

# NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

---

VOLUME 22, ISSUE 4

NOVEMBER 2021

## Hello, Siblings,

We usually think of late fall and early winter as the Holiday Season, but for me it's always The Changing Season. I start shaking off the relaxed, lazy days of warm summer weather and find renewed energy in cooler temperatures and the return of rain (we hope).

This year seems particularly filled with hopes and uncertainty. Will we really be able to put COVID behind us? What will our new normal be like and how can I prepare for that?

Part of the change for me will be stepping down as president of SinC NorCal. Although I still plan to be very active on the board, it will be a new way to participate. My personal goals are to keep driving the use of technology to balance our online and in-person activities, and to figure out how we can continue to engage our membership in more capacities.

Fortunately, we have an excellent team lined up as our proposed slate. However, I want to be sure to thank the current board for their dedication and efforts: VP, Michele Drier; Events Chair, Ana Brazil; Treasurer, Ana Manwaring; Secretary, Claire Ortalda; Membership, Malena Eljumaily; Newsletter, Margie Bunting; Speakers Bureau and Eventbrite/Meetup expert, Susan Kuchinskas; and Past President, Diana Chambers.

I know Michele Drier, with all of her extensive experience on boards and leadership, will be great as our next president. We are fortunate that many of our other board members will be staying on, some in new roles, and some new members as well.



## CONTENTS

- Page 1: President's Letter
- Page 3: Mark Your Calendar
- Page 4: In Case You Missed It
- Page 6: Making Time to Write
- Page 9: How I Potty-Trained My Cat
- Page 12: Getting into the Slang of Things
- Page 14: Like a Sailor
- Page 16: Creating a Secret Identity Online
- Page 19: Bouchercon Anthology
- Page 20: Profile: Heather Young
- Page 22: Welcome, New Members
- Page 23: Member News
- Page 24: Member Benefits
- Page 25: Question of the Quarter

## President's Letter, continued

Meanwhile, it's that time again: November is NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month). Even with the regular drop-in writing sessions, my habits have slipped a bit and I'm not as focused as I could be. Every year, participating in NaNoWriMo brings new focus and dedication to my writing life.

My personal advice is to join in and focus on what and how it works best for you. For example, although we're supposed to be focused on generating that 50,000-word manuscript, several times I needed to focus on rewriting a manuscript, so that was what I did. I also find that churning out a lot of words and then doing a lot of editing later doesn't work well for me. Instead, I focus on doing productive writing every single day and don't worry as much about word count.

First, go to the NaNoWriMo site, <https://nanowrimo.org/> and register and/or update your previous registration. Every year is a bit different, so check out your profile, look for buddies, see what the newest tools are, discover the discussion groups and meetings, both local and worldwide.

This year, SinC NorCal will be opening up the invitations to our Drop-in Writing Group to all members during November. Once a week you will be seeing an invitation to that week's 1:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., and 10:00 p.m. Zoom sessions where we say hi and then write for an hour.

Look for additional invitations from our SinC NorCal NaNo team as well.

Sisters in Crime National (an official sponsor of NaNoWriMo) will be holding similar daily write-ins at 12:00 p.m. every weekday as well as several gathers to check in and share. Go to <https://www.sistersincrime.org/event/nano21> to find those.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming Author Showcase on Saturday, November 6 and at our Holiday Party on Sunday, December 5, both via Zoom. The Holiday Party will once again be a joint effort with MWA NorCal, as well as the Coastal Cruisers and Capitol Crimes.

Have a wonderful Holiday Season!

Sincerely,

Susan Bickford (she, her, hers)

President, Sisters in Crime NorCal

# Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

---

**Saturday, November 6, 12:00–1:30 p.m.**

***Fall Author Showcase (via Zoom)***

It's time again for our lively, twice-yearly Author Showcase, where NorCal members read an excerpt from their recent work. It's a great way to add to your TBR list!

There will also be a drawing to give away 11 gift certificates (one for each reader) for Book Passage, and you must attend to win!

Participating authors:

Mysti Berry  
Susan Alice Bickford  
Vera Chan  
Glenda Carroll  
Deven Greene  
Vinnie Hansen  
Katherine Bolger Hyde  
Ana Manwaring  
Susan McCormick  
Priscilla Royal  
CJ (Carol) Verburg

**Saturday, December 5, 1:00-3:00 p.m.**

***Holiday Party (via Zoom)***

Again this year, SinC NorCal will join with MWA NorCal, Coastal Cruisers, and Capitol Crimes to celebrate the holiday season. Last year's party was a big hit, so look for more merriment and interactive fun. Watch your email for the details of this exciting event.



As always, there will be no chapter event in January.

**About 3 weeks before the event, members will receive Zoom and Eventbrite registration info via email.**

## In Case You Missed It . . .

If you weren't able to attend our recent events, here's what you missed. Members can find recordings of these events in the Members Only section of our website.

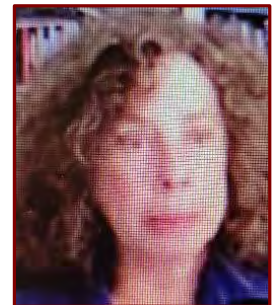
### August Meeting - Feminism and the Mystery, with Sujata Massey

What makes a mystery feminist? Author Sujata Massey says it all comes down to the protagonist: her identity, based on her work; social issues she faces such as discrimination; the setting in which she lives ("a man's world"); relationships with her partner or ex; her journey of emotional growth and change; and situations where she needs to defend herself or others. The author says her current series, featuring Perveen Mistry, a lawyer in 1920s Bombay, is "flat-out" feminist, and Massey has made it authentic by researching newspapers, historical accounts, scholarly writing, hotel menus, and old movies and photographs, not to mention relationships with scholars of that time setting. She also provided us with a brief history of feminism in mysteries and cautioned us about mistakes authors make which render such stories less authentic.

