

# THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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## Welcome to 2022!

It's been an interesting two years, and my hat's off to Susan Bickford for taking on this daunting responsibility and leading NorCal through a sea-change of structure. When she took the helm in 2020, little did any of us know what was in store, but through good communications and sound decisions, Susan helped us move to a virtual reality.

We're now, one hopes, at the cusp of regaining some sense of normalcy, and one major thrust is resuming some meetings and events in real time and space. The board is discussing some of the what's and when's this entails, but we're pledged to find a way to get together.

This is not the only issue we'd like to tackle. An area where virtual meetings excelled was the ability to attract top-notch speakers at little to no cost. And to attract an audience from across the country as well as abroad. It was delightful to see people from Australia and Europe joining our programs and hearing our stellar line-up of speakers. We intend to find a way to continue this broadening and outreach.

As we move back toward our in-person events, we need to stay mindful that we've developed a wider audience. All to the good for us as a Sisters chapter and also to us as individual authors.



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## President's Letter, continued

Some of you know that I've been involved in Sisters at various levels for the past ten years or so. I've been a member of Capitol Crimes (Sacramento) and served as president for four years. I've been a member of the Guppies as long and served as president for two terms. And beyond Sisters and into the greater mystery community, I was the co-chair of Bouchercon 2020 and am still a board member and chair of the Mentoring Committee ... meaning I get to work with people in Minneapolis, San Diego, and Nashville on their upcoming Bouchercons.

On a personal level, I'm a fifth-generation Californian from a family that came to San Francisco in 1849 (a great-great-grandfather) and with a great-great-grandmother who crossed the Isthmus of Panama on donkey back in 1851.

I can't imagine! I was born in Santa Cruz and, though I've lived in most of the state, from Humboldt County to Riverside County, the Bay Area has always felt like home.

Over years of planning programs, I've come to believe in theft. Well, really watching out for good ideas and liberating, copying, borrowing them if they help us further our mission and goals. To that end, if you know about or hear about a program or project that benefits authors or readers and you'd like to see us adopt/adapt it, please let me or any board member know.

Because we're a group of people who cherish mysteries of all kinds and are passionate about helping our members get the greatest benefit we can, we'll keep looking out for inclusion, challenge, learning, and creative ways to share our love of mystery with a wider world.

Sincerely,

Michele Drier

President, Sisters in Crime NorCal



# Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

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**Saturday, February 5, 12:00–2:00 p.m.**

***Members Meet & Greet (via Zoom)***

Be sure to join us for our annual Meet & Greet, where Mysti Berry will moderate a panel in which she, Janet Rudolph, and Faye Snowden will discuss the many opportunities for writers to submit their work, including contests, awards, anthologies, and more.

Attendees will also meet NorCal's new Executive Board members, hear some chapter announcements, and interact with their fellow members in a series of breakout rooms/sessions.

Be sure to register at <https://sistersincrime-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tjrcrOqpqDwoGdEonYTDdHu7615ht3rjj99> and you will receive a confirmation email including the Zoom link to attend.

**Saturday, March 5, 12:00-2:00 p.m.**

***How to Use Book Brush (via Zoom)***

Join Kathleen Sweeney, Manager of Marketing and Customer Service, for a fun, live walk-through to see how easy it is to use Book Brush to create a wide variety of promotional images, design book covers, and so much more. Kathleen will share handy tips and tricks along the way and will have time for Q&A as well. Learn why authors say Book Brush saves them both time and money. If you want to work along with the tutorial, please register for a Book Brush free account before the meeting and watch our social and groups.io for the registration link.

**Date and Time TBD**

***April event: topic and details available soon***

Watch the member email and the NorCal website for more information about this event and how to register.

# 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.

## November Meeting - Fall Author Showcase

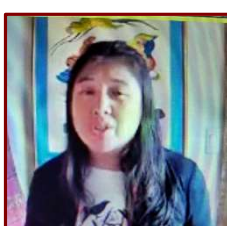
For the second Author Showcase of 2021, hosted by Michele Drier, we heard from eleven of our stellar authors and gave away some coveted Book Passage gift cards in a drawing.



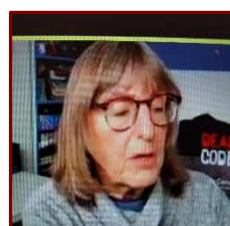
*Mysti Berry*



*Susan Bickford*



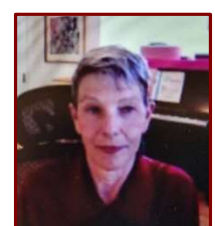
*Vera Chan*



*Glenda Carroll*



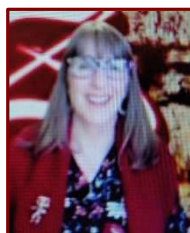
*Deven Greene*



*Vinnie Hansen*



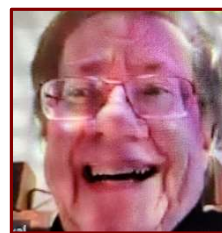
*Katherine Bolger Hyde*



*Ana Manwaring*



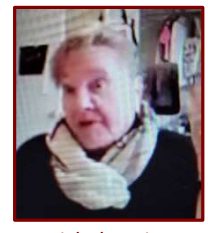
*Susan McCormick*



*Priscilla Royal*



*Carol Verburg*



*Michele Drier*

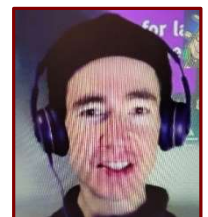
## December Meeting - Holiday Party

For the second successive year, we celebrated the holidays on Zoom, along with MWA NorCal, Coastal Cruisers, and Capitol Crimes, hosted by outgoing SinC NorCal President Susan Bickford.



Daisy Bateman (left) and Laurie Sheehan demonstrated cheese and wine pairings.

Matt Haynes, introduced by Sharon Cathcart, spoke from experience about what to expect of an audiobook narrator.



Claire Johnson, a former chef, demonstrated how to make no-bake bourbon balls and recommended her favorite holiday cookbooks.



## Introducing Our 2022 Executive Committee Members (and their outlook on the coming year)

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**MICHELE DRIER, President:** I was born in Santa Cruz and am a fifth generation Californian. During my career in journalism – as a reporter and editor at daily newspapers, including the *San Jose Mercury-News* – I won awards for producing investigative series. I also spent a couple of decades as Executive Director of non-profit organizations across California serving women’s programs, domestic assault programs, legal services for seniors and the arts. I retired from Legal Assistance for Seniors in Oakland, an agency that served more than 10,000 seniors in the East Bay. After retirement, I turned to my first love, writing, and am now working on my 17th novel. I’m past president of SinC chapters Capitol Crimes and the Guppies and co-chaired Bouchercon 2020, the world’s oldest and largest convention for mystery writers and fans. My series include the Amy Hobbes Newspaper Mysteries, SNAP: The Kandesky Vampire Chronicles, and the Stained Glass Mysteries. The latest in the Stained Glass Mysteries, *Tapestry of Tears*, was published in 2020. Find me at [www.micheledrier.me](http://www.micheledrier.me) I’m hoping that 2022 will begin a return to normal relationships after almost two years of Covid-induced shutdowns, and NorCal will be here to benefit all our members with intriguing, interesting, challenging and well-developed programs.

