

# THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime ✂ Northern California Chapter

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## A Lot to Like About SinC NorCal in 2023

It's a new year, the Year of the Rabbit in the Chinese Zodiac chart, the year of the Water Rabbit, a once-every-60-years occurrence.

It's likely to be peaceable and kinder. A symbol of longevity, peace, and prosperity in Chinese culture, 2023 is predicted to be a year of hope.

And after the last couple of years, we could use a little hope and peace.

As the year unfolds, we'll be asking you, the NorCal membership, to weigh in on several areas of our benefits and services. One area we want to home in on is member benefits – what do you find most helpful, and what other programs would you like to see?

One of the more popular ongoing projects is Drop-In Writing, run by Susan Bickford and Ana Manwaring. These sessions are daily and continue to be popular.

In the past year, we began a critique group and beta reading service, acting as a clearinghouse to put members in touch with one another to form groups or request a beta read.

In the coming year, we're going to be fleshing out the production of another NorCal anthology, and a subcommittee



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## President's Letter, continued

has begun to work on submission requirements . . . including a title. When I helmed the 2020 Bouchercon anthology, we were looking for a title that encompassed all of California and eventually opened it up to a Facebook post soliciting ideas. The result: *California Schemin'* was a winner in every way!

Have a suggestion? Send it to us.

Again this year, we'll participate in the Sizzling Summer Series sponsored by the Southern California Sisters in Crime chapters of San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties. This is a way to boost our visibility and engage Siblings from across California. We're working out the schedule, but will likely have our program in September.

Chapters are still wrestling with the in-person/virtual (Zoom)/hybrid meeting and presentation format, with each type of meeting having positives and drawbacks. We are looking at trying some in-person events; specifically, the semiannual Author Showcases will be hybrid, with in-person attendance encouraged. If you know of another chapter that is doing some successful and creative programming, let us know!

And we have opportunities to get involved. We have committees that can use volunteers, even those who may not want to serve on the Executive Committee (Board).

Want to work on programs? Help develop marketing projects?

A specific opportunity is to serve as our chapter Secretary, but it's not an onerous job. It is a Board position, but all of our Board meetings are on Zoom and recorded, so it's a matter of writing brief minutes from the meeting or recording. Interested? Please contact any Board member – email addresses are on page 29 of this issue.

Here's to an engaging and productive Year of the Rabbit!

Sincerely,

Michele Drier

President, Sisters in Crime NorCal

# Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

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**Saturday, February 4, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.**

***Meet & Greet + Beta Read the Write Way, with Linda Hartmann***

*Rockridge Branch Library, 5366 College Ave., Oakland, CA*

*Hybrid Meeting with Zoom*

Introduce yourself at our annual roundtable and tell us what you're working on. In conjunction with the re-launch of our Feedback Bureau, the meeting will also include a short program on alpha and beta reading and how it can add value to your final drafts and published works. The presenter is Linda Hartmann, an experienced beta reader and document writer who is Immediate Past President and current Vice President of the California Writers Club, Mt. Diablo Branch.

**Saturday, March 4, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

***Cops and Writers and PTSD: Getting it Right, with Ellen Kirschman***

*Zoom Meeting*

Some estimates suggest that nearly 30% of all law enforcement officers suffer with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. An alarming statistic for men and women who are thoroughly screened to get their jobs. What are the little-recognized factors that put officers at risk and make your police characters all the more real? Our own Ellen Kirschman is an award-winning police psychologist who has also written both non-fiction and mysteries with a police psychologist protagonist.

**Saturday, April 1, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

***Contraband and Crooks: Working Dogs in the World of Police, Fire, and SAR, with Robert "Bob" D. Calkins***

*Zoom Meeting*

Bob's presentation will focus on how to accurately portray working dogs in procedural crime fiction. You'll learn what makes a good police or SAR (Search and Rescue) dog, how they are trained, and how they're used. The presentation is more than just cool dog stories. Bob will focus on how to create conflict, drama, emotion, empathy, revelation, and resolution as part of your plots. And then . . . he'll tell cool dog stories. Bring your questions! Robert D. Calkins has been a search and rescue dog handler in Washington state for more than a dozen years. He currently searches with K9 Ruger, a 4-year-old golden retriever. He is also the author of the Sierra the Search Dog series for children and adults.

**Check out our website for information about our events and links to register.**

## In Case You Missed It . . .

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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**

It was a lively hybrid meeting, where several of our members read excerpts from their recent works. Authors included:



Glenda Carroll



Amy S. Peele



Ana Manwaring



Catriona McPherson



Gayle Feyrer



Josie Brown



Lisa Towles



Michelle Chouinard



Stephen Murphy



Terry Shames



Vinnie Hansen

### **December 11 Meeting - Holiday Event**

SinC NorCal joined with MWA NorCal and Capitol Crimes for a virtual holiday event that included segments on wine and cheese, trivia, recipes, and appearances by the presidents of each group. The event was hosted by Susan Bickford.



Susan Bickford



Laurie Sheehan



Daisy Bateman



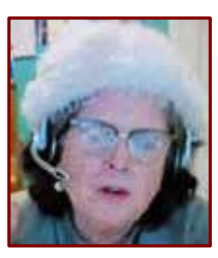
Michelle Chouinard



Jennifer Morita



Michele Drier



Claire Johnson

## Our 2023 Executive Committee (Board) Members (and their favorite part of their Board role)

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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 <https://micheledrier.me/> **Serving on the Board gives me insight to the interests of the members and to help develop programs for craft, marketing and exposure, as well as forming a community of support for authors.**

**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/) . **I enjoy being an advocate for members of SinC and promoting their work. I don't care if they are developing an idea for a mystery novel or short story or being a participant in the Spring or Fall Author Showcases. I want to give all of our members a chance to shine.**





## 2023 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**SECRETARY, YOUR NAME HERE!** Please contact any Board member if you are interested in being our new Secretary. Contact information is available on page 29.