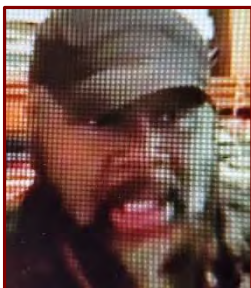


### September Meeting - Writing Your Best Book Panel

An all-star panel convened to give us the benefit of their personal experiences that can help us make our own books the best they can be. With Janet Rudolph as moderator, Matt Coyle, Laurie R. King, S.A. (Shawn) Cosby, Jess Lourey, and Ivy Pochoda told us what they considered their own best books and why, along with the decisions they made that improved their writing. With humor and honesty, they told us whether they write for themselves or their readers, how a particular storyline came to them, and what they would tell their younger writing self today.



Janet Rudolph



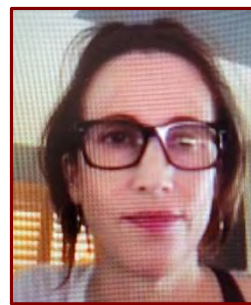
S.A. Cosby



Matt Coyle



Laurie A. King



Jess Lourey



Ivy Pochoda

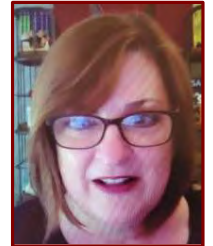
## In Case You Missed It, continued

---

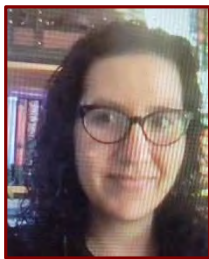
### October Workshop - Getting the Best Bang for Your Book



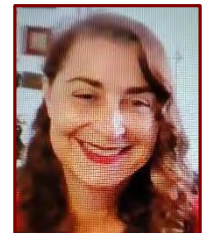
“Be generous and strategic” is writing coach/marketing practitioner Anne Janzer’s (left) tip for marketing your book, which was the theme of this 6-hour workshop, hosted by Mariella Krause (right). Anne’s definition of marketing is matching a product with the people who need, value, and will enjoy it. She suggests that in addition to content, authors should have at least three of the following in their author platform: website, email newsletter/community, social media, and real world reach and relationships.



A panel of stellar authors—Rhys Bowen, Heather Haven, Naomi Hirahara, and Sheldon Siegel (l. to r. below)—provided insight into how they had personally succeeded in promoting their books. Their tips included reaching out to special interest groups, looking for speaking opportunities, identifying ways to make your readers feel like a part of your life, and finding your tribe of supporters.



Gigi Pandian (left) has had a newsletter for 10 years, while Michelle Chouinard’s (right) newsletter is just one year old. Their perspectives are slightly different, but both agree a newsletter is important to engage their readers and attract new ones. Frequency, size, and content will vary, and there may be technical issues at times, but overall, the effort is worthwhile. Gigi gave us her “top ten” lessons learned, and both described the successes they had experienced and the pitfalls that should be avoided.



Alec Peche gave us the benefit of her vast experience with placing book ads on BookBub, Facebook, and Amazon (for Indie writers) and will make her presentation slides available on the NorCal website.



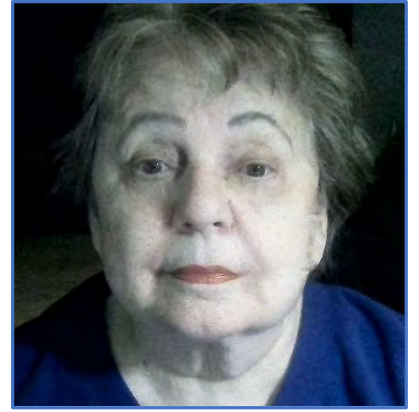
Lisa Towles gave us a real-time demonstration of how easy it is to create a book trailer on Lumen5 in an hour, without being highly technical or having a marketing background.



# Making Time to Write

## by Josephine Mele

---



“You are so lucky to have the time; I could never fit writing into my hectic day.”

The first time I heard this it made me cringe. Now, not so much.

I have been the primary caregiver for my husband, who was downed by a series of strokes nineteen years ago. The first few months, I worked my full-time job from home, put my writing on hold, and did everything by myself. I was exhausted every day.

My neighbor suggested I hire the woman who was helping her recover after hip replacement and to “get out of the house.” I resisted for about a day, and then asked for Katia’s phone number.

She saved my sanity, and probably my husband’s life.

Joe was more patient with Katia and followed her directions during his exercises. I got some much-needed alone time, and grandma hours.

It was a win-win.

I could spend more time with my grandson, Nick, who was on the autism spectrum and having difficulty with his kindergarten teacher, who thought he had a behavior problem. Over the summer, Nick and I wrote the “ABC’s of Asperger’s Syndrome.” When it was published in *Parents Magazine*, my daughter gave a copy to Nick’s first grade teacher and the school principal, who gave a copy to the school faculty.

Nick’s first grade teacher invited me to speak to his class to talk about the alphabet, which gave Nick’s point of view. Why he didn’t make eye contact, volunteer, join games without being invited, couldn’t sit for a long time. I explained what they could do to make life easier for Nick and others on the spectrum. The kids brought their copy of the alphabet home, and a mother called my daughter and said she thought her son was on the spectrum. Another mother called to say that her child’s therapist was using the alphabet in her practice.

## Making Time to Write, continued

---

This positive input from total strangers gave me confidence in my writing and spurred me on to take on bigger challenges. I began collecting and writing short stories about my extended family by talking with my mother and her siblings.

I started going back to the office part time, delegated work chores to others (especially meetings), and worried less about what was going on at home.

I've always been a list maker and still get excited when I cross anything off. At first the lists were husband-centered: doctor appointments, laundry, pick up Rx, what's for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

Then I started adding a treat for myself: haircut, massage, and if I was really good, an hour to write, or submit a short story.

Nirvana.

After a few stories were published, I took out the notes for a memoir and reviewed what I had written. I needed a thread. I took a writing class, cemented a direction, and have been writing ever since. I turned a collection of family stories into a memoir of three grandmothers, *The Odd Grandmothers*, and self-published on Amazon so my 95-year-old mother could have the first copy.

