

THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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AUGUST 2024

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Years ago, at the *San Jose Mercury News*, one of my friends wrote a feature on a local potter. And the headline that ran?

“If You’re Hooked on Pot, You Have to Sell It.”

The headline writer accurately understood that the story was about how a potter turned her hobby into a brand that she could market, but . . .

Marketing then and now is tricky.

Probably at a conference a decade or so ago, I went to a panel on marketing your books, and one of the panelists hit a nerve. He said, “I planned on being a writer, working in a small room churning out pages of prose and slipping them under the door for someone else to publish and sell. Boy, was I wrong!” Out of all the conferences, presentations, and panels I’ve heard over the years, this one sticks with me.

I’ve learned that just writing the pages isn’t enough, but I’m still flailing around with marketing. I’m just not very good at it. Most of my sales are online, and I sell more ebooks than print, which I suspect may be the norm.

This year I decided to make an effort to drum up sales locally. After all, I live in Northern California, and in my immediate area there are probably between 2 and 3 million people. And that doesn’t include the Bay Area. There may not



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President's Letter, continued

be a way to reach a large percentage of these people, but I didn't usually do face-to-face sales other than a booth at the Great Valley Book Fest annually in Manteca.

This summer I'm doing two or three weekends a month at a nearby Farmers' Market, and I bit the bullet and signed up for a booth at the State Faire's California Authors display. So far, I haven't sold tons of books, but I've enjoyed meeting people and talking books, writing, and ideas.



One of the more interesting people is a Sergeant Major in the California National Guard, director and chief curator of the Military History and Museums Program in Rancho Cordova. He saw that the cover of my first mystery, *Edited for Death*, had a swastika on it and asked why. I explained that one of the protags had been in Europe at the close of WWII and stolen a drawing that the Nazis had stolen from a Jewish family. That led to a discussion about the Monuments Men, a group of artists, curators and art historians put together as the war was ending to track down art stolen by the Nazis. They did find a massive cache of paintings and sculpture hidden in an old salt mine in the Bavarian Alps. Which led to his next statement: "The U.S. Army has the world's greatest art collection." Odd but true, much of that hoard hasn't been returned. Even today, they work to find any surviving family members who may have had their collections stolen.



I may not be selling hundreds of books this summer, but I'm meeting people, talking books and writing, art and history, and that's a lot for a summer vacation.

Whether you're a writer or a reader, talking to people is a joy and sometimes opens up avenues of research you never thought about.

I urge you to try face-to-face sales.

Sincerely,

Michele Drier

President, Sisters in Crime NorCal

Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

Sizzling Summer Events presented by SinC California Chapters

To attend both events on Zoom, click on <https://www.sistersincrimela.com/events/>. No logon or password needed. Registration is required for in-person attendance at Radford Studio Center for Rhys Bowen event.

Sunday, August 4, 2:00 p.m. (SinC NorCal August meeting)

Rhys Bowen

Zoom meeting and in person

Rhys Bowen's work has sold close to 10 million copies in over 30 languages. She has been nominated for every major mystery award and has won multiple Agatha, Anthony, and Macavity Awards. She will speak in person at Radford Studio Center in Studio City and via Zoom.

Saturday, September 7, 1:00 p.m.

Writing True Crime with McCracken Poston Jr.

Zoom meeting

McCracken King Poston Jr. is a criminal defense attorney and former state legislator in the Georgia House of Representatives. His book, *Zenith Man*, is a story of redemption of more than one man in Catoosa County, Georgia. He will share his expertise in writing true crime stories and authentic courtroom scenes.

Saturday, October 5, 1:00 p.m.

The Gift That Keeps On Giving: Adding Paranormal Elements To Your Writing

Zoom meeting

Our own Dänna Wilberg, author and Universal Connection Podcast Host, will moderate a panel that will help you add depth to your characters and plotting with intuitive tools. Explore the unknown, look into your characters' past to find out what makes them tick, tap into their destiny, and let the magic unfold. Additional panelists include: Linda Schooler, psychic; Linda Potter, past life regressionist; and Erin Burrell, tarot card reader

Please check our website and your email for updates and more information on our events, and for registration links for all events.

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.

May Meeting - Spring Author Showcase

Members of SinC NorCal gathered in person at Book Passage in Contra Costa and virtually on Zoom to enjoy ten member authors reading (6 minutes each) from their new book/short story/podcast content. There was also a drawing to award each book to a lucky attendee (including those on Zoom). Chapter vice president Glenda Carroll introduced each of the authors.



Rachele Baker



Susan Bickford



Josie Brown



Rhys Bowen



George Cramer



Heather Haven



T.E. MacArthur



Jen Prosser



Susan C. Shea



Dänna Wilberg

June Meeting - Get Smart: Understanding Artificial Intelligence

Our esteemed panel of Vera Chan (who also served as moderator), Bruce Johnson, and Reece Hirsch educated us on the differences between assistive AI and generative AI (including ChatGPT) and discussed the benefits and issues of each, responding to many questions from attendees.



Agatha Christie and Me

by Heather Haven

Even though I never knew Agatha Christie personally, she has been an important person in my life. I was a lonely kid and can only say the phrase “books are my friends” was on the mark for me. I started reading Nancy Drew mysteries when I was nine. I moved on to Agatha Christie when I was about sixteen. In the following years, I read anything that came my way, from Ernest Hemingway to P.G. Wodehouse, Ruth Rendell to Erma Bombeck. Thrown into this mix was required reading, such as “Ode to a Grecian Urn.”



But I always came back to Christie. Her books were like a trip home. I knew I would care about the characters and be certain of where they were going — i.e., a solved crime—but at the same time, be perplexed by the mystery. Above all, it would be a good read. Something to savor and enjoy, to be sorry when it ended.



Arguably, but let's not argue about this, Christie invented the genre we know today as the cozy mystery. Although, most of them were not as cozy as people like to think. If you scratch beneath the surface, you will find deceit, betrayal, greed, selfishness, and amorality. Even in her romantic mystery series with Tommy and Tuppence, these two were up against some pretty evil stuff amid the charm and fluff.

It is said that the best way to learn how to write a mystery is not just to study writing but to read others who have gone before. Read the best and you cannot help but become a better writer yourself. So, I read her a lot. From Christie, I learned a lot about the value of having a protagonist people enjoy reading about and are committed to. I learned pacing, plot building, and the element of surprise, but mostly I learned the importance of sustained good writing.