**GLENDACARROLL, Vice President:** I am the author of the Trisha Carson mysteries, *Dead Code*, *Drop Dead Red*, and *Dead in the Water*. They are set in the San Francisco Bay Area, including Marin, the East Bay State Parks and, of course, San Francisco. All of my books have a swimming undercurrent, based on my own experience. I have raced in more than 150 open water swimming events in Northern California, as well as Hawaii and Perth, Australia. I completed a swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco in 2021. I was a long-time sports columnist for the *Marin Independent Journal* and have written for numerous publications, including *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Defenders of Wildlife*, *Sailing*, *Yacht Racing*, *Swimmer*, and *Ford Times*.



I tutor first generation high school students in English. I live in San Rafael, CA with my dog, McCovey. For more information, go to [www.glendacarroll.com/](http://www.glendacarroll.com/) . As your new vice president, my primary role is to organize the Spring and Fall Author Showcases. They truly highlight the talent in the organization, and I am proud I am responsible for putting them together. I also am on hand to help out the president, Michele, in any way I can.

## 2022 EC Members, continued

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**CLAIRE ORTALDA, Secretary:** A former journalist, ad copywriter, and English instructor, I made the switch from literary writing to mystery writing by immediately joining Sisters in Crime. My short story, "The Recipe Box," was published in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, and "Oglethorpe's Camera" was published in the Anne Perry-edited Mystery Writers of America anthology, *Odd Partners*. A full-length traditional mystery, still looking for a title and a publisher, was short-listed for the Del Sol Press First Novel Prize (judge: Hallie Ephron). I look forward to assisting with board recruitment in the coming year, as we have more good ideas than people to implement them.

**MALENA ELJUMAILY, Treasurer:** I am an avid reader of mostly mysteries, but a few other genres as well. I belong to a mystery book club that has been meeting for over 25 years. Several of my short plays (one-act, ten-minute and one-minute) have been produced in festivals around the country. I also love to knit, but now consider diamond painting my new mindful hobby. I live in Santa Rosa. After many years as Membership Chair, I am passing the reins on to Mysti Berry's capable hands and taking on the job of Treasurer. This is to allow Ana Manwaring the opportunity to work as Events Coordinator. I'll be in learning mode for the first few months but hope I can muddle through to eventual competency.



**MYSTI BERRY, Membership:** I am the editor and publisher of *Low Down Dirty Vote*, two volumes of short stories (soon to be three!) created to raise money for voting rights work. All volumes contain stories by award-winning writers. We're especially proud of Faye Snowden for her story, "One Bullet. One Vote," that has been accepted into *Best American Mystery and Suspense 2021*. I've been published in *EQMM*, *AHMM*, and many regional SinC anthologies, as well as an article in the MWA handbook, *How to Write a Mystery*. I hope to follow in Malena's masterful footsteps with Membership and also help to increase the diversity of our chapter. I have previously served on the Board of several writers' organizations.

## 2022 EC Members, continued

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**ANA MANWARING, Events:** When I'm not planning our meetings, I'll be republishing my first three JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures and publishing the fourth in the series, *Coyote*, with Indies United Publishing House. My FUNdaMentalists poetry community, Words at the Root, launched last January and is going strong, and my next chapbook will publish on May 1. I am a former lifestyle columnist, and my reviews of Sisters' books can be found at [www.anamanwaring.com/](http://www.anamanwaring.com/), as well as information on my editing business, JAM Manuscript Consulting. In my new role, we're planning some great programs for 2022 on topics from craft to critique to submissions to marketing and more. I envision some inspiring panels, several tutorials on how to use specific platforms, ideas for submitting and entering contests, and some fun when we can meet in person.



**MARGIE BUNTING, Newsletter:** Although I moved from the Bay Area to El Dorado Hills in 2020, I have continued as editor of *The Stiletta* and am now in my seventh year. Happily retired from an HR management career, I keep busy with Toastmasters, book and movie review clubs, card game and domino get-togethers, counted cross-stitch, and watching my young grandchildren grow. I read more books than ever before (217) in 2021 and dipped my toe into the quest for ARC approvals on NetGalley for the first time, with some success, posting reviews on Goodreads, NetGalley, Amazon, and Lesa's Book Critiques. My thanks to all of you who have supported the newsletter by submitting articles and Question of the Quarter responses. I look forward to even more of your ideas and participation in 2022.

**SUSAN KUCHINSKAS, Speakers Bureau:** After holding down a series of random jobs—exercise demonstrator, office temp, stewardess, house painter—it was probably inevitable that I became a writer. I started my career as an architecture and design journalist and then moved into technology when the Internet became a thing. I cover automotive and digital technology as a freelance journalist, as well as writing content for tech companies. My science fiction/detective novel, *Chimera Catalyst*, was published in 2017, and the sequel, *Singularity Syndrome*, was released in February 2020. My crime stories have been published in *Switchblade*, *Shotgun Honey*, and our chapter's *Fault Lines* anthology. I live in Berkeley with my mate, a cat, a dog, and some 60,000 honeybees. <http://www.kuchinskas.com> In 2022, I want to continue supporting the chapter with outreach to the public via posting on Eventbrite and Meetup.



## 2022 EC Members, continued

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**SUSAN ALICE BICKFORD, Past President:** I was born in Boston and grew up in Central New York, the setting for many of my stories. Eventually I migrated to Silicon Valley to work in high tech in a variety of engineering and managerial roles. I write thrillers and suspense stories that are deeply embedded in the rural areas of New York State and New England, featuring resourceful female protagonists. My short stories have appeared in the anthologies *Fish Out of Water* and *Fishy Business*, and in the latest Guppy anthology, *The One That Got Away*. My debut novel, *A Short Time to Die*, was published in 2017 and was nominated for the 2018 Left Coast Crime Best Debut Novel. My second novel, *Dread of Winter*, released in October 2019, was a 2020 Edgar Award nominee. **As past president, I will be actively supporting and helping guide the chapter in a wide variety of areas. I also plan to continue to help run our digital meeting strategy and implementation going forward.**

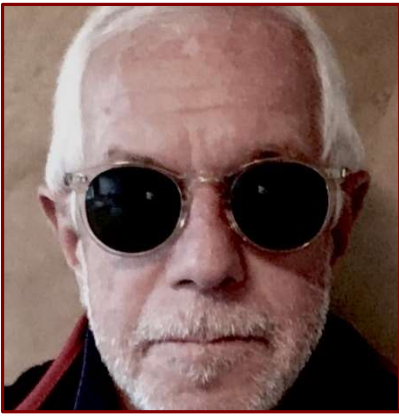


**... to our newest members (joining SinC NorCal from October 1 through December 31, 2021)**

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Beverly Kristina Allen  
Heidi Eliason  
Lynn Franken  
Kris Freeman  
Lisa Freese  
Bonnie Gordon  
Cherie O'Boyle  
Alana Weaver





## A Review of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* by Kenneth Gwin

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Every so often I get the urge to read an old book just to see how styles and things have changed. Writers today, especially genre writers, tend to follow certain plot conventions and don't like to waste time dawdling on lengthy descriptions, feelings, considerations – the kinds of things Elmore Leonard said people skip over anyway.