**MALENA ELJUMAILY, Treasurer:** I am an avid reader of mysteries, memoir, and lately, self-help books. 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, cross-stich, and sew. I live in beautiful Santa Rosa. **I love serving on the Board of NorCal SinC, mostly because of how wonderful the other people are, so smart, talented, and without a doubt, more organized than I am.**



**MYSTI BERRY, Membership:** I am the editor and publisher of *Low Down Dirty Vote*, three volumes of short stories created to raise money for voting rights work. All volumes contain stories by award-winning writers, and we've raised \$25K across all three volumes. 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*. My next short story is due out mid-2023, and I am working on my first historical mystery novel set in 1938 Hilo, Hawaii, where my mother was born. **My very most favorite thing about serving on the Board is the chance to meet so many crime readers and writers over the course of the year. It's fun to think about what our members want**

**and need, and then try to make those things happen. We're lucky to have so many creative people in the Bay Area, and it's always a delight and a privilege to work with you all!**

**ANA MANWARING, Events:** I'm the author of the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures, suspense/thrillers set in Mexico. I'm currently working on book 5 due out from Indies United Publishing House next November. In May, IUPH will publish my memoir, the "real" Mexico story. I'm also working on my fourth poetry chapbook and continuing to run North Bay Poetics, a monthly poetry event. I am a former lifestyle columnist, and my reviews of Siblings' books can be found at [www.anamanwaring.com/](http://www.anamanwaring.com/), as well as information on my editing business, JAM Manuscript Consulting. I teach creative writing in Sonoma, CA. **Getting to know other writers, working with writers, and learning new things are my favorite things to do—I get to do it all in my role on the Board.**



## 2023 Executive Committee Members, continued

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**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 eighth year. Happily retired from an HR management career, I keep busy with Toastmasters, book and movie review clubs, game get-togethers, and being a part of my young grandchildren's lives. I finished reading 198 books in 2022--reading remains my favorite pastime. The library and NetGalley are my two biggest sources of books. I post my reviews on Goodreads, NetGalley, Amazon, and Lesa's Book Critiques. *As a non-author, I especially relish the opportunity to work with SinC NorCal authors on putting *The Stiletta* together, and I am gobsmacked at how generous they are with their time and participation.*

**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. *It has been wonderful to get to know more about our members--a very talented and supportive group. Figuring out how to run digital meetings and now mixed in-person / online is actually very satisfying because I love solving puzzles.*



**MAUREEN STUDER, Member at Large:** I am an award-winning actor, director, educator, and playwright. I garnered my awards over the span of four decades of working in the theatre. I graduated from University of California at Riverside with a focus on acting and directing and received my MA from San Francisco State with a focus on theatre history and criticism. During my tenure as an educator, I taught acting, directing, playwriting, and history. I have also performed in or directed over 100 productions. Fifteen years ago, I turned my creative energy toward writing. To date, I have completed six full-length plays, three romance novels, six short plays, and a myriad of short stories and poetry. I have also written one non-fiction book, *Before an Audience: Tips and Tricks to Reading Your Writing in Public*, and I have presented the topic at various authors meetings and three conferences. *Maureen is thrilled to be a new member of the SinC NorCal Executive Committee. Previously she was on the board of two theatre companies, where she held the roles of Secretary and Vice President.*

# Why Bloody Scotland?

By Mysti Berry

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One of the pleasures and pains of being a crime writer is choosing which, if any, conferences to attend. In the United States, there are two kinds of conferences: those meant primarily for readers, and those meant primarily for writers.

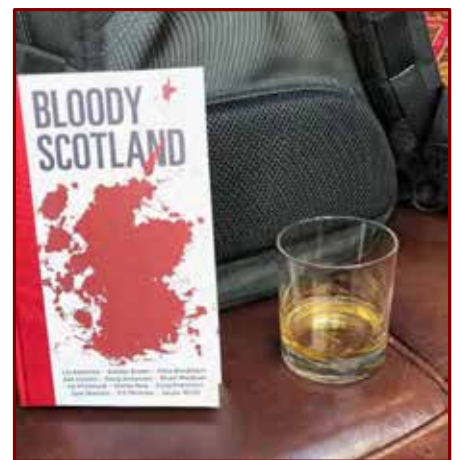
- Conferences intended primarily for fans and readers (including writer-readers – scratch a writer and find a fan!) include Left Coast Crime (LCC), Bouchercon, and Malice Domestic. LCC is a West Coast favorite, Bouchercon is the daddy of all crime writing conferences, and Malice Domestic is home to traditional and cozy writers and readers alike. It also is presented very close to the MWA Edgar awards most years, so you can take a short train trip between them to attend both.
- Conferences intended primarily for writers include ThrillerFest, New England Crime Bake, and Sleuthfest. Many local organizations sponsor conferences, such as the annual WriteNOW! Conference sponsored by the Desert Sleuths SinC chapter in Arizona, and the California Crime Writers Conference (CCWC) sponsored by the Southern California MWA/SinC chapters every other year.

Any of these conferences will have panels of interest to either readers or writers, but each conference’s programming leans more toward one or the other. There are dozens of conferences every year, despite the pandemic. Some have gone virtual or hybrid, and it seems likely that most conferences will now offer at least some panels virtually. Organizers are learning what people want versus what they’ll actually do when it comes time to travel. Life has been so unpredictable!

The point is, when there’s so much on offer in the United States, why would anyone travel to another country to attend a conference? Of course, if you have the travel bug, the answer is obvious: “because it’s there!” However, I have to say after having attended **Bloody Scotland**, there are a LOT more reasons to attend!

## The Conference is Very Well Run!

Bloody Scotland has been running for over ten years, and they know their stuff! They have a wide range of panels featuring internationally known writers and locals alike, and they present in a variety of venues within walking distance (and for those of us who can’t walk, with some help to get around). The venues are all fabulous: conference rooms in the conference hotel; the Golden





## Why Bloody Scotland, continued

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Lion, where Robert Burns once etched a poem in glass; The Albert Halls, a very large space with a stage that the conference manages with stage technicians who are as kind as they experienced; Allan Park South Church; and a lovely bar, The Curly Coo (cow), where some of the writers perform in a band. There's also a football (soccer? rugby?) game that sells out as quickly as the Curly Coo performance does, and a panto (think *Harvard Lampoon* brought to life).