Do I write like or as well Agatha Christie? No. But I don't try to. This isn't a competition. I'm me and Christie is Christie. My goal is to write as well as I can, in my way, and in my voice. But hearing her angels singing in the background helps. Seeing in my mind's eye the day-to-day existence of her people, even in the smallest of ways. Poirot measuring his eggs. Marple knitting her latest pair of baby booties. They help me with my own protagonists' quirks and foibles, keeping my characters interesting and believable. There may be chit-chat about the Great God Google, but to me, Agatha Christie is my goddess.

With this kind of godlike appreciation comes a certain amount of ownership. I am quite possessive of what is done with her work. I can remember seeing Margaret Rutherford on TV in four black and white movies with her playing Miss Marple and thinking, uh-oh.

Agatha Christie and Me, continued



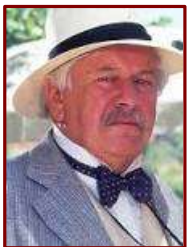
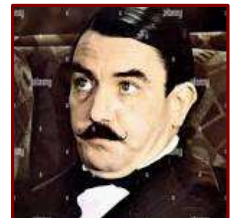
Don't get me wrong, I adore Margaret Rutherford. She was a wonderful character actress of the 50s and 60s who was in many fine movies, such as *Blythe Spirit*, *The V.I.P.s*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She even won an Academy Award for *The V.I.P.s*. However, her approach to Miss Marple was more along the dotty, sleuthing line, with less on observation and mental acuity. Rutherford also decided to add her own husband to the stories as her sidekick, Mr. Stringer. Of her performances, it was said Christie respected Rutherford, but later wrote that "Margaret Rutherford was a very fine actress but was never in the least like Miss Marple." I'm with her.

Glossing over Angela Lansbury's Miss Marple when she was 55 years old and looked as if she could fell a horse, Christie's quintessential Miss Marple was Joan Hickson. Agatha Christie even wrote her a letter saying, "I hope one day you will play my dear Miss Marple." Christie eventually got her wish when the opportunity arose for Hickson to star in the role at the age of 78. Others come and go, but Joan Hickson was and is my perfect Jane Marple.



Another glossover time is Tony Randall playing Hercule Poirot in *The Alphabet Murders*. Despite adding Robert Morley to the cast, the movie didn't work on any level. The script was compromised, the heart of the story was neglected, and Tony Randall needed to go back to being the second banana in Rock Hudson movies. Which he did.

Albert Finney played Poirot one time in the movie *Murder on the Orient Express*. With an all-star cast, the script followed much of Christie's novel. Finney's portrayal of Poirot was exacting, respectful and believable. My own respect for Albert Finney went up several notches after seeing that movie. He really became Hercule Poirot.



Peter Ustinov played a very credible Poirot in six movies. While he didn't look physically very much like the description of Poirot in the books, he had a great sense of fun, the intellect was there, and he honored the character and the role. And he was a wonderful actor. The films were made on location and tended to follow the plotlines, always a plus. His *Death on the Nile* is one of my favorite go-to movies.

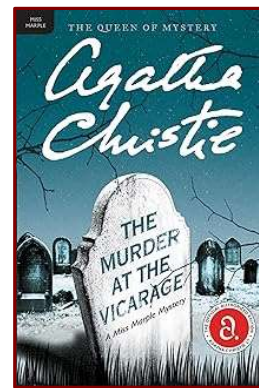
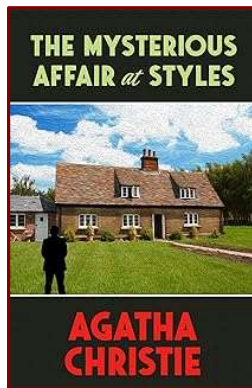
Agatha Christie and Me, continued

But now we come to Kenneth Branagh. He's a good Shakespearean actor, but his Hercule Poirot is more one of his fancies than what Christie wrote. His Poirot is a man with a full head of hair, blondish, younger, and far more strapping than any Poirot previously done. And his mustache seems to change in every film. He's done three films so far, all uneven, and probably plans to do more. Okay. Everybody's gotta make a living.



If you want to know what Hercule Poirot looks like according to Agatha Christie, either read the books or watch one of David Suchet's performances. Because we have just gone back to quintessential. David Suchet played Hercule Poirot for nearly 25 years on television. It was a faithful version of the character. According to *movieweb.com*, "Throughout his 25-year tenure as the detective, Suchet managed to consistently bring to life all of Poirot eccentricities, right down to the physicality and movement of the character — as , notably, Suchet managed to perfect Poirot's distinct walk."

Keeping in mind that actors need to work and they're going to take a job whether I like their version of the role or not, when I really want to visit Miss Marple, or Tommy and Tuppence, or Poirot, I pick up one of Agatha Christie's books. Timeless and wonderful.



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 <https://heatherhavenstories.com/>

Point of View: Keeping It Straight

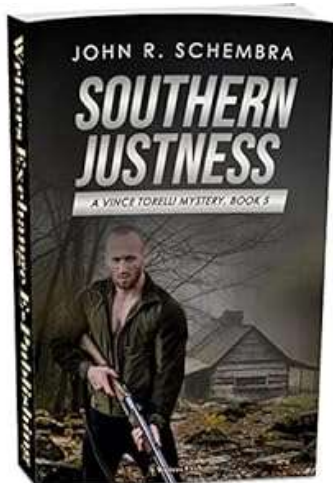
by John Schembra

One writer's conference I attend every year is the Public Safety Writers Association held in July at the Orleans Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. It is a great conference, with three days of interesting and informative panels. Included is an option to attend a pre-conference workshop the day before the conference starts, during which members with a particular writing expertise instruct the participants in aspects of writing which seem to plague writers.



Last year, when I attended the workshop, one of the instructors, Mysti Berry, who is a member of the PSWA and our own chapter of Sisters in Crime, and is a writer, editor, and publisher, presented a class on Point of View. It was excellent, clearing up exactly what POV is and how to avoid breaks that can bring the reader out of the story. It was a class from which I benefitted, as I was sometimes guilty of that.

Mysti has graciously allowed me to quote from her lesson plan in this article, and for that, I thank her. Obviously, this article will not be as comprehensive.



Those of us who write fiction write in one of three points of view: first person (I punched him); second person (you punched him); third person (he punched him). I write strictly in the third person, as it allows me to share more info rather than info from just one person. Where I would run into trouble is that when writing in the third person, it can be easy to accidentally break the POV, which can interrupt the flow and bring the reader out of the story. When I am reading and come upon a broken POV, it takes me out of the story, and sometimes it can confuse me as to who is speaking, talking, or thinking.

We all know the cardinal rule of writing: Show, not tell, the reader. I find it much easier to show in the third person, as adding sights, sounds, smells, etc., enhances the scene rather than just describing it, and allows me to provide a bigger picture for the reader. It also helps to clearly define the characters and provide a "picture" of each character.

