of books pertaining to everything from horse racing mysteries to New Years ones. The Rap Sheet publishes lists of forthcoming books in the UK and US. The latter emphasizes hardboiled detectives, not one of my top genres, but he is so informative that I have ditched my prejudices occasionally and read gems. ***Priscilla Royal***

Two favorite blogs: (1) Janet Rudolph's Mystery Fanfare - I like blogs that teach me and make me laugh. Janet's blog is the most informative and the most entertaining— nothing escapes this blog and blogger! Are you looking for a cartoon? An essay? A review? A theme of the day? How about A List of Mysteries Set at Three in the Afternoon on a Saturday in New Castle, Delaware? I swear, Janet has researched it. It doesn't hurt that she has a doctorate in religion and literature—Janet knows things. And if you still have time, you can move over to her Dying for Chocolate blog, which speaks for itself. (2) Ann Parker's Silver Rush Blog - back to learning and laughing. Every Wednesday, Ann gives us a word or phrase, one we might think we know about—a random slang-o-rama, as she calls it. We get the history of the word, a bit of myth-busting about the word, and even a graphic to further emphasize the theme. Here's my little secret: I look forward to this word-of-the-week and take it as an opportunity and a challenge to use it in my WIP! I can't remember a Wednesday when there was a word I couldn't use! ***Camille Minichino***

Question of the Quarter, continued

I don't search out mystery blogs specifically. There are several daily blogs I make sure I read: Janet Rudolph, Janet Reid, and Lee Lofland. They provide a great balance of broad perspectives, industry guidance, and crime insights. Beyond those, it really depends. I love it when the blurb for the blog lets me know what I'm going to read about and doesn't try to entice me by hints. There are many blogs I love to catch up on. I hate to list them because I know I'll leave out some. And anything by Ramona DeFelice Long! *Susan Bickford*

The Rap Sheet. So informative, bits and pieces of everything. Sometimes full reviews, sometimes covers, so eclectic and relevant to the mystery world. J. Kingston Pierce is the blogger. *Janet Rudolph*

One of my favorite book blogs is Mystery Playground, whose editor-in-chief, Deborah Lacy, used to be a member of Sisters in Crime NorCal. She has a story in our *Fault Lines* anthology. Mystery Playground has lots of great reviews and a fun feature on Fridays where authors pair their books with a compatible drink or cocktail. Deb also sends reports back from conferences such as Bouchercon and Left Coast Crime. The blog is updated daily, but pieces are short and easy to read on the go. *Malena Eljumaily*

My fave is Jungle Red Writers, not just for the wonderful crop of mystery writers in the group (including our own Rhys Bowen) but because they engage so fully with their hordes of readers and with each other on a host of topics that include books but range further afield. It reads every day like a conversation over coffee or cocktails. I have to do a shout-out to the blog I'm part of (along with Terry Shames) called 7Criminal Minds because we have such a diverse crew of serious writers and we talk seriously about the kinds of things writers talk about—writing, marketing, books we love and why. *Susan Shea*

My all-time favorite is Lesa's Book Critiques. Lesa Holstine posts new reviews almost every day, and on Thursdays we talk about what we're reading. I was lucky enough to have Lesa solicit and post (twice) my favorite reads of the previous year. Lesa is a librarian who has hosted many authors at her libraries over the years, as well as a reviewer and columnist for several sites. She recently won a special service award that was presented at Bouchercon. Most importantly, Lesa has become a trusted friend. Another standout for me is Jungle Red Writers. It's not so much about reviews, although the Reds often host posts by other writers. It's the conversation about books and so much more. Finally, I met Kathy Boone Reel on Lesa's blog because we were struck by how similar our reading tastes were, so now I visit her excellent blog, The Reading Room. *Margie Bunting*

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

It's All about YOU!

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

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

SinC NorCal Executive Committee

President: Diana Chambers – [diana \(at\) dianarchambers.com](mailto:diana@dianarchambers.com)

Vice President: Susan Bickford – [bol \(at\) bickfordonline.com](mailto:bol@bickfordonline.com)

Secretary: Claire Ortalda – [clairemystery \(at\) sonic.net](mailto:clairemystery@sonic.net)

Treasurer: Ana Manwaring – [anamanwaring \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:anamanwaring@gmail.com)

Membership: Malena Eljumaily – [malena \(at\) omnicode.com](mailto:malena@omnicode.com)

Events: Heather Haven – [heatherhavenstories \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:heatherhavenstories@gmail.com)

Speakers Bureau: Susan Kuchinskas – [susan \(at\) kuchinskas.com](mailto:susan@kuchinskas.com)

Newsletter: Margie Bunting – [mbunting \(at\) sbcglobal.net](mailto:mbunting@sbcglobal.net)

Anthology: Margaret Lucke – [getlucke \(at\) earthlink.net](mailto:getlucke@earthlink.net)

Past President: Terry Shames – [terryshames \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:terryshames@gmail.com)