One interesting difference from American-style conferences: you don't pay for the conference, but you do pay for tickets for each event you attend. If you are thinking of going, sign up for the email list to be notified when things go on sale, as some tickets sell out quickly. The remote option offers both individual tickets and a pass for the whole conference (not all events are accessible remotely).

The year I attended, everything came off without a hitch, except I wasn't fast enough to grab a ticket to the rock concert at The Curly Coo. I met incredibly kind and funny people, despite my being a massive introvert, partially disabled, and anxious not to be an "ugly American." I couldn't have been happier. In fact, I met a wonderful copyeditor whom I've used on all the *Low Down Dirty Vote* anthologies.

### Special Features Support New Writers



Bloody Scotland invests in emerging writers in several lovely ways:

- Crime in the Spotlight is a juried event, where writers are chosen to read briefly from their work before a "main event" writer. I was lucky enough to be selected in 2018, so it was my terrifying honor to read briefly before M.C. Beaton was interviewed by Agatha Raisin actress Ashley Jensen. Being the *amuse bouche* for such a famous writer really boosted my writer's ego! They let me wait in the green room, then gather round Ms. Beaton, and they made us rehearse ahead of time, like grownup writers. It was intoxicating and I'll always be grateful.
- Pitch Perfect, sponsored by The Open University in Scotland, is not like the cattle-call pitch sessions at American conferences. Rather, it is a juried event where writers are selected to participate in training and then have to pitch to a panel of writers. In the words of Bloody Scotland, "Everyone who has won the prize has been picked up by an agent and most have had books published, as have many of the other Pitch Perfect participants."
- There's a short story competition sponsored by Glencairn Glass, open to all.
- There's a debut crime novel competition for those born in Scotland or living there.

## Why Bloody Scotland, continued

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### They Care About Accessibility

Bloody Scotland goes out of its way to accommodate people with mobility issues. Best of any conference I've ever attended. I am unable to walk very far on my own (until I get my knee fixed) and found the jitney they provided and other accommodations all that I needed to get around (no fancy motorized chair for me!).

### The Torchlight Procession

The festival opens with a torchlight procession from the Church of the Holy Rude to the Albert Halls for the opening panel. That's right, in Scotland you can trust people with burning torches! You also get one free cocktail and a safety talk.

### It's Very International

Scotland has a strong relationship with Northern Europe, and Edinburgh (near Stirling, where the conference is held) is an ancient and international city. Panelists and attendees from all over the world attend. The Scottish writers I met are world-class, and it's so wonderful to hear writers talk from the different perspectives of their lived experiences. Icelandic noir usually shows up in at least one panel, as well as North Americans such as Louise Penny and writers from all over the globe.

### They're So Friendly and Funny and Smart!

Chris Brookmyre, Val McDermid, Gordon Brown, Denise Mina, Abir Mukherjee, Sophie Hannah, Alexandra Sokoloff--everyone was thoughtful and engaged in discussions of craft, as well as being wonderful storytellers and provocative interviewers.

To sum up, Bloody Scotland is a truly international crime writing festival whose hospitality and creativity are second to none. I've been saving up to go back in 2023. I can't wait to see everyone again, and to laugh and think and drink really, really good whisky. But you don't have to take my word for it! Bloody Scotland shares a lot of content on YouTube, so you can visit and get a feel for things: <https://www.youtube.com/@BloodyScotlandFestival/videos>. Also, American author James McCrone attended in 2022 and I interviewed him about the conference. You can find the interview at this YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@lowdowndirtyvoteanthology512>

Mysti Berry is the editor of *Low Down Dirty Vote*, three short story anthologies which have raised \$25K for voting rights work. She has been published in *EQMM*, *AHMM*, and many regional SinC anthologies, and her article *How to Write a Mystery*, was published in the MWA handbook. Her next short story is due out mid-2023, and she is working on her first historical mystery novel set in 1938 Hilo, Hawaii, where her mother was born.

# Drop-in Writing Testimonials

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**In their own words, seventeen writers in the SinC NorCal drop-in writing sessions tell what being part of this group means to them.**

**Susan Bickford:** Early in the Covid pandemic in 2020, Mysti Berry started running drop-in writing sessions for SinC NorCal members. Unfortunately, her work schedule and other demands forced her to stop. As NorCal president at that time, I stepped in. I registered us for a Zoom account. There was no clear consensus on the best days or times, so I decided on drop-in writing sessions, Monday through Friday at 1:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., and 10:00 p.m., and later added Sundays at 1:00 p.m.

The group has evolved. We added breakout rooms for those who want to start writing right away, and one for people who like sprinting. We recently changed the 10:00 p.m. time to 9:00 p.m. to accommodate people who wanted an earlier time for their night writing.

Personally, what I have enjoyed most is getting to know many of our members better and see their work develop, winding up in my collection. It's gratifying to know that something so simple to set up and run has helped many people achieve their writing goals, even in tough times.

**Alec Peché:** I've been doing write-ins from their initial birth in SinC NorCal. It's a way to hug yourself with the moxie of your fellow writers as we all try to write the next Great American Novel.

**Vera Chan:** A midday break from the work grind, a snatch at the netherworld of imagination.

**Thena MacArthur:** The SinC NorCal drop-ins saved my life. That's dramatic, but accurate. I joined the daily write-ins mid-pandemic, and my entire writing life changed. The accountability to other writers, the discipline of regularly showing up, and the connection to others are what makes it work. Connection, in person or via Zoom, can spur a writer/artist to exceptional creation, through encouragement, collaboration, and humor. I made new friends, cemented old relationships, and learned to be a much better writer.

**Heidi Noroozy:** The drop-in writing sessions are my favorite antidote to writer's malaise. I look forward to seeing my pals every day. Knowing that we are all working simultaneously on some aspect of our craft inspires me to dive back into my story. Even on the days I'm sure I can't put together a coherent sentence.

**Michelle Chouinard:** Drop-in writing group = words for my WIP + community (craft talk, industry talk, writing advice, friendly chat). What could be better than that?

## Drop-In Writing Testimonials, continued

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**G.M. Malliet:** The NorCal SinC writing group was literally a lifesaver for me during the pandemic, providing much-needed structure to my days. Seeing the friendly faces zooming all the way from the West Coast (I'm on the East Coast) made my day. When I ventured into my first post-pandemic Left Coast Crime and Bouchercon conferences, it was wonderful to see so many people I recognized!