As a world traveler, tour guide, and mystery lover, I drifted into writing cozy travel mysteries. I am on my sixth book. I just discovered a body in a castle on the Rhine. I'm not sure who killed him yet, but I'm working on it.

I've accepted book events and found I enjoy talking with readers. I only get a little upset when friends say they won't travel with me if I keep tripping over dead bodies.

I laugh when I hear some writers (especially men) say they write every day from 4:00 a.m. to noon and then have the rest of the day to themselves. That's because someone else feeds them, does their laundry, and cleans up after them. Not my life.

I once heard Margaret Atwood say, "That's not how my day rolls." That line gave me hope that I too could make the time to write in spite of the daily chores.

## Making Time to Write, continued

---

I write when my husband naps, I write when he watches a movie, while he eats lunch, when his caregiver is working with him. Sometimes I get in 10 minutes, sometimes hours. I keep writing in my head the rest of the day. I know what the next chapter will reveal when I finally sit at my keyboard. I can see my characters and know their back stories. I hear them talking to each other, see their setting, and smell the food they eat – there’s a lot of food in my stories.

I used the same method when my kids were babies and I wanted to paint. I gave up oils and acrylics, as they were too time and space consuming. When I switched to watercolors that need to be completed in a short amount of time, I found I could enjoy painting again.

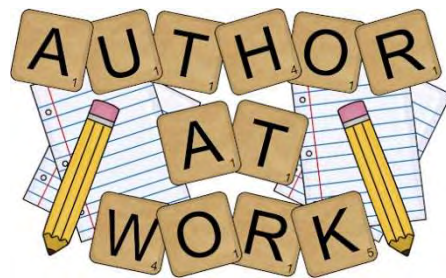
I’d decide on the design while pushing the stroller, pencil sketched during naps, visualized the finished project, and painted in watercolors when everyone was asleep.

There’s always a way to do what you really love. You just have to organize the rest of your required to-do’s. Hire someone for the simple but time-eating chores, accept help when offered, and relax.

Writing should be fun.

I especially like writing mysteries where you can vent by knocking someone off.

Josephine (Jo) Mele has failed at retirement many times. She was a teacher, Parks & Recreation Director, VP of a construction company, and college administrator. Jo is a world traveler, tour guide, magazine editor, and life-long mystery reader. She is the author of: *The Odd Grandmothers*, a memoir of three generations of her Italian immigrant family; *The Travel Mystery* series, including *Two Travel Mysteries: Bullets in Bolivia and Homicide in Havana*, *Mystery in Monte Carlo*, and *Bandits in Brussels*. She wrote “ABC’s of Asperger’s Syndrome,” an article for *Parents Magazine* that was co-authored by her grandson, Nick Mack, “Ellis Island Story” for *The New York Times*, and is a regular contributor to *Reminisce Magazine*, *The Lamorinda Press*, and *Cine Cuvee Magazine*.





# How I Potty-Trained My Cat

by Lee Alvarez (protagonist of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries)  
as told to Heather Haven

---



*The real Tugger*

I lost my mind when Tugger – My Son the Cat – came into my life. Not because he came into my life, but because I tried to potty-train him. My only excuse is I kept tripping over the litter pan every time I went into the laundry room. And wouldn't it be great, I thought, if he used the john instead of his pan? It can't be so hard, I reasoned, even if he can't work the flusher.

I can do this, I continued on in my insanity. After all, I am a Stanford graduate. I am a private detective. I am intelligent. Okay, maybe not as intelligent as Tugger. That's a given. But he is an obedient cat.

So, after reading a particularly entrancing how-to on the internet, I sent away for the kit. Several days later, I received a pair of steel-reinforced gloves in the mail and a set of instructions that went like this:

*Dear Cat Owner,*

*Congratulations on taking the first step towards a better trained cat! Remember, it's essential to keep the upper hand when laying down the law to your pet. You can achieve your goal if your commands are clear and concise. You will be rewarded by an animal who loves you even more for your discipline. Below are the three foolproof steps to employ in training your cat to use the facilities:*

- 1. Discuss overall goal with yourself. You must be in total agreement with self on objective and how to achieve it. Keep cat out of room during this discussion. There is no sense in alerting cat ahead of time. They have their ways.*
- 2. After you've settled things with self, this is the time to talk about overall goal with cat. You will find that sitting cat down in a quiet place, void of distractions, and outlining the situation and resolution is the way to go. They will usually pay rapt attention to you, especially if you are waving catnip about. They may not remember all you've said, but it is a bonding experience.*

## How I Potty-Trained My Cat, continued

---

3. *Lastly, when you see cat doing business in litter pan, carefully lift animal out of pan with care. Be sure to wear aforementioned patented gloves. Now carry to facility. Be sure lid is up. Firmly but gently, place back legs of cat on either side of seat, smiling and chatting casually but in an authoritative manner. A sense of authority is essential for realization of Goal One. After a few times of using firm but pleasant voice, you will be rewarded with a cat that accomplishes feat on his or her own. You will deal with the flushing part of the lesson in Goal Two. The kit for Goal Two is affordably priced on our website.*

None of this went quite as planned. See below for the rest of the steps.

4. Dry self off after cat and you splash about in toilet bowl. Apply Neosporin to scratches on upper arms and face. Clean up poop that landed on new rug while carrying cat from laundry room to bathroom.
5. Transfer litter pan from laundry room to bathroom, so it will be closer to ultimate goal.
6. Using ladder, get wet cat off top shelf of linen closet and towel dry. Put more Neosporin on new bites and scratches, bearing in mind you have to break an egg to make an omelet. Although at this moment, you have no time to cook.
7. Introduce cat to new location of litter pan in one and only bathroom of house. Leave lid of toilet up even though you are a woman, and you are used to it being down when not in use.
8. Clean up cat poop in laundry room done by now confused cat that went behind dryer and on your new, washable silk blouse that fell there earlier in the day, and you forgot to retrieve. Rewash blouse. Hope claw marks will not show.
9. Return to bathroom. Because you left toilet lid up, remove rubber ducky and bottle of expensive perfume that fell in when you and cat were engaged in wrestling match. Wash ducky and perfume bottle thoroughly.
10. To continue training process, stand guard over litter pan now in bathroom waiting for opportunity to catch cat using again. Sleep in bathtub overnight.