One example – in my current WIP, I have the two detectives walking up to a witness's house:

Exiting the car, they walked up the pathway cut into the recently mowed, weed-free lawn, and climbed the three steps to the porch. Louie saw three large planter pots filled with petunias. The

Point of View, continued

flowers had spilled over the edges of the pots and hung nearly to the ground, creating a pretty, multi-colored waterfall. The front door was centered on the house, which looked recently painted, and to the right were two garden chairs with brightly colored cushions facing the street. Between the two chairs was a small table on which rested a large glass ashtray filled with cigarette butts.

Paints a nice picture, right? The reader now has some expectations of the owner, and what the interior of the house must look like. Now, let's move on:

"I've got five bucks that says smoking isn't allowed inside."

Louie smiled and said, "By the look of the ashtray I'd say that's a sucker's bet, but you're on."

As he reached to knock on the door, it was pulled open quickly. "Who the hell are you, and what do you want," an elderly woman growled, blocking entry with her substantial girth. A half-smoked cigarette dangled from her lips.

Louie turned to him and said, *sotto voce*, "You owe me five bucks."

The woman was wearing a light blue housedress that ended a few inches below her knees, with a threadbare black sweater draped over her shoulders. Black socks and tan colored slippers completed her outfit. Several splotches of spilled food decorated the front of the dress, stretched over her large bosom. Her salt-and-pepper hair was in disarray, desperately needing a good shampooing and brushing. A thin mustache was barely visible on her upper lip. Her complexion was pale, bordering on grayish, and several liver spots adorned her bare arms. Her appearance belied the neatness of her home's exterior.

Not exactly what the reader imagined the resident would be, eh?

The point is that it would be very difficult to "show" the house and occupant in either first or second person POV. Sometimes the writer may jump to the resident's POV to convey her perceptions. That can be "head hopping," which is not a good thing.

I am by no means an expert in these things but have benefitted from the expertise of others such as Mysti, and, if I say so myself, it has resulted in a better story.

Oh, and it keeps me from getting those annoying "stop head hopping" comments from my editor!

Point of View, continued

John Schembra is an award-winning author of eight books—one military (Vietnam War), five Vince Torelli mystery thrillers, and two supernatural thrillers. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife of 52 years. Besides being a Vietnam veteran (Military Police Corps), John is a retired police officer with nearly 30 years of service. After retiring from the police department, he became the lead EVOG (Emergency Vehicle Operations Course) instructor for the Contra Costa Sheriff's police academy, instructing both academy cadet and advance officer courses all over the state. After 15 years he retired, again, and now devotes his time to his family, traveling, reading, and writing. He is currently hard at work on his ninth book, *The Night Caller*, the first in the Louisa (Louie) Princeton mystery series. You can learn more at his website (currently being updated), www.jschembra.com



**... to our newest member
(joining SinC NorCal from April 1, 2024 through June 30, 2024)**

Christine Kulikowski

Ekphrasis: “In Frida Kahlo’s Garden”

by Nannette Rundle Carroll

I was one of three authors whose writing was spotlighted at a recent **Ekphrasis** exhibit sponsored by the California Writers Club, Lamorinda Arts Alliance, and Lamorinda Arts Council at the Orinda Library. Dating back to ancient Greece, Ekphrasis is written expression engaging and dialoguing with visual art or responding to it.

In this local **Ekphrasis** event, artist Elizabeth Kennen’s painting (below) inspired my literary response, “In Frida Kahlo’s Garden,” which lives somewhere between prose and poetry. I inhabited my soul while creating my piece and “conversing” with Frida. Elizabeth and I were one of three pairs invited to showcase our work to the audience at the Opening Reception.



“In Frida Kahlo’s Garden”

Sixty years after you left us, the entire world is invited into your garden. Did you ever imagine Casa Azul—the source of your life and art—would become a museum to keep your story alive? That this lush courtyard, your refuge from suffering and inspiration for immortality, would be replicated internationally? So people who cannot tour this haven can smell your gardenias and prick their fingers on the tall Organ Pipe Cacti?

Ekphrasis: “In Frida Kahlo’s Garden,” continued

Here in your garden, I see you washing your feet in the shallow reflecting pool, rinsing away his infidelities with your sister and countless other women. Your tears mixing with the water spouting from the fountain.

You stare at the pyramid he built, adorned with Indigenous Mexican art your ancestors shaped. Does the clay-fired dog statuette make you smile? Do you ever smile? In your many self-portraits, your unibrow appears pinched in a frown and your lips tightly drawn. Were you depicting your chronic pain and romantic torment?

Here within the cobalt-blue walls of your oasis, did you not foresee that you would emerge from the shadow of the great muralist? That you would earn fame, not just as his wife, but for your own art?

Your feet ripple the cool water in the mosaic pool, distorting the image of the frog in the tile floor. Frog—what you called Diego. The corners of your mouth curve up. He encouraged your genius and helped you embrace yourself as a painter. Even before the eclectic group of artists, writers and photographers in San Francisco energized you to become a serious artist.

A decade later you returned to California, newly divorced. And shortly thereafter remarried Rivera in San Francisco City Hall, despite the turbulence in your marriage, which you had to know would recur.

Was he as upset with your dalliances as you were with his? While in your garden, did Trotsky craft a crown of bougainvillea for your raven hair? Did your other famous lovers treasure the dahlias’ showy blooms and hear your parrots sing? When you picked up and cuddled the baby monkey that played among the plants, did you think about the son you longed for?

In your loving moments with Diego in your garden, did you feed him bittersweet pomegranate seeds? Wipe orange juice from his chin? Did you share watermelon and savor its sweetness, like the sweet part of your love?

Why did you both paint watermelons as your last works? Colorful lives entwined to the end.

Your brilliant art endures, as does your vibrant garden. “Viva la Vida.” Long Live Life!

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Ekphrasis: “In Frida Kahlo’s Garden,” continued

Nannette’s book, *The Communication Problem Solver*, snagged spots on “best of the year” sites. Many publications quoted her, including *Investor’s Business Daily*. She has published numerous articles on communication, the arts, and general interest. She won second place in a short story contest and is currently writing a mystery novel. Speaking engagements include the New York Public Library, Lafayette Library, webinars, and appearances on radio shows and podcasts. Nannette is a member of Sisters in Crime and California Writers Club.



Speakers Bureau Update

Maureen Studer, a member of the SinC NorCal board, is reviving our chapter's Speakers Bureau by contacting various organizations, libraries, bookstores, and other writing groups who might enjoy our panel presentations. If you know of an organization that may be interested in hosting a panel presentation, please provide Maureen (see email address below) with their contact information.