**Michal Strutin:** The 1:00 p.m. drop-in session anchors my day. Whether I write beforehand or continue after, family and friends know it's "sacred space." Don't interrupt. The first 15 minutes of discussion is a thoroughly pleasant way to connect with others who scatter bodies around.

**Jen Prosser:** The zoom write-ins are everything you need from a writer's group: camaraderie, support, feedback and understanding.

**Laura Boss:** Seeing the same faces regularly is an inspiration that commitment pays off. And while I can't always make the time slot, I do see the notification glaring at me from my calendar and think of everyone else tapping away on their keyboards, prompting me to keep to my hour-a-day commitment – if not with the group, then at least at some point in the day. It's a huge help.

**Marilyn Dykstra:** I attended regularly for a year or more. Now not as much. I loved it and still do because it both kept me writing on a regular schedule during the pandemic and gave me a community of support. Members clapped for my first rejection, congratulated me when I won a contest, and offered me writing advice. I know they're available whenever I want writing companionship or advice. I always feel welcome.

**George Cramer:** The SinC writing group has been a lifesaver over the last two years. It would have been a lonely and depressing time for me if it weren't for meeting with my siblings each afternoon. Thank you, Sisters in Crime.

**Glenda Carroll:** Every day at about 12:55 p.m., I receive an email alert telling me the 1 p.m. write-in is about to start. After two years, my brain sends its own message to get to my laptop and prepare to sign in and join a group of writers I've come to know and appreciate for their talent, humor, and good advice. The write-ins are like jumper cables that connect a dead battery to a working battery. They load a heavy-duty spark into my non-functioning brain and jolt me into writing. The group oozes creativity and gives me the push I need to keep going.

**Vinnie Hansen:** Mary Heaton Vorse said, "The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair." Drop-in writing helps me to do this but has also led to two guest appearances on George Cramer's blog, a short story review swap, three reviews and two blurbs for *One Gun*, my latest book, an interview with our fearless leader, Susan Bickford, for my book launch, new authors to read and invite to Misterio Press's blog, camaraderie, moral support, and free medical advice from Jen Prosser.



## Drop-In Writing Testimonials, continued

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**Ellen Kirschman:** Hanging out with my new-found sisters and one brother has been a welcome break to the long days of writing/editing/revising. I show up even when all I can write is email. We are a loosely structured group (just my style)—come when you can, write what you want—offering a generous dose of kindness, wit, and expert support.

**Lisa Towles:** The midday 1:00 p.m. write-ins give my creativity the discipline it needs to get things done and meet my writing goals. An added bonus is getting to write with people I really care about.

**Ana Manwaring:** I am a regular at the 1:00 p.m. and the 9:00 p.m. sessions. Committing to two hours a day at my keyboard has improved my work output, my organization, and my happiness. And best? I've made new friends, learned much about writing and marketing, and escaped the lockdown loneliness so many have suffered during this new era of pandemics.

**To join one or more of SinC NorCal's drop-in writing session, look for the weekly email announcements with Zoom invitations.**



# So Good to See You Again

by Susan C. Shea

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Writers of series—and their faithful readers—know the pleasure of revisiting fictional friends, watching characters grow and change over time, keeping up with their adventures and enjoying their foibles. We authors can start a new manuscript feeling that our series characters will tell us what they're thinking and perhaps even telegraph how they'll react to the situations we devilishly put them in. Writing a series can be lots of fun, even if we scratch our heads at the plot problems and the "muddle in the middle."

So, it feels like moving to a faraway place when the series isn't continued by the heartless publisher and we're left to wonder, probably as much as our fans, what happened to the wayward teenager who seemed to be starting on a new path, or the divorced cop who perked up when the handsome new doctor in town and she shared a fizzy moment. Wait, you say, I have more to show you!

But you're a professional writer, so you may sulk or weep a little, and then start something new, with a cast you have to create from scratch, observe carefully, and come to care about.

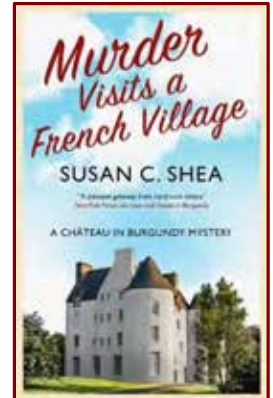
This happened to me when Minotaur said thanks but no thanks after two French village mysteries—*Love and Death in Burgundy* and *Dressed for Death in Burgundy*—that actually sold fairly well (think midlist). I couldn't share the good news about Michael Goff's burgeoning music career? That Pippa sold a murder mystery and got a contract for a second? That Madame Pomfort was still trying to run the tiny hamlet she lives in by intimidation, now laced with a bit of compassion? *Sacre bleu!*

Then, a funny and wonderful thing happened. The acquiring editor for Severn House, a British company that recently has been scooping up a number of my talented crime-writing friends, contacted me. Would I like to write a new French village series for Severn? The invitation was flattering, and the answer had to be yes, but the conversation that followed surprised me. He said he'd read the Minotaur books and that what he envisioned was a fresh start—"a liftoff" he called it—but not too far from where the series had been geographically. He said as a new publisher they needed a new protagonist and a new twist, but that the setting, the characters, and the quirky life of a small town in rural Burgundy were delightful. Could I take on the new material, but perhaps write in small parts for some of my existing characters?

## So Good to See You Again, continued

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Could I! So, *Murder Visits a French Village* was born. A newly widowed American woman inherits a small chateau only a few kilometers from Reigny-sur-Canne, the invented setting of the first two books. She meets my old series character Katherine, who introduces her to Pippa, and when a suspicious death occurs on her property, the three of them are off to the races. There are major new characters, of course, some of whom will become series regulars. And this time, the restoration of the dilapidated manor house with an interesting history, and the slightly larger town that borders it, play significant parts in the story. The good news: The eccentric denizens of Reigny are still in the picture, sometimes fleetingly, but I have the pleasure of knowing they live on and, even if not everything made it into the manuscript, I could still keep an eye on them.