## How I Potty-Trained My Cat, continued

---

11. Bandage big toe that got stuck in faucet during night. Wash foot that stepped into litter pan as you were trying to get out of tub, overturning litter pan in process. Curse internet. Curse cat litter. Curse all cats.
12. Exhausted, track down cat and spy him curled up in bed on top of your favorite pillow, looking like the innocent you know he isn't. You realize you love him, anyway.
13. Stagger back to bathroom. Shut lid to toilet. Refill and remove litter pan. Return pan to laundry room. On knees, scrub down bathroom and use one hundred twenty-five dollar-an-ounce perfume to help mask odor you believe to be coming from recently removed litter pan. Realizing it is you, yourself, that smells, take shower to remove odor and excess kitty litter from hair and body. Put soothing moisturizer on chafed knees, rebandage toe, and reapply Neosporin to bites and scratches. Throw what's left of perfume behind your ears; what the hey.
14. Pray cat forgets entire 24-hour experience and will resume litter pan usage in laundry room. While you're at it, pray the boobheads that sold you reinforced gloves will take them back.
15. Crawl into bed next to sleeping, purring cat that snuggles next to you, while you thank God for short memories.



*The fictional Tugger*

Heather Haven is an award-winning mystery author. Her series include the Silicon Valley-based Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, its offshoot, Love Can Be Murder Novellas, The Snow Lake Romantic Suspense Novels, and Manhattan's trail-blazing WWII lady shamus in The Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries. *Murder under the Bigtop*, a Ringling Brothers' Circus standalone docu-mystery, and an anthology, *Corliss and Other Award-Winning Stories*, round out her work. You can learn more about her at [www.heatherhavenstories.com](http://www.heatherhavenstories.com)



## Getting into the Slang of Things by Ann Parker

As a writer of mysteries set in the past, I need to be careful with my language. For instance, if my 1880s characters “get into the swing of things” (the phrase I play off of for the title of this little essay), are they being anachronistic? One of my many reference books, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* by Christine Ammer, says this phrase, which means to “become active, make progress,” dates to the late 1800s. Ah, but does that mean 1870, 1880, 1890? (For my answer, see the end of my essay.\*)

When I dusted off my quiescent Silver Rush Mysteries blog in January 2018, I realized that, if I was to post consistently, I needed to settle on a theme. My love of idioms, slang, and outdated Victorian phraseology came to the rescue, and *Wednesday’s Random Slang-o-rama* was born! With my first Slang-o-rama post featuring *live lumber*, I was off and running. My research led me to linguistic delectables such as *bambsquabbled*, *zounderkite*, *scurryfunge*, and *nanty narking*. I also explore the etymology of more common expressions, such as *asleep at the switch*, *out of kilter*, *I’ll eat my hat*, and *cold turkey*.



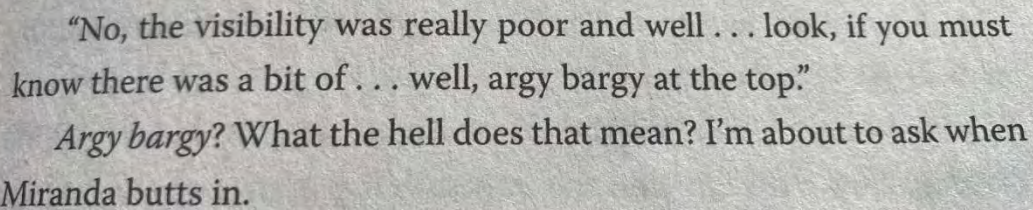
*Some of my hard copy slang resources (I need more shelves!).*

## Getting into the Slang of Things, continued

---

My shelf of reference books has expanded along with my growing interest in turns of phrase. And, of course, let's not forget the many online resources, including the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, *World Wide Words*, *Phrases.com*, and *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. You can also find more specialized dictionaries online, including *Dictionaries of the Scots Language* and the 1889 edition of (take a deep breath here) *Americanisms, old and new; a dictionary of words, phrases and colloquialisms peculiar to the United States, British America, the West Indies, &c., their derivation, meaning and application, together with numerous anecdotal, historical, explanatory and folklore notes* by John Stephen Farmer.

I have to say that I get a special thrill whenever I bump into an unusual Slang-o-rama word/phrase while reading, such as the appearance of **argy bargy** in *One by One* by Ruth Ware.



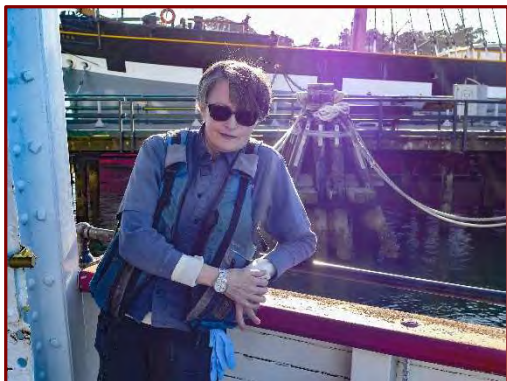
"No, the visibility was really poor and well . . . look, if you must know there was a bit of . . . well, argy bargy at the top."  
*Argy bargy? What the hell does that mean? I'm about to ask when Miranda butts in.*

*Argy bargy "in the wild."*

I don't think I'll ever run out of lovely words and phrases to research. That said, I also take special requests, so if there's a saying or such that has you wondering "Where did THAT come from?" drop me a line at [annparker\(at\)annparker.net](mailto:annparker@annparker.net). Better yet, I invite you to be a guest poster on Slang-o-rama and join in the semantic fun!