It's sometimes a challenge, then, to wade into some of these older books, plodding through burdensome layers of arcane verbosity, hoping to find that promised nugget or hidden insight buried in one of these classics of yesterday. Turns out, *Ulysses* is beyond me. *Heart of Darkness* is an impenetrable jungle of tone-deaf prose. Dashiell Hammett is a bit wooden, but he had some good lines. So, it's not all a waste of time.

We've all read *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where the gentle orangutan is miscast as a vicious killer. Research was often lacking in these past stories of crime. But things progressed. Google will catch the sloppy writer of today.

I decided to tackle *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. This was supposedly for historical reasons, but honestly, it was because I liked the cover. It features a dusty-blue background, a turban-wearing swami, and a lovely redhead in a satin sheath. As a bonus, the face of a masked man is pointing a pistol from a postage stamp stylishly placed in the lower right-hand corner. This cover was obviously an illustration from the nineteen thirties and not 1868, when the book was first published. Still, how could I resist even this tempting bit of nostalgia?

Happily, the prose required little translation from nineteenth-century British to something I could understand today. It did plod as things progressed, what with endless paragraphs, parenthetical asides, diversions, and references to previous events, and so on, and so on, and so forth. As it were.



## A Review of *The Moonstone*, continued

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What struck me as most interesting was the template it provided for decades of mystery stories to follow. I refer again to the cover and its allusion to magic, Orientalism, and the delicate vulnerability of female sensuality draped in gossamer frocks.

Inside the cover are all the elements of a familiar, tried-and-true formula. There is a grand estate, a missing jewel, suspicious foreigners, shady dealings in India and the mysterious East, opium, hypnotism, unrequited love, love found, smugglers, thieves, a bumbling constable, a crafty detective, a murder, and a butler that didn't do it. There is more, but my favorite detail, one I haven't seen used in a novel or movie in ages, is quicksand. Whatever happened to quicksand? It was always so helpful in dispatching bad guys in the past.

It also successfully employed the technique of overlapping first-person narratives. Not *Rashomon*, but a linear accounting of the events by the butler, the niece, the detective, the suitor, the solicitor, and a cast of characters, all contributing varying points of view as the events proceeded to unfold.

This is a slow read by modern standards; still, it required only a few trips to the dictionary. It shows the reader many of the devices used today in crafting mysteries, long before the likes of Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, and Michael Connelly came on the scene. And yes, even you have used these tricks as well.

Two thumbs up.

Kenneth Gwin is a visual artist living in San Francisco. He is a fan of both mysteries and thrillers, with a special interest in espionage, conspiracies, and disinformation. He thinks everything you really want to know is behind that curtain. What's there, you ask? That's the mystery.



# Location Scouting from the Desktop

by Susan Kuchinskas

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I'd love to be one of those writers who travels to a fascinating location, soaks up local color, and sets her next great mystery there. Sad to say, I'm not able to relocate for a month or two at a time. And, when I vacation, I ... vacation.

But I've learned to let Google be my travel guide. It's cheap (as in, free) and efficient, if not as much fun as actual travel.

The Bouchercon/Dallas anthology put out a call for submissions with the theme "Deep in the Heart of Texas." The story could either be set in Texas or somehow refer to the theme. "Heart of Texas" said to me that I should set my story in a small town, in the literal heartland of the state. I started by putting Texas into the Google Maps search bar, then increasing the magnification (with that little plus/minus thingie) until I could see all the littlest towns. I traveled by cursor around the area until I found Spur. The name itself was intriguing. So, Texas, I told myself.



*Photo Credit: Danny Mingus via Flickr*

When I Googled "Spur, Texas," Wikipedia told me the town only had some 1,300 people—just the size I was looking for. Even better, there's a monumental sculpture of a spur right in town.

Images.google.com showed me this monument, which looked to be about 30 to 40 feet high at its tip. I also saw it was set in a little park with a couple of benches across from a gas station. I had to use this.

Image search also led me to Danny Mingus, a Texas photographer who'd posted 84 photos of the town on Flickr. These photos gave me a real sense of the town and its environs.

Back to Wikipedia, which linked to an article about how Spur tried to reverse population decline by selling off vacant lots and encouraging alternative structures such as tiny houses—but residents were aghast at these "hippie" invaders. Now I had social conflict and real estate, two prime instigators of murder.

## Location Scouting from the Desktop, continued

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I decided to make my protagonist a beekeeper. That part was easy because I keep bees. She was a newcomer trying to navigate the mores of this place. I wanted to start with her chasing a honeybee swarm, so it was back to Google Maps to get a layout of the streets. Google gave me the name of a market and café in town, settings for two of my scenes.

Okay, but what about the murder? I remembered news stories a while back about a dispute about a high-value dinosaur fossil. Googling “dispute dinosaur fossils” took me to *The Smithsonian* and an article about a real estate developer who found a T-Rex fossil, worth about \$8 million, in South Dakota. Google told me there are plenty of valuable dinosaur bones found in Texas, too. There was my motive, one of the classics: money.

The resulting story was rejected by the anthology committee, but recently ran in *Mystery Tribune*: “A Harrow Tine in the Heart.”

I also used this approach for my “Florida man” story, “Gator Baiter,” located in a swampy Florida state park and published in *Rock and a Hard Place*.

I’m old enough to remember a time before Google, and despite all the problems the internet can cause, I would never go back.

Susan Kuchinskas is the author of the science fiction/detective novels *Chimera Catalyst* and *Singularity Syndrome*. Her short stories have been published in a variety of magazines, including *Rock and a Hard Place*, *Shotgun Honey*, *Switchblade*, and *Terror House*. Find out more at <http://kuchinskas.com>







## Cheese and Wine: A Conversation with Daisy Bateman and Laurie Sheehan

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**Daisy Bateman:** At the Sisters in Crime/MWA holiday party, Laurie and I teamed up to form a cheese and wine pairing supergroup, like The Traveling Wilburys, with more lactose and less facial hair. (Possibly the same amount of booze, though.) Now, despite a total lack of popular demand, we're back, this time in print.

**Laurie Sheehan:** Which is great, because we'll be able to add more detail to our original cheese and wine pairings.

**D:** I'm ready to offer my thought on the best way to build a cheese plate\*, for those with a burning desire to know my thoughts on the topic. I know that lately a lot of us have had our plans for gatherings cancelled or modified, but that doesn't really change my recommendations. Any cheese plate can be a single-serving cheese plate if you put your mind to it.

**L:** I like it.

**D:** Right? Let's jump right in. My categories are Funky, Creamy, Blue, Aged, and Wild Card.

**L:** Those are excellent categories. Where should we start?

**D:** Funky. It's my favorite category, so we're doing it first.

**L:** Excellent! I love funk. Nice strong dance rhythm.

**D:** Not that kind of funky. I'm referring to the lovely, musty smell of funky cheeses.

**L:** That does make more sense. So, whatta ya got for me?

**D:** My Funky selection is Langres AOP. My tasting notes on this cheese are mushroomy, lactic, and rich. Ideally, you want a funky cheese that will make anyone you live with wonder if something has gone off in the refrigerator, but not actually move out.

**L:** Sounds like a guy I dated when I was 20.

**D:** You should save that story for girl's night and a bottle of wine. Speaking of wine, what are you suggesting as a partner to Funky?