I've started the second book in the new series and, yup, there's Madame Pomfort, waving her garden hoe and complaining loudly about a derelict sleeping on the doorstep of Katherine's little shop . . . who might not be sleeping. (Oh, you didn't know Katherine, the charming, fey painter at the heart of the first two books, has opened a tiny store for her flea market finds? You'll have to check out the new book, which launches March 2023.)

My first series, the Dani O'Rourke mysteries, is getting a makeover at the same time - new covers and interiors and self-published status on Amazon. Another interesting model of refresh: Each book in the series had at least two traditional publishers, multiple formats, and was orphaned, then purchased again. Whew! Ultimately, I was able to get the rights back (for free) for all three and looked at how well some of my Sisters in Crime NorCal friends had done taking on new self-publishing challenges with previously published and still delightful books.

I've followed their example, and all three are in process for POD and e-book publication this spring. I still get requests for a new Dani from readers, some who say they've scouted out copies from various sources and now want to know what Dani's up to and if she has gotten back together with her ex or moved on completely. So, if I have the bandwidth, perhaps a new Dani mystery later this year? After all, I want to know too, and right now it's a toss-up. Dickie is cute, contrite, and rich. Inquiring minds, including mine, want to know, and how better than to start typing and see what she says? I love writing series!

Susan C. Shea is a former President of Sisters in Crime NorCal, a former SinC National board member, and a member of Mystery Writers of America, and is on the faculty of the annual Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference. She blogs at *7CriminalMinds* and lives in Marin County. [www.susancshea.com](http://www.susancshea.com).

# Editing Checklist

## by Camille Minichino

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Done! My first novel, 75,000 words, more or less. A cozy mystery, ending with the sleuth in handcuffs.

Only I wasn't done; the final edit loomed. How would I know when the edit was complete? I needed a plan. Here it is, developed over more than 25 novels. If you're a debut author, this might help. If you're experienced, I'd love to hear about your plan!

My first tip: don't proof or edit for everything at the same time.

*What? I have to read this thing over and over?*

Yes. But don't panic; here's a 4-step map that will guide each reading.

### Reading 1: The Basics

- Check grammar, punctuation, spelling.
- Use ellipses, italics, dashes sparingly if at all; make your point with words.
- Check for consistent POV, one per scene.
- Keep track of time: hours, days, years.
- Clearly delineate backstory or flashback from present.

### Reading 2: Style

- Change weak verbs: be, have, walk, look, go, and the like.
- Eliminate -"ing" words and adverbs, "ly" especially; use simile instead.
- Change passive voice (search for *it* and *there*).
- Check for overwriting: "Stop!" she shouted loudly.
- Trim useless words: just, only, really, very; stood UP, knelt DOWN.
- One exclamation point per chapter, at most!

### Reading 3: Deeper

- For dialogue: add subtext.
- Add figures of speech, as needed.



## Editing Checklist, continued

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- Change nonspecific words: several, many; use BLT instead of lunch, e.g.
- Use 5 elements in a scene: action, dialogue, description; internal thoughts; physiological reactions.
- Use 5 senses in a scene.

### Reading 4: Deepest

- Use objective correlatives: objects, images, phrases that reappear and tie the story together.
- Pacing: read aloud for rhythm, variety of sentences, and chapter lengths.
- Enlist and consider beta reader advice.

Now you're done. Let it go.

Footnote: Some authors I know use this plan in reverse, starting with the more literary steps and ending with punctuation. Either way, covering all four steps holds the promise of a clean, well-crafted manuscript, ready for submission.

Camille Minichino has a Ph.D. in physics from Fordham University and teaches science at Golden Gate University and writing throughout the Bay Area. She has published more than 25 novels, as well as many short stories and nonfiction articles. Her five series are The Periodic Table Mysteries, The Miniature Mysteries, The Professor Sophie Knowles Mysteries, The Postmistress Mysteries (as Jean Flowers), and the Alaskan Diner Mysteries (as Elizabeth Logan). Camille is Past President and member of SinC NorCal, MWA NorCal, and the California Writers Club. Details at <http://www.minichino.com/>



**... to our newest members (joining SinC NorCal from  
October 1 through December 31, 2022)**

Chris Boynton  
Evette Davis  
Kimberly Elliott  
Alec Keylan Herrera

Claudia Hagadus Long  
Rachel Seidman  
Pamela Tent

# The Art of the Literary Device

## by Heather Haven

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Google states that “a Literary Device is a writing technique that writers use to express ideas, convey meaning, and highlight important themes in a piece of text. A metaphor, for instance, is a famous example of a literary device. These devices serve a wide range of purposes in literature.”



And that’s probably as good an explanation of a literary device as any other. They change hues from one genre to another, but for those of us who write mysteries, there are ten device steps that seem to be needed in order to write a good whodunit: a hook, atmosphere, a crime, a sleuth, a villain, narrative momentum, a trail of clues, foreshadowing, red herrings, and, of course, a satisfying ending. It sounds a lot easier to do than it is.

Other genres have latched on to their own devices. I don’t always know what they are or recognize them when they’re hurled out at me. But when I do catch one, I try to learn from it, even if it isn’t applicable to what I do.

Recently we went to see the national tour of *Ain’t Too Proud: the Life and Times of the Temptations*, the Broadway musical. The musical is based on the book *Temptations* by the group's founder, Otis Williams. For those of you arriving from another planet or born after the year 2010, they were the biggest singing group to come out of Motown, rivals to Diana Ross and the Supremes. And if you’re going to ask who Diana Ross and the Supremes are, please don’t do it in my presence. Or allow me to get a strong scotch first.

*Ain’t Too Proud* was one of the best productions of any show I’ve seen in a long, long time. Each performer was of star quality, from the leads to people playing multiple roles. The acting, singing, dancing, costumes, lighting, and sets went to a level of perfection seldom achieved in live theater. I have a background in theater and worked backstage on Broadway for ten years, so naturally, I think I know what I’m talking about. It doesn’t mean I do, but try telling me that.