Maureen will keep us all posted on opportunities as they become available. Once she has scheduled a speaking engagement, she will send an email to the membership through groups.io with all of the details. Typically, there are two to three writers on a panel for each speaking engagement

To participate on a Speakers Bureau panel, you must be a chapter member who:

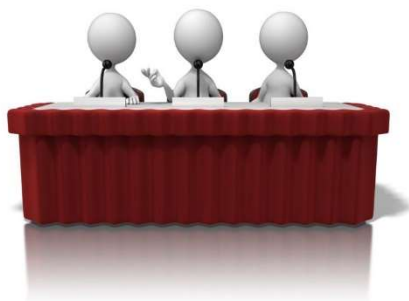
- Is a SinC NorCal member in good standing.
- Has published a book within the last six months or less OR will publish a book within six months of the event.
- Has not participated on a panel (other than our own Author Showcases) in the last year or has cancelled their appearance in a panel during that time period.

To indicate your interest in participating on a scheduled panel, contact Maureen Studer at SpeakersBureauNorCal (at) yahoo.com and include the following information:

- Best email contact information.
- Most recent publication information.

Please respond directly to Maureen and not to the groups.io email. If there are more applicants than spots available, Maureen will randomly draw the names of the participants.

Our thanks to Susan Kuchinskias for her work administering the Speakers Bureau and providing valuable notes to her successor.



Reading Your Work Before an Audience

Part 4: Reading Dialogue

by Maureen Studer



For my money, I say dialogue is the heartbeat of your reading. It holds the emotional and psychological context of the story. This is the place where the characters will argue, reveal their love or fear about jumping off the cliff. The dialogue brings to life the characters, attitudes and ideas, along with their human vulnerabilities and struggles. It's the most identifiable experience for your listener. It's best if you treat dialogue as if a person is really talking. Making dialogue sound like it's a language is not as easy as you think. Here's a bit of a secret: the sound of the dialogue starts with your writing.

Dialogue moves the story forward, reveals details of the story that can only be revealed when the characters are talking to each other. Even an inner monologue can sound like language if done properly. There's a good deal to think about when planning for your reading. Let's start at the beginning.

We have several goals for our public readings, not the least of which is inspiring the audience to purchase our book. While there is no promise of selling books, improving your skills as a public reader can help.

You'll want to catch the audience's attention through identifiable characters.

You'll want characters to sound authentic and have a personality.

You'll want characters to lead into the story, let the audience in on a secret or something curious about your tale.

You'll want to sound spontaneous, the key to engaging an audience. Always remember, while you've heard this material a thousand times, it's the first for your audience. Make it memorable.

When practicing the dialog, keep in mind that it should sound like someone speaking, not reading, the words. The fastest way to handle dialogue is to mimic the character's point of view.

Attitude

The simplest method of reading aloud is to imitate the attitude of the POV character. If the character is angry, be angry; happy, be happy; sad, be sad. If mimicking the attitude of each character is going to be your approach, be authentic about it. Mimicry is a great method of delivering a story

Reading Your Work: Reading Dialogue, continued

exactly as you would like it to sound. The audience doesn't need to know who you are imitating, but you will. You will need to engage your imagination in order to create the right attitude for your characters.

If you can't easily determine how a character would say something, imitate someone else. Imitation is perfectly fine in this situation. Mimesis is the highest form of a compliment, so please do. For example, we've probably all said, or laughed when our friends imitated Robert De Niro's iconic line, "You talkin' to me?" And it got the point across.

The method of practicing reading your writing with different attitudes will help you find just the right sound. If you are anything like me, you hear everything silently in your head while writing. The issue for most people, including me, is that when you start to speak the dialogue aloud, it often doesn't sound the way you heard it in your head. My suggestion: say it aloud one way, then try it again in another way. And again, in a different way, until you find the right emotional and psychological tone. The other reason for rehearsing is to alleviate some of the stress of getting up in front of an audience. As for scoring your script, as in part three of this series (May 2024 issue of *The Stiletta*), when you try different attitudes for the character, then change the scoring to match what you are doing.

You want the audience to hear love, anger, sadness, frustration, or admiration. Sarcasm is quickly understood when something kind is said in ornery way. For example, say aloud, "Isn't that sweet." Or "Isn't that sweet?" The difference between the statement or the question makes the intention of the character clear.

I understand it might feel odd to be sarcastic, irritated, or joyful in front of an audience, but if the character you are reading is feeling and expressing those emotions, it's beneficial for your audience to hear it. I mean really hear it. Not to the point where the audience might feel intimidated, but certainly to the point where they understand the emotional experience of the character.

If there is more than one character in your excerpt, then choose a different style of voice for each character; one pitched higher and one pitched lower is usually enough. Don't go overboard, as it can sound cartoonish. Then stick with your normal reading voice for the narration. More about that in my next article.

If you are not comfortable enough to read more than two characters, don't. It's not necessary. If you're uncomfortable, then the audience will sense it and will wind up uncomfortable too.

Beats

Beats and pauses are powerful tools for reading aloud. A beat is just that, a short, almost

Reading Your Work: Reading Dialogue, continued

immeasurable amount of time. It's a quick stop between one word and the next. Here's an example to sound out. Every dash is a miniature stop--like this--just that half-second between words to give the audience just a split second to understand what's happening.

A beat is best used between sentences, where the period rests in the narrative of the story.

A beat is also used in dialog to accentuate how characters are engaging with each other.

“But--you said – didn’t you - that it was over?”

As opposed to: “But, you said, didn’t you, that it was over?” or even:

“But you said – didn’t you? That it was over?”

When you read each of these lines, you will notice a subtle difference in the questions of the character. Now try it with some of your dialog.

Pauses

Pauses are altogether different and convey another meaning. A pause is longer than a beat. It's a longer space of silence between words. Like this---a longer version---of the same thing---with one exception---it conveys a different meaning.

Pauses create suspense, curiosity, uncertainty, or they can raise questions. Take some time and pick a line or two out of your own work and see what happens. It's really kind of fun to play with beats and pauses. I use this technique to make sure the timing of my dialog matches the emotional life of the character.

Pauses should be used judiciously. Too many and it's an invitation for the audience to stop listening; too few and there will be missed opportunities to capture the suspense or drama of the piece. Decide carefully where, when, and how they should be applied to your reading.

Additionally, you can use the pause to look up at the audience. It accentuates the moment for them. A little raise of the eyebrow, a slight grin, or a knowing glance can help to make the character more human, thus more real for the audience. No longer is the character just words on a page, but she/he's a living, breathing personality.