## Cheese and Wine, continued

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**L:** Thanks for asking. My Funky pairing is Gewürztraminer or dry Riesling. Something crisp. I like the aromas in Gewürztraminer. You'll often find hints of rose, apricot kernel, tropical fruit, and in a nice bottle you'll also find pepper. If the grapes have experienced noble rot, you might also get some yummy dried fruit and honey tones, although that might make the wine a bit sweeter.

**D:** Noble rot? Like, inbred with a bad chin?

**L:** Close. It's a fun grey fungus called *Botrytis Cinerea*. The conditions need to be ideal--damp for the grapes to be infested, but then exposed to drier conditions so they become a bit raised. They also need to be picked at the ideal time to produce a concentrated wine. That's why these wines are often sweeter.

**D:** Hmm. Fascinating.

**L:** Your "fascinating" seems suspiciously analogous to "disgusting."

**D:** Never. Let's move on, shall we? Next category. Creamy. I'm going with a Le Rustique Camembert. This is a reliable choice for when you want to maximize your intake of dairy fats. This one is a little on the sharp side; if you want a milder option, look for a triple cream brie, *delice de Bourgogne* or *fromager d'Affinois*, a cheese I like so much I can spell it on the first try.

**L:** Those are all wonderful options and I was really pleased with your selection. Quick question, who wouldn't want to maximize their intake of dairy fats?

**D:** I'm guessing that would be the truly lactose intolerant or crazy people.

**L:** Agreed. For this cheese I'm going to have to say crisp and white. Think unoaked Chardonnay, Burgundian Chablis, or Sauvignon Blanc. Crisp whites will have fewer tannins, that's just better for younger soft cheeses. However, you tricky cheese aficionado, you've thrown a curve. You picked a creamy cheese with a slight sharp edge, bordering on the stinky. Which I love. Ultimately, I picked a Sauvignon Blanc, which should offer notes of cut hay, bell pepper, toast, and some say they get overtones of cat pee or gun flint (think mineral notes, or steely, or the smell of wet pebbles along a river bank). At any rate, when you drink this wine you should pick up on a bright minerality where lemon, green apple, and cream play across the tongue. Try to pick something that isn't going to do battle with the distinct flavors of this splendid cheese. Wine can get pushy.

**D:** That sounds lovely, and I am going to pretend you didn't say "cat pee."

**L:** Wine people can be strange. A fun sort of strange, but still strange.

**D:** Noted. And, what if someone really wanted red wine with creamy cheese?

**L:** Then I'd have to tell them to look for a soft Pinot Noir. It's a low tannin red, often fruit forward without being oppressively jammy. That would work.

## Cheese and Wine, continued

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**D:** Right, next category. Blue.

**L:** Yummy! Happy dance, happy dance!

**D:** Calm down, it's just cheese.

**L:** Sorry.

**D:** Ahem. As I was saying, Blue. I picked the Point Reyes Original Blue. A Bay Area artisan classic. Their Bay Blue is milder--this one puts up a fight. Other options could be Rogue River Blue from the creamery of the same name, or cambazola, if you can't get enough of the high-cream options. As a side note, I've found that an unexpected but good pairing for this blue is honeycomb and almonds.

**L:** I enjoyed the crumbly nature of this blue compared to a triple cream blue. Although, I'll admit to being partial to creamy cambazola! Drool.

**D:** Okay, we'll add cambazola to the girl's night wine party.

**L:** Perfect. Now, back to the task at hand. Wine to pair with Point Reyes Original Blue. As you said, this can be pungent. I suggest a sparkling wine, something Brut. The mild tang and effervescence of the wine pairs nicely, and it will help clear your palate a bit between nibbles without ridding your mouth of the delightful flavor of this cheese. For anyone who is not a fan of sparkling wine (philistine), or if you're having a cheese plate in place of dessert, go with a sauterne. Many sauterne have a fantastic balance of sweetness and zesty acidity with flavors of apricots and honey with a nutty note. Which is why I'm so glad you mentioned that this cheese pairs nicely with honeycomb and almonds. What a great tip!

**D:** Thanks. I try. Next category, Aged. I selected a Parmigiano Reggiano aged 40 months.

**L:** What's that is in dog years?

**D:** Grey muzzle old. This cheese is savory, slightly nutty, with crunchy bits that are actually the crystalized proteins, not salt. You could also do a manchego, or some aged gruyere, or just eat the powdered stuff out of the green can, the world is ending, who cares.

**L:** You're kidding about the green can, right? We're not that desperate.

**D:** I never kid about cheese.\*\*

**L:** Noted. This is the first cheese we've tasted that I think really stands up to red wine. Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, or Sangiovese are all good choices. And, I have to put in another plug for a sparkler here. The bubbles cut through the perceived saltiness of this hard cheese. Prosecco is a good option because of that slight sweetness. Super yummy.

## Cheese and Wine, continued

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**D:** Okay, final category, Wild Card. I picked a British Mustard and Ale Cheddar Cheese. This category is an opportunity to go wild. See a cheese that makes you ask, “why would someone make that?” Go for it. I chose this relatively staid mustard flavored cheddar (the ale doesn't really come through). Serious rarebit vibes, as the kids would say (I don't know any kids).

**L:** I have noticed an abundance of wild cheeses recently. Some seem a little too, too... but, maybe I'll give them a try?

**D:** You should. Some will be a treat, but they'll all be interesting. What can we pair with this cheddar?

**L:** Well, Daisy, attribution needs to be assigned to you for this one. My initial volley was a Chardonnay that leaned toward butter in order to combat the sharpness of cheddar. But, I'll admit that I'm not a fan of buttery Chards. My other thought was ale (duh). But, then you suggested hard cider or artisan pilsner, which is just brilliant.

**D:** Aw, thanks. Those seemed good choices.

**L:** Indeed. Even a non-alcoholic cider would work here. Something tangy and not sweet. You'll want the respectively bold flavors to match, instead of one drowning out the other. This particular cheese, and cheddars in general, also pair nicely with single-malt scotch or bourbon. And that addresses one of the comments from the chat during our presentation. Someone asked about pairing cheese with tequila or whiskey (I'm looking at you, Dale and Mysti).

**D:** That reminds me, there were some great comments!

**L:** Absolutely! One of my favorites came from **Catriona**: "One creamy, one funky, one blue and a wild card" is much better advice for brides than the old one." **Dale and Mysti** said, "Gewürztraminer is a great villain's name" and "Ignoble Grape is going to be our stripper name." **Leslie** had some great ones: "Wet dog is my favorite smell on the wine wheel" and "Good cheddar, brown bread, Branston pickle, and bitter beer. My heart be still..." **Tammy** said, "I am going to try this mustard one melted over steamed veggies." There were a lot of comments about loving the Parm. However, some of the best were in regard to your mini-tirade regarding those spoilsports, cheese tunnelers! Here are a few:

**Leslie:** "In France, they also say, jamais couper le nez – never cut off the nose of the cheese."

**Peggy:** "The Case of the Murdered Cheese Tunneler"

**Lisa:** "Cheese tunneling - helpful to learn these proper rules of engagement :)"

**Tammy:** "You tell em, Daisy!"

**Madeline:** "Grounds for divorce"

**D:** It wasn't a tirade. Well, okay, it might have been a mini-tirade. Those people bring it on themselves.



## Cheese and Wine, continued

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**L:** I'm in your camp. Final words?