\* **In the swing of things:** The origin of this phrase turns out to be a bit of a mystery. After some assiduous digging around, I did find it in an 1893 issue of *Chronicles of Oklahoma* (thank you, *Google Ngram!*). I suspect that if an idiom/slang phrase shows up in print, it probably dates earlier in conversation. But for my characters, in 1882? Hmmmm....

Ann Parker is the author of the award-winning Silver Rush historical mysteries, and an unrepentant word nerd. The eighth book in her series, *The Secret in the Wall*, is scheduled for release February 2022. Website: [www.annparker.net](http://www.annparker.net). Slang-o-rama runs every Wednesday, rain or shine, on the following blog: <https://silverrushmysteries.blogspot.com>.



## Like a Sailor

by Lou Cook

---

One of the perks of working on the San Francisco Bay ferries is the ever-changing beauty of the view. Another is the stories that get told. Sailors, especially when they have been working boats for many years, have a great stockpile of stories. Short or long, chances are you will be told a story at some random juncture of the day. It might be on a 5-minute break before loading passengers or standing in the loading door while approaching the dock while the captain maneuvers the boat in so we can grab the spring line and tie up the boat. The subjects range wide: accidents, mechanical breakdown, feuding crew-mates (we all have those stories), or humorous incidents. And sometimes, swearing.

I first discovered swearing at age 11, in the back of my friend's family station wagon. Before that, the most ribald language I heard was Mom crying 'Mercy Maude!' in that special tone of voice that said, "I'm-at-the-end-of-my-rope-here," clearly announcing, "Right now you are to stop exasperating me! *Or Else!*" My fancy was never sparked by "Mercy Maude."

However, in the back of that station wagon, the deeper nature of prohibited word use – which I later learned was this thing called "swearing" – was revealed. As we fooled around, my friend said, "Holy Moses." I had never heard anything like it before – words I knew that now sounded intentionally naughty. We both glanced forward. No response. Her mom hadn't noticed. The car rolled on down the road. We proceeded to toss this fun new phrase around. Finally, her mother called back to us, "Enough, girls. I don't want to hear that anymore."

It was a mystery. Why were two words, words we often heard in church, not to be uttered together? But now that it was proscribed, "Holy Moses" became not just fun, but racy and wild. I was thrilled. When I tried the phrase out in the hearing of my mother, I got censured immediately. Even better, she couldn't explain in any way that made sense, why I shouldn't say it. I loved Holy Moses.

"Wow," I thought, as I repeated the phrase silently, determined not to forget it. "What else is there?"

As I grew older, moved away from home, I found out. Each new swear word I heard got tucked away for future use. In public, I held these juicy words back. Among my friends, we spiced up our conversations with abandon.

## Like a Sailor, continued

---

At work one day on the ferry, our crew was finishing up lunch and getting ready for the afternoon runs. Somebody made a remark, with a few casual swear words tucked in. The Lead Deckhand, who had worked on the ferries for forty years, chuckled. We looked over at him.

“Have you heard of that time Carolyn came down to our boat to tell us we had to stop swearing?” (Carolyn was the head of our ferry company for many years.)

Not swear? We all joined in his laughter.

“Yeah,” he continued. “We’re on our break, on this boat, if I remember right. We see Carolyn hustling down here. She comes aboard, says hi, then proceeds to tell us that she has gotten complaints, a number of complaints mind you, about the crew and the language we used. Apparently, some customers had made it a point to write to the company, objecting to the ‘language’ they overheard during a voyage.”

What do you say to that, right? None of us say anything. We’re waiting to see what else Carolyn has to say. She stands there, looking around. When no one says anything, she asks, “What should we do about it?”

One of the guys speaks up. “That’s easy! There’s only one answer.”

She looks at him. “And what is that?”

“Stop hiring sailors!”

Lou Cook grew up on a small farm in the hills of western Connecticut. After fifteen years as a commercial interior designer, Lou escaped the confines of the office when she began to work as a deckhand on the ferries of San Francisco Bay. For the past eighteen years, she has worked outside with the winds and the tides, sailing with the best on the Bay. The long history of writers working on the water includes Langston Hughes, Jack Kerouac, Jack London, and Herman Melville. Decking allowed Lou the time to write her first novel, starring her rabbit, Bunz Bunzini. Her love for the Bay and its history are woven into a tale of rabbit mayhem and moose marauders in *Murkey’s, A Rabbit Noir*. If you like charm and fun mixed in with your x-cop rabbit noir, you’ll love *Murkey’s*, set on the foggy waterfront of San Francisco. More at [loucook.com](http://loucook.com) and [Bunzini.com](http://Bunzini.com).

# Creating a Secret Online Identity

by Faye Snowden



With technology permeating every aspect of our lives, writers know that they must incorporate it into their work in realistic ways. My cyberwriting workshop helps writers do



*Deep fake of Obama appearing to say, "Stay woke, bitches"*

that. Topics range from hacking into home security cameras to controlling traffic lights. We spend time discussing how it's possible to control someone else's car while it's being driven, and then move on to deep fakes. Deep fakes are video impersonations of usually famous figures like Barack Obama doing or saying things they never did, or perhaps would never do.

But invariably participants in these workshops are interested in complete erasure. They want to know how to make their characters disappear online. While this sounds like a reasonable question, it's one with no good answers. If our characters behave like us, they have decades-long relationships with the internet, aka the machine. The internet has known some of us since birth. It knows who and what we like, and who and what we don't like. It's familiar with our hobbies and habits, knows what makes us happy and what pisses us off. The machine understands us by what websites we visit, how long we stay, our shopping habits, and information in other datasets. It already possesses an accurate and indelible picture of who we are.



*Completely disappearing online may not be possible*

Because of this past relationship, disappearing online may not be a realistic character move. I advise workshop participants that rather than disappear online, have their characters, like the sleuth, create a clean slate. Developing a secret identity is more plausible than finding ways to erase everything the internet already knows. And bonus—it's way more exciting. Here's how you can have your sleuth hide from the machine:



*My secret identity*



## Creating a Secret Online Identity, continued

---

**Have her anonymously buy a stand-alone laptop.** Anonymously means that this laptop is in no way connected to your sleuth's real identity. Have her go to another neighborhood, or state, and to a store without cameras or license plate readers. Pay cash. Better yet, have her pay someone to purchase the laptop, which is riskier for your sleuth and can lead to all kinds of story possibilities.