Maureen Studer has bachelor's and master's degrees in theatre arts, and has had over four decades of teaching, performing, directing, and writing. She has written three romance novels and half a dozen full-length plays, won numerous short play contests, and is currently working on her first true crime play. This article is based on an excerpt from her non-fiction, *Before an Audience: Tips and Tricks to Reading Your Writing in Public*. She is now in search of an agent to help sell the book.

Member Profile: Charlotte Stuart

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

Charlotte Stuart is an award-winning writer of eleven mysteries, with an impressive education and career background. She currently lives on Vashion Island in Washington State's Puget Sound.

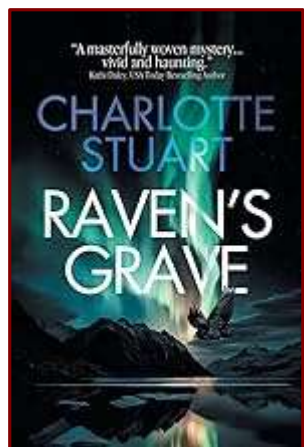
Stiletta: Charlotte, you earned a Ph.D. in Communications. How did you use what you learned in your doctoral studies in your career?

Charlotte Stuart: As a former debater and debate coach, I learned early on how to research and organize ideas and information. My Ph.D. studies were an extension of that. I even enjoyed writing my dissertation on the impact of value systems on legal decisions. But, in contrast to the academic articles I published back then (I'll spare you a list of obscure topics I wrote about), my mysteries involve deep dives into themes such as chimeras, survivalists, Aztec treasure, and unicorns. I like my plots twisty with a dollop of humor and a smattering of quirkiness.



Stiletta: I imagine your stint as a commercial salmon fisher with your husband in Alaska was quite different from your other career endeavors. Please tell us about it.

CS: My husband and I were both interested in writing and felt that fishing in the summer to earn a living would free up our winters to write. In theory, it was a good idea, but we were slowly drawn back into other lines of more lucrative and less physically demanding work. I joined a management consulting group, and he became involved in managing and advocating for nonprofit organizations. Each career shift provided experiences that have become fodder for writing.



One of my books, *Raven's Grave*, was inspired by the Native village we fished out of in Alaska; I fell in love with the Tlingit art and traditions, as well as the locale, and wanted to share some of what I'd observed in a mystery setting.

Stiletta: At what point did you decide to write mysteries and why? Were there authors who particularly inspired you?

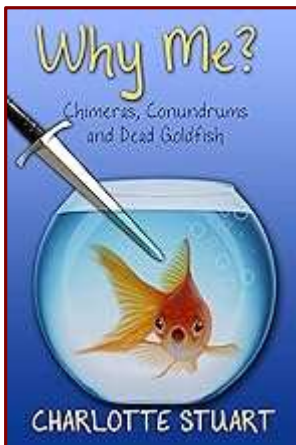
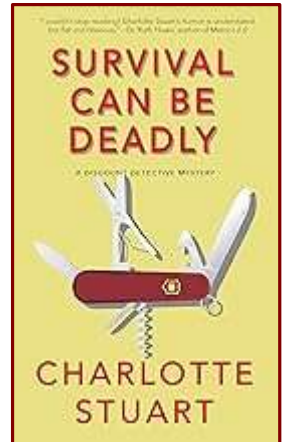
CS: Like so many female authors I know, I was originally inspired by Nancy Drew mysteries. But I also liked Jack London books about wildlife and wilderness settings. Later I became hooked on a wide

Member Profile: Charlotte Stuart

variety of mysteries by authors such as Rex Stout, Dorothy Sayers, Donna Leon, Ian Rankin, and Carl Hiaasen. All have different styles, but with complex plots to keep you guessing. I enjoy trying to solve a good puzzle.

Stiletta: You have written several humorous mystery series set in the Pacific Northwest and featuring quirky protagonists: Discount Detective, Macavity & Me, and John Smith. Please tell us about the idea and protagonist for each.

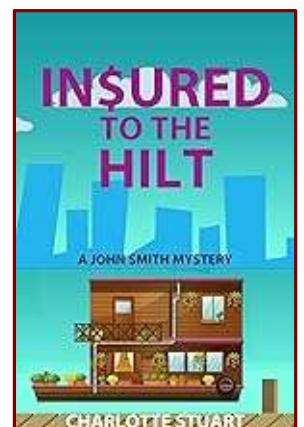
CS: My first published mystery was in the Discount Detective series. I wanted to create a strong female character in a realistic setting. Not a superwoman, just a single mom struggling to get by with a difficult but helpful live-in mother. After finishing her Ph.D. and unable to find a teaching job, my protagonist is hired by a detective agency located in a suburban shopping mall: "Vigilance you can afford."



My second series, Macavity & Me, features another strong woman, but this time she lives on a sailboat with a cantankerous cat and is an amateur sleuth. (Her marina home is remarkably like the one where I was a liveaboard for almost nine years.) Each book title is long (my publisher thought they were too long) with three-part subtitles: the unique topic (chimeras, fogbows and speluncaphobia), the catalyst for murder (secrets, fraud, and conundrums), and some object that plays an important role in the book (dead goldfish, a statue of Aphrodite, and hidden treasure). For example, my first in the series: *Why Me? Chimeras, Conundrums and Dead Goldfish*. And yes, I have the title for the fourth in the series but no plot

outline yet!

I refer to my John Smith mysteries as "Murder with a Laugh Track." They have serious plots, but humor is integral to the storyline. The third in the series will come out next spring.



Stiletta: Why are you particularly drawn to feature humor in your books?

CS: I confess that I didn't give much thought to writing style when I wrote my first mystery. I started with an idea, a title, the main characters, and a very rough outline. I didn't try to "make it funny." But humor seeped out through the situations the characters found themselves in, as well as from the characters themselves. Nevertheless, I think of the Discount Detective and Macavity & Me series as "amusing" rather than written for laughs. Whereas I started the John Smith books with a character I describe as "everyone's inner klutz."

Member Profile: Charlotte Stuart

I've always been a fan of humorous stories and cartoons, so no one who knew me was surprised to find my mysteries sprinkled with humor. But one thing I realized when I wrote my first "serious" mystery was that I had to get in a different frame of mind to see the world through a darker lens. Striving for an upbeat and positive mood to write humor is a much more pleasant space to occupy on a daily basis.

Stiletta: What can we expect to see next from you?

CS: I have two books coming out next spring: the fifth in the Discount Detective Mysteries (*Unicorns Can Be Deadly*) and the third in the John Smith Mysteries (title TBD).