**D:** Sure. I found all these cheeses at my local Trader Joe's. Local markets and personal tastes should lead to substitutions. This is cheese; it's just here to make you happy. How about you? Guiding words on wine?

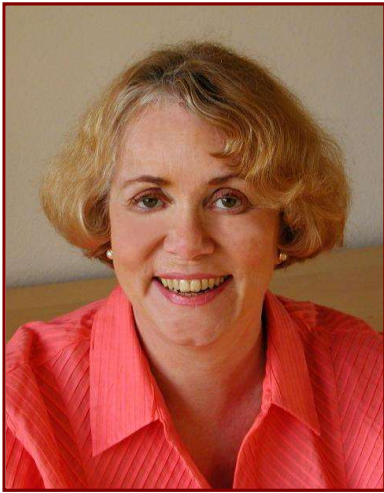
**L:** There's a reason why wine has been around for thousands of years, and not just because having a few glasses makes everyone around you prettier. Wine is interesting. For instance, put the same wine in two different shaped glasses and it will taste different. That's science, and science is fun. But, please drink what makes you happy. There are plenty of fun unboozy options that feel festive – sparkling lemonade, Yerba Mate, soda with a healthy squeeze of lime, sparkling water with a splash of cranberry juice and a slice of orange. Whatever you drink, just put it in a fancy glass.

\*Not that there's a bad one.

\*\*This is demonstrably untrue.

Laurie Sheehan has long been a member of Mystery Writers of America, a relationship that began with her in a flapper dress, in a cemetery in Potomac, Maryland, drinking cocktails next to the graves of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. At first she was "only" a fan, but over the years she also joined multiple SinC chapters, the Guppies, and found super sweet, supportive friends that encourage write more seriously. She is currently working on *Death in the Afternoon*, the first novel in what she hopes will become The Modern Speakeasy Mysteries. By day Laurie is a mild-mannered Program Analyst for the Department of Defense. She lives in Pacific Grove with a supportive husband and a chunky tortoise shell cat with an attitude. She can often be found at home singing off key, defending the Oxford comma, or at a café (when we're not in a pandemic) over creaming her coffee. Laurie tried to start a website, but it's stalled. If anyone has ideas or comments bring 'em on: <https://lauriesheehan.com/>

Daisy Bateman is the author of the Marketplace Mysteries series from Seventh Street Books, in which the owner of an artisan foods marketplace on the Sonoma Coast solves murders and stops for the occasional snack. *A Dismal Harvest*, the second book in the series, will be released on March 15, 2022. Daisy is a mystery lover, cheese enthusiast, and world-renowned expert in Why You Should Buy That. In what passes for normal life, she works in biotech and lives in Alameda, California, with her husband and a labradoodle on a mission to chew the world into tiny pieces. If you would like to get more of her cheese recommendations, along with ridiculous plot ideas and the occasional bit of news, please go here to subscribe to her newsletter: <http://daisybateman.com/>



# Your Setting – What a Character!

## by Margaret Lucke

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I love to read a story with a strong sense of place, to be invited into the world that the characters inhabit, and to share their experiences there. In the best stories, the location itself becomes a character.

Wait a minute. Places are, well, places, right? And characters are people. What does it mean to say that the setting is a character? And how does a writer accomplish that miraculous transformation? It takes more than tossing in vivid descriptive details, though that helps.

One approach is to look at the three main functions of a story's setting and develop your location accordingly.

### **1. The setting provides a context for the characters and the action.**

I once attended a workshop on settings led by mystery author Susan Dunlap, who said, "A story is in its setting because it could be nowhere else."

The setting is the physical and cultural environment of your story. What defines a place is more than just its geography, whether it's urban or rural, tundra or tropics, in the mountains or by the sea. Places have personalities, too – the combination of factors like the kind of people who live there, what makes up the economic base, prevailing attitudes and beliefs, local tastes in food and entertainment, what holidays are celebrated, and what crimes are typically committed. (Did you know that Laredo, Texas, has the highest rate of automobile theft in the country?)

All of the physical, sociological, and psychological characteristics of the setting can provide you with a wealth of material for your plot.

### **2. The setting creates moods and affects emotions, for both the characters and readers.**

The way you treat the setting helps you establish the emotional environment of the story. Do you want readers to laugh, to cry, or to be scared out of their wits? Use setting details that will encourage that reaction. Abandon your detective in a bad neighborhood or send her to a cocktail bash in the best

## Your Setting—What a Character! continued

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part of town. Drench her in a rainstorm or have her bask in the sun. Let her lounge by the swimming pool or fall into it.

At a Left Coast Crime conference a few years ago, I was on a panel of six authors, all of whom had set novels in San Francisco. In the course of the discussion, it became clear that we'd written about six very different cities. We'd each carefully chosen what to put in and what to leave out to serve the mood we wanted to create and the type of story we wanted to tell. Yet readers who know San Francisco would find each depiction to be true to the city they know.

### 3. The setting helps shape the story and influences the plot.

Your setting isn't just scenery, a painted backdrop to the action. It's a vital force that impinges on your characters and their situations. It's the interaction between the characters and the environment. What resources, help, or comfort does the environment offer your protagonist? What obstacles or difficulties does it impose? What choices is your detective forced to make in order to cope with the realities of this place and this time?

If you change the setting, you also change the story. Say your amateur sleuth is an aspiring rock star who moves back home to help her mother after her father has been murdered. You'll be telling a very different tale if home is Las Vegas than if it's a central Pennsylvania coal town.

Personality, mood, a vital force that affects the action and the outcome—the location of your story has all of those. Sounds like a character to me.

Margaret Lucke writes tales of love, ghosts, and murder, sometimes all three in one book. Two of her novels (*Snow Angel* and *A Relative Stranger*, an Anthony Award finalist) feature artist/private eye Jess Randolph, and two others (*House of Whispers* and *House of Desire*) star Claire Scanlan, a real estate agent who specializes in haunted houses. She is also the editor of SinC NorCal's anthology, *Fault Lines*. Margaret teaches fiction writing classes and has published books on writing craft. [www.margaretlucke.com](http://www.margaretlucke.com).

# 20Books Vegas Convention Report

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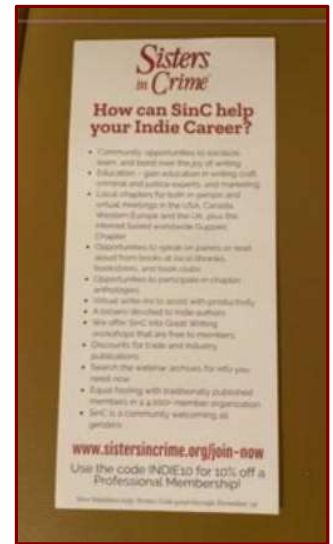


Sisters in Crime had a booth on the first day of the 20Books Vegas conference in the Bally's Ballroom on November 8, 2021. The booth was staffed by Alec Peche, Victoria Kazarian, and George Cramer of NorCal – Alec and Victoria are members of Coastal Cruisers as well.



20Books Vegas is a Facebook group of 50,000 worldwide indie authors. This year its annual convention hosted 1,800 authors from all genres in person and another 2,000 attending virtually.