Anyway, the writer of the musical's book, Dominique Morrisseau, is first-class. The storyline is clear, well-paced, entertaining, emotionally moving, and all the stuff a really fine book to a musical ought to be but seldom is. And the writer applied a device using verb tenses that astonished me. I will try to explain it. There would be a scene where one character would initially say they were going to do a specific thing. Then, after a small amount of dialog, that same character would repeat the same line,

## The Art of the Literary Device, continued

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but state they were doing that specific thing. Further on in the scene, the same character would use the same sentence, this time announcing the long-term result or outcome of what they'd done. So we would go future, present, past, in one fell swoop. Whether it was a few months or years, the plot advanced solely due to these tense changes. I did note that the same words had to be used each time in the sentence and said by the same character for clarity, but this device worked.

It would be great to know if any of you have either seen this device used before or have used it yourself. It was a first for me. And I loved learning about it! But whatever you do, try going to see *Ain't Too Proud*. It will make you and your heart sing.

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 Big Top*, a Ringling Brothers' Circus standalone documystery, 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)



## Member Profile: Gayle Feyrer aka Yves Fey

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

Gayle Feyrer lives in the SF Bay Area and is quite the Renaissance woman—creating not only historical mysteries but artwork, prize-winning desserts, and perfumes.

**Stiletta:** First, I have to ask . . . how did you come up with your pseudonym, Yves Fey, and why a pseudonym?

**Gayle Feyrer:** When I was 13, I added a “y” to Gale. I thought Gayle was prettier and more elegant and I like names with a “y.” No one can pronounce Feyrer, so when I wanted to choose a *nom de plume* for the Paris mysteries, I decided to keep Fey and wanted something French for the first name. I’ve always liked the name Eve. The feminine French would be Yvette, which didn’t feel right, so I decided to use Yves as a unisex name.



**Stiletta:** You have an MFA in creative writing. When did you start writing for publication?

**GF:** I’d written stories since I was about 12 but didn’t write for publication until I was in college. I did a lot of poetry, short stories and, of course, the Great American Novel—which was so obscure even I didn’t understand it or try to get it published. I also discovered fan fiction, which remains controversial, I know, but some of my best work was fan fic and I was read and beloved, which was wonderful. I was doing a lot of erotic fan fiction when some friends told me I should try a romance, that it was the easiest market to break into—still sort of true at the time. I didn’t really read romance (except for fan fic); I read historicals and mysteries. It got me on the road to where I am now, but my sensibility was always too dark for the genre.

**Stiletta:** Tell us about your current historical series, *The Paris Trilogy*. How did you decide to set it in *Belle Époque Paris*?

**GF:** When I was writing romance, I told my agent that I wanted to do one set in Paris. I was told that Paris was no longer considered romantic. Nor was the setting I used for my first one, Italy. The readers wanted Scotland, the American West, light Regency, or Medieval. I did a medieval setting but didn’t want to do another. And an Elizabethan. But writing romance convinced me that I could actually plot—most of my romances have a mystery or thriller element. When I left romance, I decided to write a Paris-based mystery, as Paris was my true love. But I spent a year with the wrong characters. Nothing came alive and I despaired. Wondering what else I could write, I remembered a fascination



## Member Profile: Gayle Feyrer aka Yves Fey, continued

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with Joan of Arc's evil lieutenant, Gilles de Rais. But I didn't want to return to medieval. Then I thought "copycat" and had the whole concept for the story and characters come together in a few days, though it took a long time to actually write it.

**Stiletta:** The series has been called "classic detection and occult revelation" and "not for the faint of heart." Is that how you would describe your books? What inspired the paranormal element?

**GF:** It's very much true of *Floats the Dark Shadow*. The villain believes he's possessed by Gilles de Rais, who was fascinated by sorcery, and his crimes are not for the faint of heart. I know that some readers just don't like paranormal, so I wrote the mystery so that Michel solves it based on clues he gathers and his assessment of the suspects. Theo enters into the occult world that was very active in England and Europe at the time, and she offers the clues she unearths there from her friend Carmine's tarot readings and her experience with the leaders of the Golden Dawn.

When I began *Bitter Draughts*, I wanted to keep all the various threads woven into the new tapestry. Theo could continue her exploration of the occult easily enough, but it all seemed totally irrelevant to Michel's investigation of the Dreyfus Affair and antisemitism. Then I discovered that the first clues to the coverup that Captain Dreyfus' brother received were from a psychic! He even brought her to live with him. Much rejoicing! I couldn't find out much about Léonie Leboulanger--historians seemed very embarrassed to even refer to her, much as they are with Yeats' deep interest in the occult. But I then had a way to weave that thread through both Theo's and Michel's investigations.



But I've long had an interest in the occult. I taught myself Tarot back when I was a hippie and I do astrological charts for my characters—sometimes just imagined ones to explain them—but for the Paris books, I created charts from actual dates and planetary aspects, searching for the ones that made the most sense for each character. It's a fun way to both explain and discover more about them as individuals.

**Stiletta:** Are more books planned in this series?

**GF:** I'm working on the third book of The Paris Trilogy, which is Averill's story. It ties up the story lines set up in the first book, but I do have ideas for others. One will be several years later, after Averill becomes a psychiatrist, shifting from Freud to Jung, but also with the Symbolist art movement. And I'd like to do one that centers on the women solving a murder. The 1900 World's Fair in Paris is also a tempting setting.

**Stiletta:** You have been both traditionally published and, more recently, self-published. Which do you prefer?

## Member Profile: Gayle Feyrer aka Yves Fey, continued

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**GF:** I'd love to have a traditional publisher for more visibility, but I am a slow writer. I can't do a book a year, much less a book every six months or nine months. I think small press or self-publishing is the only reasonable route for me. But I do love getting to design my books. I hated most of my romance covers. I had titles I didn't want foisted on me by people who hadn't even read the books. Ugh. So, I do love the control aspect of self-publishing. But I'm not very good at marketing

**Stiletta:** I understand you are currently creating perfumes inspired by your novels. Tell us more!

**GF:** I've been fascinated by perfumes for ages, especially since the more niche perfumers have become available. When I was in Paris and just beginning *Floats the Dark Shadow*, I saw a shop with a workshop where you could make a perfume. I took a class and created a dark rose and carnation perfume that I thought my courtesan, Liliias, would wear (it was also a fragrance that I'd like to wear). It turned out quite well, and when I returned home, I decided to try making more on my own. I created a few successful ones and even took samples of a couple as gifts at a Bouchercon and an LCC.