I'm also working on a final draft of a second book set in the late 1970s in a remote native village in Alaska. Like *Raven's Grave*, *Raven's Legacy* attempts to capture the flavor of the cultural shift the village is experiencing, while also describing the Alaska setting as accurately as possible.

Meanwhile, I have two other manuscripts I completed recently. One features a woman who has been teased and bullied all her life because she is unattractive and decides to get back at the people who made her life miserable. (The book recently was selected as a Killer Nashville Claymore Award Top Pick in Suspense. Earlier in the year it was a semifinalist in the Chanticleer Clue competition.) The other is soft-boiled noir in which the protagonist is living as two different people to hide from his past. So far, I haven't found a home for either manuscript, so I may venture into the world of self-publishing.

Stiletta: I see you are also the author of a nonfiction book about "disastrous interviews." Please tell us about it and what inspired it.

CS: I've personally experienced several disastrous interviews during my time in corporate America. One in particular stands out. I had been recruited to apply for a position that was a professional step up, and it was clear that I was about to be offered the job in what was the "final" interview. The recruiter was with me, all smiles at the thought of the commission he was about to earn. Unfortunately, after touring the company outlets and meeting their employees, I wasn't sure I was a good fit. So, when asked by the hiring manager at the end of the interview how I would rate the position on a scale of 1-10, I knew the answer was 10, but my mouth said "7." The interview ended, and the recruiter never contacted me again. Sometimes honesty is overrated.

When sharing that experience with others, I learned that almost everyone has at least one interview that haunts them. And in the retelling, they were usually able to see the humor in what had happened. I spent a year collecting over 150 stories and categorized 134 of them to help people learn hard lessons the easy way—through the missteps of others. Although originally intended for use only in my consulting business, I've made the book available on Amazon for anyone who wants to gain

Member Profile: Charlotte Stuart

perspective on the interview process . . . or to simply feel good about the stories happening to someone else and not to them.

Stiletta: What is your typical writing routine?

CS: I write almost every morning. I say “almost” because sometimes life interferes with my morning routine. Because my husband is also a writer, we frequently talk about plots and story ideas on our afternoon walks. And, yes, we write most weekends. Obsessive? Probably. Enjoying it? Definitely.

Stiletta: What advice would you give to aspiring mystery writers?

CS: Figure out WHY you want to be a writer, and make certain you will enjoy the journey. And that you can be satisfied with whatever level of success you manage to achieve. Writing is what gets me up in the morning. I love delving into the imaginary worlds I create. I love my surrogate pets. But learning how to market my books and getting my name out there has been a slow and painful process. Some writers may achieve instant success, but most of us don’t. So my advice? Be realistic and only write books if you enjoy doing it.

Stiletta: You are a past president of the Puget Sound chapter of Sisters in Crime. How have you benefited from SinC in your writing career?

CS: I wish I had joined SinC earlier than I did. I’ve not only learned a lot through their educational opportunities but have enjoyed meeting and getting to know other authors. I belong to several other writing groups, but SinC is definitely at the top of my list.

Stiletta: What would you like your fellow members to know about you that I haven’t asked?

CS: I would like to introduce the *Women of Mystery*.



Linda Norlander, Roxanne Dunn, and I are making presentations on a variety of writing-related topics under our masked identities as the Women of Mystery.

Charlotte Stuart was interviewed by Margie Bunting, SinC NorCal newsletter editor.

Camille Minichino Tributes



Our dear longtime member, friend, and SinC NorCal past president Camille Minichino passed away in May. Below is the obituary printed in the *East Bay Times*, followed by individual tributes from our members.

On May 6, 2024, Camille Minichino passed away after a brief illness. Born in Revere, Massachusetts, in June 1937, to Joseph and Helen Avallone Minichino, Camille was the first of two daughters; sister Arlene Minichino Polinene predeceased her. Camille often related how her father, a laborer, introduced her first to the joys of mathematics by showing her how to measure, multiply, and divide.

Camille graduated with a B.A. in Mathematics in 1958 before joining the Sisters of Notre Dame, where she remained for 18 years, including teaching at Emmanuel College. Camille attended Fordham University, New York City, where she carried out experimental physics research in spectroscopy and obtained a Ph.D. in Physics in 1968, one of three women in a department of nearly 80 students.

After leaving the order, she moved to California. During her 30-year career at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory she worked in high-temperature, high-pressure physics, provided technical support to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and consulted at commercial reactors throughout the country. As an educator and professor, Camille developed and taught physics, mathematics, philosophy, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary courses at all levels. She served on numerous academic faculties from California to Massachusetts. She also developed and taught writing classes and workshops at community colleges and through various writers' organizations.

Camille is also the author of nearly 30 published mystery novels, plus numerous short stories and articles in both technical and popular magazines and websites. Her first mystery series was The Periodic Table Mysteries. Four other series followed.

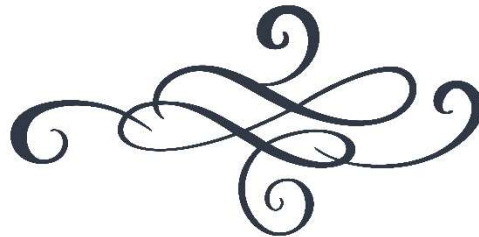
She loved See's Candies, cappuccino, Amici's margherita pizza (hold the sauce!), designing and creating "miniature" scenes and dollhouses, watching movies, reading books, and hosting parties (games and prizes a must!). Camille always stepped up when the call went out for volunteers for the many organizations she belonged to, and was readily available when a friend, family member, or student needed a hand or a listening ear.

Although she lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for 50 years, she still considered herself a "New Yorker." Regular trips to the Big Apple, with its museums and bookstores, helped feed her city-soul.

Camille Minichino Tributes, continued

No overview of Camille's life is complete without acknowledging the deep devotion she shared with her husband of 47 years, Richard (Dick) Rufer. Camille and Dick met at LLNL and married in 1977. Dick was, without question, the great love of her life. Dick predeceased Camille by two months. Although her death certificate states a medical cause of death, all who knew Camille and supported her after Dick's death know that she really died of a broken heart.

Camille is survived by a number of cousins and second cousins, and by legions of friends, colleagues, and students.



Daisy Bateman: I met Camille in the early 2000s, through a grad school classmate. Mary knew I was writing a mystery novel (my first), and she offered to introduce me to her godmother who was a published writer. Camille not only met with me, she took the time to read that first (terrible) book, to offer me praise and encouragement, and even to loan me her copy of the Jeff Herman guide. That mystery was (mercifully) never published, and I don't think I ever managed to return her book, but I never forgot her kindness and generosity to someone just starting out in the field. The last time I saw Camille was at Bouchercon in San Diego, where she was filled with righteous anger at a member of the mystery community who was not being all they should be--a fitting memory of a woman who never lost sight of her principles.