Our three representatives distributed this card explaining what Sisters in Crime can do for an indie author's career, and they spoke with more than 100 indie mystery authors.



## Calling All Showcase Authors

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**Mark your calendars:** The next Author Showcase to feature the latest works of Sisters in Crime NorCal members will be held on May 21. Not knowing what the world will throw at us, we aren't sure yet whether it will be in person or on Zoom.

To be eligible, your work (book, story) must be published between November 2021 and May 2022. If you have been in a Showcase in the past year, you will not qualify for this one.

Watch your email for more details. If you would like to participate or you have any questions, please email Glenda Carroll at [gocarroll43@gmail.com](mailto:gocarroll43@gmail.com)



# Prospecting for Speakers Bureau Opportunities

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Our chapter provides speakers to libraries and organizations whenever we have an opportunity. Author panels or individual presentations are a nice way to connect with readers and maybe sell a few books. Since COVID, these appearances are via Zoom, but we may be able to have some in-person events later in 2022.

Do you have a contact at an organization that would like to hear from a mystery author to perk up its general meeting? We could get creative with this: A chapter of the Society of Chemists might want to hear how an author researches poison. A crafting group might enjoy a presentation from cozy authors whose books feature craftspeople.

These appearances typically don't offer an honorarium; instead, in-person presentations provide an opportunity for book sales.

We try to spread these opportunities around, prioritizing authors who haven't done a presentation for us in a while. However, if an organization wanted a particular theme, we could certainly tailor the presentation.

If you have a resource at a likely organization or have any questions, please contact our Speakers Bureau coordinator, Susan Kuchinskas, at [susan@kuchinskas.com](mailto:susan@kuchinskas.com).



## Member Profile: Amy S. Peele

Twenty-first in a series to introduce our members to each other

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Amy S. Peele's long career in organ transplantation has influenced her more recent career – mystery writing!

**Stiletta:** You grew up in Chicago. Tell us about your life there, including your education.



**Amy Peele:** The fifth of six kids, I was raised by a single mom who supported us on the salary of her private duty nursing work. There weren't ICU's as we know them today, and my mom and two other nurses covered all three shifts. I loved where I grew up in Park Forest, Illinois. I always felt safe—we never locked our doors and walked everywhere. As a child, I spent some time in the hospital with bronchial asthma, and my back was broken in high school. After attending public high school, I graduated from a two-year nursing school diploma program at South Chicago Community School of Nursing (where Richard Speck had killed the nurses almost a decade earlier). I loved my education there, and I still see my nursing school friends annually. I worked on a med-surgical floor and moved to a surgical floor, which I preferred, and I took many college classes while I worked full time.

**Stiletta:** You became interested in organ transplantation early in your career. How did that come about?

**AP:** I worked on an experimental surgical floor at University of Chicago Hospital where they had kidney transplant patients and an assortment of other interesting surgical cases. I loved it there, as it was a teaching institution, and I was always learning. That's when I met what was to become my passion and my 35-year transplant career. I was able to do so many things that I never thought possible including speaking with donor families right after they were told their loved one was brain dead and requesting consent for organ donation—it was the most sacred space I had ever been in, and these donor families were beyond kind and generous. Once they consented, I would orchestrate all the events that culminated in kidney recovery (ICU -OR and morgue) and kidney placement—from the heavy sadness of witnessing a family's loss to telling a patient we had a kidney for them to seeing their renewed lust for life, health, and vibrancy.

**Stiletta:** What made you decide to move to Marin County?

**AP:** I was recruited by UCSF to work with their kidney transplant program, considered one of the biggest and best in the country in 1985 and continuing to this day. In Chicago we handled 40 kidney transplants annually. The first year I was a coordinator at UCSF, we did 250 kidney transplants, which was so exciting for me. I was single and was on call most of the time. I had loved living in Chicago so

## Member Profile: Amy S. Peele, continued

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I declared I would stay in California for just two years and then move back to Chicago. But after I was here a couple of months, I met my husband—so much for plans. We lived in North Beach until our daughter turned one, then searched for a home we could afford and landed in Novato in 1989. We both became commuters, and our second child was born two years later. I retired from UCSF as Director of Clinical Operations in 2014, having overseen a staff of 120 performing 600 solid organ transplants annually.

**Stiletta:** What were the highlights of your role as President of the North American Transplant Coordinators Organization (NATCO)?

**AP:** At NATCO (1983-84), our big event was supposed to be our annual meeting until a father, Charlie Fisk, got in front of the National Pediatric Conference and begged for a liver for his little girl, Jamie Fisk. It was covered on all the news stations. Al Gore was in the House of Representatives at that time, and he called for an investigation into the organ sharing system in the US. As NATCO president, I was asked to testify in front of the Sub-Committee of Investigation and Oversight. I'd never been to Washington, DC but went there five times, working with Representative Gore and his team to share the nuts and bolts of our system. I was actively involved in formulating Federal legislation that realized funding within one year and served on a Task Force with Surgeon General Everett Koop. The United Network for Organ Sharing that was formulated from his legislation is still functioning today. I was also invited to be part of a medical delegation that went to China in 1984. Who knew following your passion would yield all this!

**Stiletta:** What motivated you to start writing, and when?

**AP:** Working at academic medical centers, I wrote professional articles and a chapter for a book, but nothing creative. I was doing *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron with several friends, and it asks you to quickly write lists of what you think you want to do, but I kept telling myself I wasn't a writer. In 1992, I decided to take a creative writing class at the College of Marin and was fortunate to have a kind and generous teacher, Guy Biederman, who inspired me to always want to write more. I took his novel-writing workshops and wrote my very first rough draft of a mystery. I also met three other women who became my writing tribe to this day. I attended many of the mystery writing conferences at Book Passage and continued to be inspired by their skilled and generous faculty and staff.

**Stiletta:** Tell us about your mystery series. Did your medical background influence the subject matter?

## Member Profile: Amy S. Peele, continued

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**AP:** I had started a silly Bunko Murder Mystery series, as I didn't want to write about transplant since I was living and breathing it, ignoring the "write what you know" advice I often heard. I was at a writing class at Book Passage, and that's where the idea for my first book in my series, *Cut*, was born. It explores the question: Can you buy your way up to the top of the liver transplant waiting list? *Cut* was published in 2017 and won many awards. My second book, *Match*, published in 2021, asks: What do politics, living donor kidney transplants, and the current opioid crisis all have in common? The third book in the trilogy, *Hold*, to be released in October 2022, delves into the world of corporate greed and an unethical pharmaceutical company in search of the holy grail of transplant: inducing



tolerance so the patient wouldn't have to take all the anti-rejection drugs that have awful side effects. My series has been referred to as a mystery with a mission and a side of humor as readers feel they have gotten a peek behind the curtain of a transplant program. Since I had to be so professional at work, once I retired, I decided I would kill the people I didn't like from work and use their organs for transplant, which was very cathartic. Why waste the kill!

**Stiletta:** You also have a background in improv. Where did you train/perform?

**AP:** In 1984, while living in Chicago, I realized I needed more levity in my life, as my job was intense, juggling life and death on a daily basis. I sent myself to a program conducted by Second City--Players Workshop--and the year-long evening classes culminated in our graduation on stage at Second City. It was so much fun to just use my imagination. Once I got out to San Francisco, I took some improv classes at Bay Area Theater Sports (BATS). I did a stand-up routine when I was attending a weekend workshop at the Chopra Center in San Diego, which was so much fun and scary. I also used my improv training at work to impersonate some of the transplant surgeons--in front of them, of course. They laughed--we all needed some levity.