Once the laptop is purchased, it's important that she:

**Installs the Tails Operating System (OS):** Tails is an operating system on a USB stick that comes with an anonymous browser. Tails won't leave any traces once the laptop is powered down.

**Uses The Onion Router (TOR):** This is the browser that comes with the Tails OS. (You can also download TOR without Tails.) TOR hides your sleuth by bouncing traffic through millions of relays on a distributed network. TOR also encrypts her traffic and won't leave the laptop full of pesky tracking cookies.

**Purchases gift cards anonymously:** Avoid the refillable ones, or any gift cards that require identifiable information.

**Investigates places to connect wirelessly:** Don't use any locations connected to your sleuth's real identity, or places with security cameras. Find a location where the wireless signal bleeds into the parking lot, or into the hole-in-the-wall next door. Again, the story possibilities.

**Changes the laptop's MAC (Media Control Address) every time she connects wirelessly:** This is easier than you think, and doable. Google it.

**Purchases a burner phone with a hot spot:** Anonymously is also key here. And she shouldn't activate or turn on the phone at home or any place connected to her unless risking exposure is part of the storyline.

Your sleuth, Tails and TOR are best buds from now on. On to the next steps.

**Have her create an email account using her secret identity:** Make up the subscriber data or use a fake person generator that can be found on the web. (If you're trying this in real life, do your research to make sure the site is safe.)

## Creating a Secret Online Identity, continued

---

**Have her convert the prepaid gift cards into bitcoin** and shred them somewhere unrelated to her real identity. Use bitcoin to sign up for other services that her secret identity will need, ex. VPN. To make her secret identity more realistic, lead her to websites that generate fake faces that can be used as profile pictures on social media. You can find these sites, like “thispersondoesnotexist.com” via searches, but please be careful. Do your research before visiting these sites in real life. Only do so if your computer is fully patched and has anti-malware software installed with the latest updates.



*This person is not real*

The tough part about a secret identity is maintaining it. Your sleuth could easily blow her cover by powering up her laptop at home or in a place connected to her, going to websites that her real identity visits, or using the secret identity to communicate with real identity contacts. With the rapid pace of technology, even your characters typing speed or word choices can give her away.

Regardless of how you choose to hide your characters online, be safe and have fun! The possibilities are indeed endless.

\*Most of the ideas on how to create a secret identity comes from Kevin Mitnick’s book, “The Art of Invisibility”.

Faye Snowden writes noir mysteries, poems and short stories from her home in Northern California. Her short story, “One Bullet, One Vote,” was selected as one of the best American mystery and suspense stories of 2021. Novels include the Richard T. Marvel detective series and the Louisiana Killing series featuring homicide detective Raven Burns. The novel *A Killing Rain*, will be out next year. Faye has a master’s degree in English literature and has been awarded several writing fellowships. She is a member of Mystery Writers of America and Sisters in Crime, where she serves as Board Secretary for SinC National. She has participated on many writing panels, appeared as a guest lecturer in several university writing classes, and taught IT courses at the university level. Learn more about Faye at her website, [www.fayesnowden.com](http://www.fayesnowden.com).





## **An announcement from Rae James, Chair of Bouchercon International**

We are pleased to announce there will be a short story anthology for Bouchercon 2022 - The Land of 10,000 Crimes. Our goal is to raise money for the Women's Prison Book Project (WPBP). All of the proceeds, after publishing costs, will go to the WPBP, along with the proceeds from our live and silent auctions.

### **Submission guidelines:**

Short stories must be crime fiction, less than 5000 words, and stories must not have been published anywhere else previously. We would like the stories to be set in Minnesota or Minnesota adjacent (Wisconsin, Iowa, Canada, the Dakotas).

The hard deadline for submission is December 31, 2021. Any stories received after this will not be considered for any reason.

Please submit stories via email and in Word documents to [Anthology@bouchercon2022.com](mailto:Anthology@bouchercon2022.com). Please include your name, email, and any other contact information we might need.

If selected, we will send you a contract assigning Bouchercon the rights for your story for one year after the publication date. After that, the rights revert to you. You will be paid \$75.00 for each story we publish so you meet the guidelines for certain awards in our industry. You will also receive a free copy.

We will be holding a signing at Bouchercon 2022.

Greg Herren and Bouchercon 2022 co-chair Terri Bischoff will be making the selections and editing the anthology.

# Member Profile: Heather Young

Twentieth in a series to introduce our members to each other

---

Heather Young's first book, *The Lost Girls* (2016), won the Strand Award for best first novel. *Booklist* deemed her second, *The Distant Dead* (2020) one of the ten best mystery/suspense books of 2020. And *both* books were nominated for the Edgar Award. Heather lives with her family in Mill Valley, California.

**Stiletta:** Before you began your writing career, you received a law degree from the University of Virginia. Please tell us about your career as a litigator.



**Heather Young:** I was a litigator in a big firm in San Francisco for five years, then moved to a smaller firm in the East Bay for another five before deciding to stay home with my two young kids. My practice was corporate defense, with an emphasis on antitrust and intellectual property law. In other words, nothing like my fiction!

**Stiletta:** What originally inspired you to write crime fiction?

**HY:** The truth is I didn't really set out to write crime fiction; I just wanted to write a novel. The story I came up with centered around a child who went missing in the 1930s, and the sisters who carry the secret of what happened to her for sixty years. When my publisher marketed it as mystery/suspense, I realized that was, in fact, what I had written, so I decided to center my next book more overtly on a murder. It turns out crime fiction is a great framework for the stories I like to tell, which are about families and lies and regrets and redemption, and whether we can forgive the ones we love.