Diana Chambers: I remember Camille's sly wit, the twinkle in her eye. As if when you were with her, she was letting you in on the joke. But her generosity was no joke. Nor her brilliance. She was dogged, and that was an inspiration. Camille Minichino is unforgettable.

Ellen Kirschman: I met Camille Minichino before I ever wrote a mystery. I had just published my first book, *I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know*, and she invited me to talk to the East Bay Chapter of SinC. She told me ILAC was always on her desk as a reference. When I started writing my mystery series, she praised Dot Meyerhoff as "the most interesting heroine to come along in a long time." It's my favorite blurb. My drawers are littered with the tiny gifts she managed to pull out of her enormous tote bag: postcards, sticky tape, and socks. She was one of a kind, thoughtful, compassionate, generous, and eternally curious. RIP

Camille Minichino Tributes, continued

Heather Haven: Nearly twenty years ago, Camille Minichino became my very first friend at a Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference weekend. I was sitting alone having lunch when Camille approached me. As I knew she was on the board, I couldn't believe my good fortune when she asked if she could join me. Then she asked me why I looked so sad and miserable. I told her the story of my then agent who'd had my book for two years and, while there had been some near misses, nothing was happening. Without a moment's hesitation she said, "Dump her. If there's something wrong with the book, it's her job to tell you. Get yourself a new agent." I did and never looked back. I won't go into how she was there for me when I got breast cancer, but I will say Camille made the world a warmer, more giving place. I will never stop missing her. I will always love her.

Margaret Lucke: Camille Minichino was one of my favorite people. A talented writer, a supportive mentor, a role model, and above all, a close friend. For years we were in a writers group together, reading and commenting on each other's work. Her suggestions were invaluable, but more important than the critiques was the camaraderie. One of her many talents was creating miniature rooms, and when my novel *House of Whispers* came out, she gave me a gift—a tiny rug bearing a 3-inch chair, a cozy shawl, a tea caddy, and a stack of my books with their actual cover. It occupies a place of honor on my desk. I miss you, Camille!

Nannette Rundle Carroll: Whether speaking on panels with authors like Michael Connelly or presenting the Edgar Award for Best Novel to Stephen King, Camille delighted in and contributed to the profession. We became friends when we served on the California Writers Club Board together. In our critique group, I was fortunate to both benefit from her mentorship and offer suggestions for her many novels. Some years, she was under contract for three novels, and taught us her organizational tools. My husband and I miss being part of her extended family at the annual holiday gatherings: Thanksgiving, July 4th, New Year's Eve, and The Oscars. Camille is one of my most inspiring, hardest working, creative, and brilliant friends. Her advice to me: "If you have ten minutes, use it to write." I salute you, dear Camille!

Susan Bickford: There were so many sides of Camille, it would be hard to pick one. My favorite section from her newsletter was encrypted quotations. I'm a huge puzzle fan, and those were a mainstay and highlight of the month. She told me that she picked the quote and her husband encrypted the letters.

Susan Shea: When I met Camille for the first time in the late 1990s, it was at a session she was doing for MWA or SinC about the writing craft. I took copious notes (I hadn't even finished my first manuscript), but she had handouts, of course. I decided that day that she was special. My note to myself when I added her email to my address book: "Smart, friendly, and so generous." What I can

Camille Minichino Tribute, continued

add decades later as we became friends is "so patient, so warm, so encouraging, so damn funny!" Camille was a good human being, and I will miss her.

Margie Bunting: Camille was so supportive of me in my role as editor of *The Stiletta*. She would always agree to write an article for the newsletter when I asked her, and her articles were unfailingly clever and well thought out. I loved how beautiful and specific her handcrafted miniatures were, and I was in awe of how many captivating mystery series she had written, incorporating her interests and occupations. I remember one Author Showcase where she didn't feel like reading from her recent work, so she wrote a short story that morning and delivered it to the audience! And recently, she surprised me by sending me a book about Scandinavian Noir after I told her I hadn't read anything in that subgenre. I'm so happy I had the opportunity to sit down with Camille at Bouchercon last year in San Diego and have a lovely extended conversation with her. She never failed to make me feel welcome when I approached her, and I miss her very much.

Ann Parker: Camille was a companion, colleague, mentor, teacher, ally, and more to me and many, many others. By any measure, she was an amazing person. Memories of her are no doubt as varied as the folks she touched in her nearly 86 years on this planet. As for me, I'd like to take this space to relate how we met, which was long before she (or I) embarked on writing fiction. Forty-six years ago, I arrived to work after vacation to find a stranger (aka Camille) sitting at my desk. We exchanged glares, primed to dislike each other. She'd been temporarily assigned to my spot and was not impressed with my wall of nature photos. (The great outdoors was not her forte!) As for my part, well, she was sitting at my desk! We eventually declared a truce. Once I got to know her and the remarkable person she was, I slipped into her orbit — like so many others. Camille was one in a million nonpareil. RIP, my dear friend.



Member News

New and Upcoming Releases

Connie Berry has announced that two NorCal members will have short stories in the Guppies anthology, *Gone Fishin': Crime Takes a Holiday*, to be published by Yay! Publication in February 2025. Vinnie Hansen's story is "Downward Dog," and Mary Adler wrote "The Defenseless Cookbook."

Lisa Towles' 12th book, *Codex*, was released on June 20 by Indies United Publishing House.

G.M. Malliet has a short story appearing in *Midsummer Mysteries Short Stories: From the Crime Writers Association (Beyond and Within)*, edited by Martin Edwards. The anthology will be released on August 20 by Flame Tree Collections.

The paperback edition of *Guilt Strikes at Granger's Store* came out in July from Severn House. The book was a top pick of 2023 from *Library Journal*. In a starred review, *LJ* said, "The Samuel Craddock series may be the best regional crime series around today."

Glenda Carroll's third book in the Trisha Carson series is now an audiobook, available on Audible, iTunes, and Amazon. The narrator is Oona Maya, who is exceptional.

Under the pseudonym HC Chan, Vera Chan's short story "Tone Deaf" is part of the Bouchercon anthology, *Tales of Music, Murder and Mayhem*. All proceeds go to Nashville Library Foundation.

Public Appearances

Vinnie Hansen will be doing a Zoom presentation titled "Get Shorty: How to Pursue a Short Story" for Coastal Cruisers on Saturday, September 21 at 10:30 a.m.

Vinnie Hansen will be in conversation with author Karen Fitz Sanford about Sanford's new book at Copperfield's books in Santa Rosa on Thursday, August 22 at 7:00 p.m.