**Stiletta:** Tell us about the non-fiction book you wrote in 2009.

**AP:** I had written a memoir entitled *Aunt Mary's Guide to Raising Children the Old Fashioned Way*, based on my great-Aunt Mary, who owned a brothel during the Depression and later cashed out and bought property in Indiana and Florida. The only vacation my family took was to Lake Wawasee in Syracuse, Indiana every summer. My mom would drop all six of us kids off at my grandmother's house, and my great-aunt lived right next door. The book was a collection of short stories I had written during my College of Marin days. An author and memoirist read it and asked the key question I didn't want to hear: why were the kids so relived to jump in Lake Wawasee--what was going on at home? I didn't like that question, but I spent two and half years in her memoir class writing really tough stories that helped heal my heart and soul. It's funny how the stories are so big and once they get on a page, they

## Member Profile: Amy S. Peele, continued

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aren't as big as they were inside of you. Once the book was published, my mom did the book tour with me, and we connected on a deeper level than we would have if I hadn't found the courage to write the stories. I had no idea writing could be so healing.

**Stiletta:** Are you still involved in organ donation advocacy?

**AP:** Yes. I guess it's in my DNA. On my website I have a page dedicated to the waitlist and number of transplants done annually, as well as the link where you can sign up to be a donor. I like to encourage folks to decide if they want to be an organ donor and to be sure to share their decision with their family.

**Stiletta:** Please describe your writing routine. Has it changed during the pandemic?

**AP:** My writing routine has changed for the better during the pandemic for sure. I block time to write and have accountability partners so I have to show up for them and myself. Some days it's easier to write, but when I get my butt in the chair and start writing, that's when the magic begins. I can procrastinate with the best of them. Deadlines also help. I'm still with my writing tribe, thankfully – Linda Joy Myers, Betsy Graziani Fasbinder, and Christie Nelson. We support each other, fighting our gremlins and always celebrating when each of us writes "The End," even if it's the first draft. We still see each other either in person when possible or via Zoom. Over the years I've made friends with some wonderful and talented writers and also keep in close contact with them.

**Stiletta:** How has membership in Sisters in Crime benefited your writing career?

**AP:** So many of the members are very talented, generous, and supportive. I enjoyed going to the monthly meetings when I could and always felt welcome. And, of course, SinC was so generous when my second book, *Match*, came out during the pandemic and I was fortunate enough to join a showcase.

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

**AP:** I am continually inspired by their writing, books, and generosity of spirit. I felt at home when I attended a virtual event or when we were in person at Left Coast Crime or Bouchercon. Everyone was so welcoming and supportive of a new member like myself. Since I was in the transplant world for over 35 years, I had my transplant tribe and felt accepted and supported. SinC is my new home and I'm grateful for that. I like belonging to SinC and hope someday we can be in person again because that's where the magic happens.

Amy S. Peele was interviewed by Margie Bunting, SinC NorCal newsletter editor.



# Member News

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## *New and Upcoming Releases*

*Across the Red Sky* by Victoria Kazarian, book #2 in the Silicon Valley Murder series, was released on November 29 by Fog Hollow Books.

*Scot Mist* by Catriona McPherson, Last Ditch Mystery #4, is out in hardback February 1 by Severn House. This is a comedy set in March 2020, during the first ten days of California's lockdown. In other words, it's a historical novel.

*Last Call* by Sheldon Siegel, book #13 in the Mike Daley/Rosie Fernandez series, was released on January 12. Sheldon is working on #14 and has been releasing his books independently for about 10 years, making him the publisher as well as the author.

*Where Did She Go?* by Alec Peche, book #2 of the Michelle Watson Thrillers, was released on December 31 by GBSW Publishing.

*Birthdays are Murder* by Cindy Sample, book #1 in her new Spindrift Cove Mystery series featuring Sierra Sullivan, will be released February 10, with a launch party scheduled for March 13 at Face in a Book in El Dorado Hills.

*Death in Cornwall* by G.M. Malliet, book #4 in the DCI St. Just traditional mystery series, became available in audio from Dreamscape on January 18.

*Under Lock and Skeleton Key* by Gigi Pandian, book #1 in her new Secret Staircase mystery series, received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly* and will be released on March 15 by Minotaur Books.

*The Secret in the Wall* by Ann Parker, book #8 in the Silver Rush mystery series, will be released on February 15 by Poison Pen Press (an imprint of SourceBooks).

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

On Sunday, February 13 at 3:00 p.m., Glenda Carroll will be at Books, Inc., 601 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco, reading from her latest Trisha Carson thriller, *Dead Code*.

Ana Brazil will be appearing on two panels at The History Quill's inaugural Writers Convention 2022. Ana will be presenting content on "Promotion Loves Company: Maximizing Promotional Efforts through an Author Collective" (February 3, 9:00 a.m. PT) and "End with the Beginning in Mind: Hooking Readers with your Chapter Endings" (February 5, 9:00 a.m. PT). Tickets for this international virtual conference are available at <https://thehistoryquill.com/the-history-quill-writers-convention-2022/>

## Member News, continued

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Gigi Pandian will be at Book Passage, Corte Madera, on Saturday, March 19 at 1:00 p.m. for an in-person book launch party for *Under Lock and Skeleton Key*. She'd love to see NorCal folks in person, but for virtual launch you can also join her and Juliet Blackwell on Monday, March 14 at 5:00 p.m. for a virtual event hosted by Murder by the Book.

### *Awards and Recognition*

Congratulations to Heather Haven, whose book, *The Drop-Dead Temple of Doom*, book #8 of the Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries, won the Best Indie Book Award for best mystery/cozy mystery of 2021.

Congratulations to Laurie R. King for being honored as MWA's 2022 Grand Master. The MWA Grand Master Award "represents the pinnacle of achievement in mystery writing and was established to acknowledge important contributions to this genre, as well as for a body of work that is both significant and of consistent high quality."

Congratulations to Catriona McPherson, Lefty Award nominee for Best Historical Mystery Novel for *The Mirror Dance*.

Congratulations on your Edgar Award nominations: Rhys Bowen, Best Novel, *The Venice Sketchbook*; Gigi Pandian, Best Short Story, "The Locked Room Library," published in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine's* July/August 2021 issue.

### *Miscellaneous*

Ellen Kirschman will be posting about her most recent Dot Meyerhoff mystery, *The Answer to His Prayers*, on Dru's Musings, Friday, February 18. Drop by and read about what Dot is up to now. Never a dull moment. Dot has scored first place on Amazon in several categories on multiple days.