**Stiletta:** How did your education prepare you for your writing career?

**HY:** It didn't! I was an Economics and International Relations double major and had never taken a creative writing class before I decided to write a novel at the age of 42. I was so ill-prepared to write fiction that I went to a low-residency MFA program just so I could learn the ropes. Though my legal training did give me the discipline it takes to organize my plots and, especially, to edit my very bloated first drafts.

**Stiletta:** Would you describe your two published books as thrillers, and is there a common theme that runs through both?

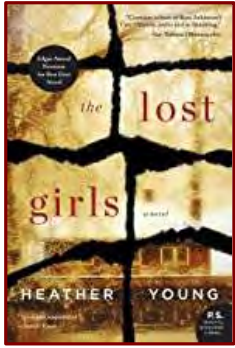
**HY:** I consider each of them both a mystery and a thriller. As much as I like to write about the aftermath of a crime—how characters handle the loss of someone they love, and how they figure out who killed them—I also like to show the building tensions and personal conflicts that lead to the murder itself. The first of these is what mysteries are made of, while the second is more like a thriller.

## Member Profile: Heather Young, continued

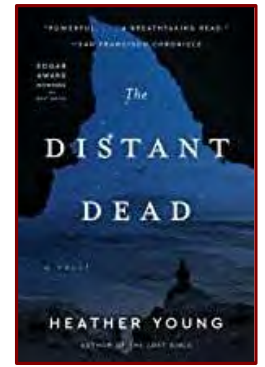
---

Both of my books alternate chapters between before and after the crime, so I get to have my cake and eat it, too.

*Stiletta:* How was writing your second book different from writing your first?



*HY:* I wrote the first book over eight years, in and around parenting my two children. It was my own private passion, and no one but me cared if I finished it or not, so I could take my time, learning to do it as I went. For the second book I had a deadline, and expectations. Looking back, I think of it this way: the first book taught me how to be a writer, and the second book taught me how to be an author. Someone who writes novels as a job. Both transitions were very hard, but the time pressure involved in writing the second book wreaked some serious havoc. Still, I have the best job in the world, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.



*Stiletta:* Tell us about your writing routine. What works and doesn't work for you?

*HY:* Now that I've gone through the crucible of writing my second book, I do have a regular routine. I devote my mornings to exercise, errand-running, etc. Once I've cleared my to-do list, my mind is open to the creative process of writing. I spend anywhere from three to five hours working, Mondays through Fridays. Of course, sometimes what I call "writing" is really research, or book promotion, or editing, but it all falls under the heading of work, so it counts.

*Stiletta:* What can we expect from your next novel, and when?

*HY:* My next novel is set in a small town in Iowa during the Second World War. Like my other two books, it's something of a coming of age story, as a young girl confronts prejudice and the dark side of patriotism as a member of an "outsider" family. Throw in the murders of several young Mexican orphans and her brother's secret life and I hope I end up with something that offers a slightly different perspective on World War II than those of the many excellent novels I've read that examine this era. As for when—I'm still not a very fast writer, so I'm hoping to finish it in 2022 and publish it in 2023.

*Stiletta:* As a successful published author, what advice would you give to fellow SinC NorCal members who are trying to launch a writing career?

*HY:* The first, last, and only rule: don't give up. I had many dark nights of the soul during the eight years I spent writing my debut, but somewhere along the way I read that only 4% of people who start writing a novel actually finish it. I was determined not to be in that 96%, and sometimes that

## Member Profile: Heather Young, continued

---

determination was the only thing that kept me going. Whatever it is that gets you in that chair every day, don't let it go, even on those days when you think your book is utter crap (and there will be many such days). I truly believe that if you do the hard work that writing an entire novel requires, you will have something that the world wants to read.

**Stiletta:** How do you feel you have benefited from membership in Sisters in Crime?

**HY:** I love the camaraderie of my fellow mystery writers. I'm so glad I am in this genre—mystery writers are among the kindest, most generous people I have ever met. It's been hard during the pandemic, but I'm looking forward to seeing familiar SinC NorCal faces at conferences in 2022.

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

**HY:** Mystery/suspense is my favorite genre to read and write, but I've also got a big soft spot for science fiction and fantasy. If I had a better world-building imagination, I'd write those stories, but since I don't, I content myself with living in other writers' brilliant, thought-provoking worlds.

Heather Young was interviewed by Margie Bunting, SinC NorCal newsletter editor.



... to our newest members (joining SinC NorCal from July 1 through September 30, 2021)

---

Sandy Char  
Rae James, who writes as R. Franklin James  
FaBu Omari  
Billie Settles, who writes as B. Payton Settles

# Member News

---

## *New and Upcoming Releases*

Jenny Carless is pleased to announce that her short story, “Strange Place for a Date,” appears in *Cemetery Plots of Northern California*, the new anthology from our sister chapter, Capitol Crimes.

Elizabeth Forest’s YA alternate historical mystery, *The Wharf Rat Guild*, will be released on November 6 by Arbori Books.

*Nothing Comes After Z – Death and Retribution in Tepoztlan* by Ana Manwaring, book #3 in her Jade-Anne Stone Adventures, was released in October by delValle Books.

Vinnie Hansen’s short story, “I Want to Be Your Boyfriend,” appears in *Gabba Gabby Hey: An Anthology of Fiction Inspired by the Music of the Ramones*, published in July by Fahrenheit Press.

*The Alchemist of Fire and Fortune* by Gigi Pandian, book #5 in the Accidental Alchemist Mystery series, was released on October 5 by Gargoyle Girl Productions.

## *Public Appearances (in person or virtual)*

Sisters in Crime NorCal members Alec Peche, George Cramer, and Victoria Kazarian will represent Sisters in Crime National at the 20Books Vegas Indie author convention in Las Vegas on November 8 in the Bally’s Ballroom from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They will be talking to some 1600 indie authors about what Sisters in Crime can do for their writing careers.

On November 12 from 10:00 to 4:00 p.m., Alec Peche will be among the 300 all-genre authors in the Bally’s Ballroom (Las Vegas) selling and signing books.

## *Awards and Recognition*

Congratulations to Susan McCormick, whose book, *The Fog Ladies: Family Matters*, won the InD’Tale RONE (Reward of Novel Excellence) Award for mystery.