My most successful is a perfume I created for Carmine, my heroine's best friend. It's both a descriptive perfume and one I thought she'd wear. At the time, I didn't see any like it available, though now I've seen several that have similar ingredients of rose, geranium, red fruits, pink pepper and patchouli. It's a kinky, earthy rose fragrance. I've yet to make one that I think is right for Theo. At first, I tried to put in too many elements – too much of the Parisienne she'd like to be. I'm close but haven't had time to go back to it. It has honeysuckle and clover and apricot and a base note of cedar, so much more the golden California girl, the optimist, than the Parisian artist. Theo would like it, but she'd buy Liliias' perfume. Liliias wears that perfume almost as a disguise, to make herself seem more romantic than she really is.

I have a decadent, absinthe-inspired perfume full of greens such as lime and mint, mingled with drugged, dreamy scents such as lotus, tuberose and gardenia. I had a fabulous Michel scent with coffee and chocolate and spices but ruined it by adding some very expensive naturally sourced ambergris that was way too strong. I'll have to start over! Very early on I mixed some very beautiful, aged sandalwood with a rich lavender. It smelled wonderful and I just thought, oh, Averill wears that. But when I started to answer this question, I asked myself how he came to wear it. Would he have bought it for himself? I thought, no, he'd probably have tried for something like the decadent absinthe one. Jeanette, his sister, is going to become a perfumer, so I thought she might have picked it out, but that didn't feel right either. I finally decided that his mother bought it for him, and it represents some of the most positive aspects of himself, things she sees very clearly, but also that his own chemistry gives it more drama and complexity. Like astrology, thinking about the fragrances, their high, middle, and base notes, becomes a way of thinking about the characters.

## Member Profile: Gayle Feyrer aka Yves Fey, continued

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**Stiletta:** Your bachelor's degree is in pictorial arts, and you are active as an artist. Please tell us about some of the works of art you create.

**GF:** Sadly, writing novels has undercut my work as an artist. I spend a lot of time sitting at the computer just waiting. If I don't do that, if I pull out the artwork, or the perfumes, then I start obsessing about that and lose track of the writing. I miss the peaceful zone I could enter when a drawing was going well, just floating along with the movement of the lines. But I don't like to ignore those things completely either, because they can help inspire each other.

Most often I create book trailers, which allows me to indulge my artistic side. And creating my website was a similar artistic indulgence, gathering the images to help illustrate my world. I have some images up on my website and several more planned, but I need to do some artwork for the others so the style will be consistent. My book trailers can be found at <https://yvesfey.com/novels/trailer/> and examples of my artwork at <https://yvesfey.com/novels-3-2/art/>.

When I wrote fan fiction, I was writing shorter pieces and illustrated them with an Art Nouveau-influenced pen and ink style I could later paint. That was a really delightful era. I considered doing covers for the romances when I republish them, but the style isn't quite right for the romance market, though it could work for fantasy.

**Stiletta:** What are some of the awards you have received for your books?

**GF:** I got a writing award in high school and was a finalist in a national short story competition in college, so that was my first publication. Most of my romances were up for *Romantic Times* awards, and *The Thief's Mistress* (my Robin and Marian novel, which I'm going to republish soon with the title *Marian*) won a Best Romantic Adventure award. *Floats the Dark Shadow* won the Silver Medal IPPY Award from the Independent Publishers Book Awards. It also won two Finalist Awards, in Mystery and in Historical, from the Next Generation Indies and was a Finalist in *Foreword Magazine's* Book of the Year competition. *Floats the Dark Shadow* just won the Silver Medal and *Bitter Draughts* won the Bronze Medal in the annual Historical Fiction Company's mystery awards.

**Stiletta:** Your other career endeavors have been quite varied. Please tell us about some of them.

**GF:** I was a wild child in the sixties and was a go-go dancer in San Francisco. I was a dessert baker for a while in Eugene, both at the fancy Excelsior restaurant and the Saturday market. I was also doing ceramics then, creating fanciful porcelain beasties like unicorns. I made dragon incense burners that breathed smoke. Did some minor creative writing teaching--never my strong point, as my own training was from workshoping stories.

**Stiletta:** You have won prizes for your chocolate desserts. What were the desserts that won you awards?

## Member Profile: Gayle Feyrer aka Yves Fey, continued

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**GF:** The \$1,000 Chocolate Pecan Torte and my White Chocolate Lemon Cheesecake. Years ago, I began a cookbook, but I wanted to do the cover and illustrate it and I was told that I'd have no say in that. I could do it now, but I think any original recipe ideas I created years ago have already been done and redone by others.

**Stiletta:** How have your travels and living abroad influenced your writing?

**GF:** While Paris remains my favorite city, Venice is the most beautiful one I've visited. I tried to set my first historical romance there, but I didn't find the right historical event to hook it to and ended up writing about Florence instead, using the conflict with the Borgias and Savonarola. It was very strange to be working on a book about Renaissance Italy when I was living in Jakarta, Indonesia. Rather surreal at times. I loved Bali and there was an artists' colony there in the 30s. I was tempted to write about that but couldn't find enough source material. It's still one of those ideas that teases me. When I wrote my Robin and warrior/spy Marian romance, I visited some medieval English castles. I remember looking out through one of the narrow slits in the stonework that were just wide enough to shot arrows from and thinking it was very emblematic of the medieval world view. Overall, I'm very happy in my Parisian world, very much at home with the artistic culture of the time. When I saw *Midnight in Paris*, I was the girl who stayed behind at Maxim's.

**Stiletta:** What inspired you to join Sisters in Crime and what benefits do you hope to reap from it?

**GF:** I just loved the idea of Sisters in Crime from the moment I first heard of it. I'd been to meetings occasionally, even before I began to write mysteries, to hear special speakers. I haven't really availed myself of all the resources as much as I should, partly because I am slow to search out the latest trends because I never know what they'll be by the time I've finished. Mostly I've just enjoyed the meetings for the camaraderie and to discover new authors. It was also a great resource when I was searching for a critique group. Since the pandemic I've joined in on several of the Zoom meetings and enjoyed those.