## Question of the Quarter



***Do you prefer to set your books/stories in real or fictitious places? Tell us why.***

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I prefer to set my books and stories in real places with fictitious names. Don't want to be sued or deluged with mail if I make an eastbound road go the wrong way. I like being able to walk around the settings I choose, hang out and get a feel for the place. ***Ellen Kirschman***

I chose to set my Laurel McKay Humorous Mystery Series in Placerville, only eight miles from Coloma, where gold was discovered. I love the history of this area, the old-fashioned Main Street storefronts, the rolling hills covered with apple orchards and grape vines. My goal was to promote the area and attract visitors who had read my books. Each book has scenes set in actual stores, restaurants, apple farms, or wineries. The series has become so popular in this county that local merchants are always asking me to stick a dead body in their store! ***Cindy Sample***

I tend to set my stories in real places. I find it grounds the stories more. I may have a fictitious business or home there, but usually the setting is real. ***Heather Haven***

I have done both. My priority is fictitious, but a few books have been set in real places. My problem with real places is multifaceted. I don't fly, so getting to England is essentially unreasonable. But many real places are either no longer in existence or in ruins, or dramatically changed in 700+ years. That means a lot of Googling and reading are required to get a medieval sense of place. ***Priscilla Royal***

I use both made-up locales and real ones in my writing. I write about the Bay Area, especially Silicon Valley, so I use some actual locations, streets and landmarks in the area, while centering much of my action in Monte Verde, a completely made-up small town on the peninsula. I made it up because I wanted to include the feel and topography of two different real-life towns in the area. It made me chuckle that one of my local readers looked up Monte Verde on the map, thinking it was real. ***Victoria Kazarian***

My books are set in a fictitious version of real places. Real locations, like landmarks, Stanford, the parks in the Foothills, and major roads. But I figure no one wants to watch my characters sit in a traffic jam, so I bring my own physics and geography when I pull it all into a fictional world. There's a car chase on El Camino in the middle of the night with few other cars around – fiction. The character gets from what could be called Mountain View to a Stanford parking garage in 15 minutes. My town has its own new name and borrows from several Bay Area locales. It seems to work for readers. I've spoken to book groups and libraries all over the greater Bay Area, and they all think they share my characters' hometown. Why a fictional name? I think I was scarred and scared from watching the movie *Harold and Maude*. As they liberate a street tree from the SF peninsula and find it a healthier home in a less populated location, there is a scene that has them driving on the upper deck of the Bay

## Question of the Quarter, continued

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Bridge. But they are going the wrong way! And half the theater shouted out those very words the first time I saw the movie and every time thereafter. I had an overdose of empathy for the producers and was mortified on their behalf. So I made sure it couldn't happen in the "mostly pretend locale that exists in a multiverse similar to a real place" in my books. *Mary Feliz*

I use real places in my books, but they are heavily disguised or, more often, they are bits of real places stuck together to make a new place. I make up restaurants and bookshops and, of course, people—that's half the fun of writing novels. I've heard it called the Mr. Potato Head school of writing. *G.M. Malliet.*

As a near-lifelong Bay Area resident, I adore San Francisco (yes, even still) so it's my favorite setting. I like to spotlight real streets and neighborhoods that are off the beaten path or, at least, less well known, but I create fictitious specifics—houses, restaurants, buildings. There are two reasons for this. First, you never know when a real building will be renovated or bulldozed to make way for the next iteration of the neighborhood, thus a fictional specific location has a longer shelf life. Second, creating my own version of a building or business that may or may not actually exist sidesteps any copyright/trademark issues. *Robin Stuart*

I have stolen—er—plagiarized—er—borrowed Mary Feliz's mashup name for the towns here on the Peninsula for my current WIP. She did such a good job with that, and I figure since she writes cozies and I don't, our readers will never realize this and I'll get away with it. Joking aside (I do plan to change the name at some point), I mix things up. I usually make up names for real places where bad things happen (most of the time) and create mashups of places. But I also use real names. I invented an entire county in Central New York so I could have more leeway for mayhem. Friends who know that area tell me they keep looking on the map for my towns, so I made my own map for them. *Susan Bickford*

My teen/young adult novels are all set in a fictitious town on the Northern California coast below Mendocino. Some of my critique group spent 12 fall holidays at Sea Ranch. On the drive from Sacramento to Sea Ranch, one passes some of the most beautiful, tiny, tiny, tiny one-horse villages in which I wanted to set a town in the late 1920s. There was nothing but redwoods, sequoias, Monterey pines, and sand dunes. Perfect place for a town. One of my adult novels is set in an equally deserted part of Southern Washington, also on the Pacific coast. The other is set in 1930s San Francisco. Librarians, Google, and old newspapers keep the town alive as it almost was a century ago. I love fog, grew up surrounded by Tule fog, which is perfect for murder. Today's world is weird enough for fiction, but historical fiction begs for yesterday. However, memories get clouded; therefore, places get imagined. *Pat Canterbury*

I love to set my medical mysteries in real settings—some I'm very familiar with—hospitals, operating rooms, transplant clinics. I also like to put my characters in places I've never been and research them,

## Question of the Quarter, continued

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which is so much fun. Of course, sometimes I make up a restaurant based on one I like but change the name. *Amy Peele*

I prefer settings that are “real” places, although not completely real. I love reading (and writing) about physical settings, the feel of the air, the history of the place, the geography, the views, and the people. Once there is a setting, though, the actual place (town, county, city) can be absolute fiction. In my most recent book, *Tapestry of Tears, A Stained Glass Mystery*, the setting is totally real, the south coast of England and the northern coast of France. But an earlier book in the series, *Stain on the Soul*, takes place in a small town on the Oregon coast, Hamilton. Made up but based on several small coastal towns. One of my favorite fictional settings is Louise Penny’s village of Three Pines. *Michele Drier*

I’ve done, real, imagined, and blended. Real settings can give you gifts—street names, vistas, bits of history; imagined settings give you the chance to play God that takes you (well, me) right back to childhood and the endless games of pretend. But the blended settings are the truest joy. I once used the city of Dunfermline (birthplace of Andrew Carnegie) brick for brick except I flattened the ugliest pair of the buildings in the town and wheeled in rival department stores in their place. *Catriona McPherson*

When I first started writing, I decided to set my books in present-day San Francisco so that “research” consisted of going into town, eating at various restaurants, and walking around the City. I want my readers to be able to drive around San Francisco and see the locations in my stories. I think it adds to the authenticity of the setting. I take some liberties with the interiors of the buildings, but I try to remain faithful to the exteriors. *Sheldon Siegel*

Real places, hands down, for me! I set the early part of my 1880s-era series in the very real towns of Leadville and Manitou Springs, Colorado, and the most recent books in San Francisco, although I didn’t start out intending to use real locations. When I started writing the first in the series (*Silver Lies*), I thought I’d create a fictional Silver Rush boomtown so I could design it (and its history) however I wanted. But I quickly realized that I was using real historical events, real settings, real (thinly disguised) people, and even “borrowing” the real names of Leadville’s streets and alleys. (It’s hard to beat “Stillborn Alley” and “Tiger Alley” as names in an Old West boomtown). Plus, I found grounding my historical mysteries in real locations gave me a framework to build upon, and I’m very fond of structure (of all types, including buildings). When it came time for the protagonist to go to San Francisco ... well, there’s only one San Francisco! And using a real historical setting just makes the research easier. I love perusing historical maps (including fire insurance maps), city directories, census records, newspapers, and so on for ideas and details. There is so much fodder for fiction in real history. I can’t quite imagine taking these incredible locations and fictionalizing them. That said, I’m not above inserting fictional businesses and buildings (and even a fictional gulch once!) into the actual landscape when the story requires. *Ann Parker*



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