Ann Parker’s *Mortal Music* received the Will Rogers Medallion Award (Silver/2<sup>nd</sup> place) in the “Maverick” category. The Will Rogers Medallion Award was originally created to recognize quality works that honored the Will Rogers heritage but has been expanded to include other works of Western literature and film.

## Member News, continued

---

### *Miscellaneous*

As the self-appointed CEO and founder of Hillcrest House Press, Ellen Kirschman re-launched ebooks of two Dot Meyerhoff mysteries in October, to be followed by the third in November and the as yet unpublished fourth in December. She is looking for fellow writers who will read a free advance copy in exchange for posting a review on Amazon after the pub date. Contact Ellen at [efkphd@comcast.net](mailto:efkphd@comcast.net). You'll also be entered in a giveaway for *Shattered Glass*, the Anthony Award-winning anthology from Nasty Woman Press.

---

## SinC NorCal Chapter Member Benefits

Member of our members-only groups.io email list(s)  
Monthly member events and gatherings  
Your book cover on the Our Members' Books carousel on the website  
Listed as a member on the public page of the website  
Access to event recordings in our members-only section of the website  
Option to be part of speaker events with our Speakers Bureau  
Join our daily Drop-In Writing sessions or other meetings set up for members  
Find out about events held by other chapters  
Showcase events for recent publications, twice a year  
Quarterly newsletter  
Hanging out with people who love and write Crime Fiction!!  
And more . . .

**Plus all the benefits of being a member of the national Sisters in Crime organization**



## Question of the Quarter



***Do you ever take a vacation from writing?  
If so, what do you do to escape from your characters?***

---

I try to take a vacation from writing after the most recent book is up for sale. That is when I catch up with things set aside over the last eight plus months. You might think my characters would be happy to take a vacation, too. Not mine! I could be doing tax returns or scheduling a house paint when a little fictional voice suddenly whispers, “I have a great idea for the next book . . .” ***Priscilla Royal***

Never. A day without writing is like a day without sunshine. ***Heather Haven***

I do take writing vacations, and I actually just finished taking a week off. Although I retired from teaching full-time, I still teach twice a week for AoPS. Teaching takes time and focus away from my own pursuits. I am fortunate to have the ability to compartmentalize my time. Right now, I am signed up for a writing class that starts at Stanford on Wednesday. I know I will be writing often for that. I am learning how to write cozy mysteries, so that also takes time. I keep character profile information in an accordion file. It is there when I’m ready to go back to one of my WIPs. ***Chris Knoblauch***

The answer is never, not ever. If I’m not thinking about the current book, I’m thinking about the book I’m going to write next. When I’m on vacation, everything becomes an opportunity to refill the well with new characters, new plots, new settings. I think most writers are like this – we can’t put the pen down. I’ll be interested to see the other answers! ***G.M. Malliet***

The writing, yes. The thinking about stories, never. My characters are very well-behaved. ***Susan Bickford***

I do take breaks from writing. Two weeks over Christmas and New Year and two weeks sometime in the summer. There’s no way of stopping characters from popping in to visit, but I try to make sure I’ve just finished a draft or an edit before I power down, so that the pop-ups are ideas for the next round rather than solutions for current problems. Also, when I’m curating my reading pile for the beach or fireside, I stick to some rules: nothing I need to blurb, nothing for a panel or interview, nothing I think I “should” read, nothing by anyone who’s going to ask me what I thought . . . and at least one celebrity bio. ***Catriona McPherson***

Any real vacation I take is a vacation from writing. However, I haven’t taken a “real vacation” since months before the start of the pandemic! ***Vinnie Hansen***

## Question of the Quarter, continued

---

Yes, on occasion . . . meaning that sometimes I'll go for a week with other commitments interfering with my writing, so I suppose it's not really a vacation. When I do get away, though, I always have my characters and situations with me, can't completely get them out of my head. A few years ago, I was visiting my sister on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington and we took a walk in a decommissioned fort (LOTS of them around Puget Sound). I went into what would have been ammunition storage and the walls were scaly with different colored lichen, streak of rust, blotches of mildew, and it was JUST the look I need for the room that one of my kidnapped characters was being held in. *Michele Drier*

Four things I do for escaping from my fictional universe: write for the day job (all science, all the time); read newspapers, magazines, novels, nonfiction . . . as long as the topic is not related to the book I just finished or the next one looming in the back of my mind; take photographs; watch movies—I am so happy that our little local indie cinema is open again (with masks). *Ann Parker*

Very interesting question for me, since this week I have been trying to take a vacation from my characters but have been unsuccessful in doing so. They won't leave me alone! When I take a vacation from writing, I either go hiking at a beautiful scenic spot or I read about someone else's characters—especially if they're in a book of a different genre or style. Both things help clear out my brain and give me the respite I need. *Victoria Kazarian*

I did try to slip away during the lockdown. Even then, my characters were roaming around my brain—undeterred by my “Do Not Disturb” sign, asking, “What about me?” *Diana Chambers*

I do take a vacation, in fact I just returned from a fabulous car trip through the spectacular National Parks in Utah (you can see several of the hundreds of photos I took on my FB page). Didn't help, my characters follow me wherever I go. *Ellen Kirschman*



## 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 **Ana Brazil**, Events (anabrazil (at) sbcglobal.net), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter (mbunting (at) sbcglobal.net), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions.

### SinC NorCal Executive Committee

President: Susan Bickford – susan (dot )bickford (at) gmail.com

Vice President: Michele Drier – micheledrier (at) att.net

Secretary: Claire Ortalda – clairemystery (at) sonic.net

Treasurer: Ana Manwaring – anamanwaring (at) gmail.com

Membership: Malena Eljumaily – malena (at) omnicode.com

Events: Ana Brazil – ana (at) brazilcamp.org

Speakers Bureau: Susan Kuchinskias – susan (at) kuchinskias.com

Newsletter: Margie Bunting – mbunting (at) sbcglobal.net

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