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

**GF:** Movie buff! If anyone wants to talk film, I'd love to. I often cast my characters. Cats. I'll happily commune about cats.

Gayle Feyrer was interviewed by Margie Bunting, SinC NorCal newsletter editor.

# Member News

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## *New and Upcoming Releases*

*Nest of White Crows* by June Gillam, book #5 in the Hillary Broome Novels, was released on December 12 by Gorilla Girl Ink.

*How Did She Get There?* by Alec Peche, book #3 in the Michelle Watson Thriller series, was released on December 26 by GBSW Publishing.

Victoria Kazarian has published two books in recent months: *A Tree of Poison*, book #3 in the Silicon Valley Murder series, on October 31 and *Drop Dead Bread*, first in the Laughing Loaf Bakery Mysteries, on December 15.

A reprint of Vinnie Hansen's short story, "Room and Board," appears in the anthology *The Dark Waves of Winter*, released January 10 by Kelp Books. Two young surfers plot to steal a board shaped by the legendary Johnny Rice from the Santa Cruz Surf Museum. The caper affirms Murphy's Law.

*Invitation to a Killer* by G.M. Malliet, book #2 in the Augusta Hawke series, will be published on February 7 by Severn House.

Susan Kuchinskas' short story, "Bassoon Trouble," about a feckless young woman who gets mixed up in a double cross, was accepted by *Tough* for publication in 2023.

*Robbers and Cops* by George Cramer was released on November 1 by Russian Hill Press.

## *Public Appearances*

Ellen Kirschman will be zooming with the Menlo Park Mystery Readers Club on February 15 at 3:00 p.m.

Whether you're reading paranormal mysteries with vampires, an edgy cozy with crafts, P.I. fiction, or a straight-up novel of suspense, the elements that make those pages flip are the same. But what are the sneaky devices writers use to keep us up all night? As Vinnie Hansen and Michele Drier share their most recent works with the Cupertino/Sunnyvale AAUW chapters via a virtual presentation on February 8 at 7:00 p.m., they will also divulge secrets of the trade.



## Member News, continued

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### *Awards and Recognition: Congratulations!*

*Dark Obsessions* by Marie Sutro won the Best Suspense Novel award from Authors on the Air for 2022. The live awards ceremony was held on December 14, 2022 on *Authors on the Air*.

*Expect Obsession* by JoAnn Smith Ainsworth is a finalist in the Global Book Awards contest. In this WWII paranormal thriller, published on October 5, the US government recruits psychics to hunt down a Nazi occult practitioner and spy.

Gigi Pandian, along with Kellye Garrett and Walter Mosley, received Mystery Writers of America's 2023 Raven Award for outstanding achievement in the mystery field outside the realm of creative writing. The three authors are co-founders of Crime Writers of Color, a 350-plus-member association of authors "seeking to present a strong and united voice for members who self-identify as crime/mystery writers from traditionally underrepresented racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds."

Catriona McPherson has been nominated for two Lefty Awards: *Scot in a Trap* for Best Humorous Mystery Novel and *In Place of Fear* for Best Historical Mystery Novel. *In Place of Fear* has also been nominated for an Agatha Award in the Best Historical Novel category and is a finalist for the 2023 Bill Gottfried memorial award for historical mystery.

Ann Parker has been nominated for a Lefty Award for *The Secret in the Wall* in the Best Humorous Mystery Novel category.

Laurie R. King has been nominated for a Lefty Award for *Back to the Garden* in the Best Mystery Novel category.

Gigi Pandian has been nominated for a Lefty Award for *Under Lock and Skeleton Key* in the Best Mystery Novel category.

D.W. Rowell has been nominated for the Mary Higgins Clark Award, for *Never Name the Dead*.



# Question of the Quarter



## What is your writing or reading resolution for 2023?

I resolve to publish my fifth Dot Meyerhoff mystery in 2023. As a dedicated pantsler, I resolve to gird my loins and plot out Dot Meyerhoff #6 before diving in. *Ellen Kirschman*

In 2023, I want to write a more complex book that is devious and surprising. I have wanted to do that before, but books don't always cooperate. And I never argue with a book! *Priscilla Royal*

I hope I can increase my production from four books a year to six books. I have a strategic plan for my book business that includes production and reader engagement. I also hope to enter the urban fantasy market. *Alec Peche*

My resolutions: Reading – Make my way through at least one of the many mystery-fiction TBR stacks (there are several). Writing – Write one short story and one novel. Fingers crossed I'm not being overly ambitious! 😊 *Ann Parker*

My writing resolution for 2023 is to encourage other writers, especially young writers. I've benefited so much from the encouragement of other writers, especially those in Sisters in Crime, and I want to pass that on. I have two teenage nieces who have been writing short stories – we set up a coffee shop write-in over the Christmas break. *Victoria Kazarian*

Years ago I confessed that I had never read a word of Nancy Drew or Dickens. A librarian friend came up at a book signing and pressed a copy of *The Secret of the Old Clock* into my hands. She had just bought it for me. But I still haven't read Dickens. So my 2023 reading resolution is to read either *Bleak House* or *Hard Times*. *Catriona McPherson*

My writing resolution for 2023 is not to write. Not even a 6-word flash fiction piece. No metaphors, no plot twists, no tapping into creative ideas. Nothing. I've finally learned my lesson. (Given the way my New Year's resolutions have panned out over the decades, this is the only one that will guarantee I'll turn out at least a couple of thousand words a day.) *Camille Minichino*

To read less and write more. *Susan Kuchinskas*

My both reading and writing resolution for this year is to cull books carefully and put an emphasis on literature. Although I enjoy reading and writing genre fiction (in my case, traditional mystery and paranormal romance), my brain gets stretched more when I read and learn from literature, particularly post-modernist fiction. *Michele Drier*



## 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 Manwaring**, Events (anamanwaring [@ gmail.com](mailto:anamanwaring@gmail.com)), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter (mbunting [@ sbcglobal.net](mailto:mbunting@sbcglobal.net)), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions.

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