Diana Chambers' book launch for *The Secret War of Julia Child* will be held at 6:00 p.m. on October 22 at Book Passage in Corte Madera. Diana will be in conversation with Rhys Bowen.

Margaret Lucke will join Ellen Kirchman in representing MWA NorCal on the program of the San Mateo County Libraries' Indie Author Fest on Saturday, September 28 from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Foster City Community Center, 1000 East Hillsdale Blvd., Foster City. Details at <https://smcl.bibliocommons.com/events/6670689b045cd5e3f9268d5d>.

Member News, continued

Margaret Lucke will be speaking to the Palm Springs Writers Guild about “Suspense, Tension, and Pace: How to Keep Readers Turning the Pages” on Friday, October 11 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m..

<https://palmspringswritersguild.org/>

In addition to Vera Chan’s signing of the Bouchercon anthology, (see New and Upcoming Releases above), she will be on the Friday, August 30 panel at Bouchercon, “I Knew You Were Trouble.”

Daisy Bateman (aka Stacie Grey) reports that Rakestraw Books in Danville has chosen *She Left* as the August pick for their Murder Mystery Monday book club, and she will be visiting them in the store at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, August 12 to join the discussion.

Daisy Bateman (aka Stacie Grey) is going to Bouchercon in Nashville and can be found on the Paths of Publication panel at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, August 31 and signing and giving away free books at the Sourcebooks/Poisoned Pen hospitality suite on Thursday, August 29 (time TBD).

At Bouchercon in Nashville, Ellen Kirschman will moderate a panel on Thursday, August 29 at 1:00 p.m. “Better When I’m Dancing – writer’s block, what’s that? Story ideas are everywhere, let’s get inspired!”

Training Delivered

Margaret Lucke will be teaching her Mystery Writing class for UC Berkeley Extension this fall: 10 Wednesday evenings from September 11 to November 13. It’s on Zoom so you can join from anywhere. If you’d like inspiration and information on crafting crime fiction, from cozies to thrillers, or feedback on your work in progress, this class could be for you. Check it out here:

<https://tinyurl.com/mysterywriting2024>

Ellen Kirschman will be part of the faculty of Killer Nashville, August 22-25. Her presentation will be on Thursday, August 22 from 9:00 to 9:45 a.m.

Awards and Recognition: Congratulations!

Justice is Served: A Tale of Scallops, The Law, and Cooking for RBG, a memoir by Leslie Karst, is a silver medalist for the IPBA (Independent Book Publishers Association) Benjamin Franklin Award and the IPPY (Independent Publisher) Book Award.

Member News, continued

Murder by Degrees by Ritu Mukerji has been nominated by members of Mystery Readers International for the Macavity Award in the Best First Mystery category.

The National Bouchercon Board has selected the Crime Writers of Color and its founders--Gigi Pandian, Kellye Garrett, and Walter Mosley—to receive the annually-presented David Thompson Special Service Award, recognizing extraordinary efforts to develop and promote the mystery and crime fiction field. The awards presentation will be part of the Opening Ceremony at Bouchercon in Nashville.

Hotshot Shamus by Heather Haven, book #4 of the Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries, won a 2023 Incipere Second Place Award in the Mystery-Clean category.

Miscellaneous

The past year-plus has been a detour for Carol Verburg into writing and curating *The Theatrical Adventures of Edward Gorey: Rare Drawings, Scripts, and Stories*. This elegant collection of the famous artist's work for the stage, from *Dracula* to Christmas plays, will be published October 15 by Chronicle Books. Edward and Carol were neighbors, friends, comrades-in-arts and fellow Agatha Christie fans. They collaborated on theater projects for a decade after Edward left Manhattan and Carol left Boston for the quaint New England village of Yarmouth Port. One of the last plots they hatched over lunch became Vinnie's Edgar Rowdey Cape Cod mystery *Croaked*, which spun off a neo-Golden Age series of novels and stories. Now she is partnering with the Edward Gorey Charitable Trust to release a long-awaited volume of his theatrical images and texts.



Question of the Quarter



What advice would you give to a first-time panelist at a convention, library, AAUW, etc.?

My advice would be to learn your subject, know what you're talking about, and then be yourself. Being yourself is the most important ingredient in this. *Heather Haven*

Think of some interesting or humorous stories in advance that you can share (if appropriate to a question) that might revolve around your research or even your writing process. Audiences love to hear real-time stories about the research we do for our books. *Cindy Sample*

Even if you don't have time to read the other panelists' books, at least check out their websites so you get to know them and their work a bit. If you're given any questions in advance, jot down a few notes and bring them with you to the panel – you never know when your mind might go blank! And lastly, think of the panel as a conversation with friends and have fun! *Leslie Karst*

Have fun and know something about your fellow panelists and the moderator. You don't have to read their books. Often you'll learn enough from their websites. Bring a book to show, bookmarks to distribute, and a signup for your newsletter if you have one. Know your audience. Are they readers? Writers? Young people or old? Be able to summarize your work or your style briefly with a few pithy comments, usually about your main character. Do not drone on about your plot. Be careful not to sound like a salesperson. People are interested in you and how you approach your craft. *Ellen Kirschman*

First, remember that it's a panel, not a one-person show. Every panelist, including the moderator, has an interest in the subject, book, research, and wants to impart this to the audience.

Second, stick to the topic. If the topic is "cats in a mystery," don't spend precious minutes talking about your cockatiel or recommending a book on horse training. This is a temptation that happens when a panelist feels they don't have any background in the topic but still wants to share. Better to just use a "that's not my area of expertise" statement.

Third, don't talk over another panelist or the moderator. No one likes being interrupted.

Fourth, try to set up a conversation between and among the panelists. It can be a dull panel if the moderator asks a question that goes down the line of panelists, eliciting an answer from each person, then starts again with another question.

Fifth, listen to the other panelists' responses or expertise.

Sixth, try to read something from each panelist. You don't have to read ALL their books, and perhaps not even finish one, but a quick trip to Amazon's book page, checking out the blurb will give you an idea if your fellow panelists write thrillers, humor, police procedurals, and their background. This will give you some fodder to start a conversation rather than just answer a question. *Michele Drier*

Question of the Quarter, continued

Be well prepared to speak to the topic of the panel. Have info and anecdotes at hand, and if the moderator provides pre-panel questions/ideas, give them serious thought. Familiarize yourself with the other panelists' work. Share the stage graciously and relax about trying to promote and sell your book. That's not the purpose of a panel. *Vinnie Hansen*

Review your knowledge about the topic before the panel. Try answering the questions aloud before you have an audience, even if it's to a friend. Be succinct as often as possible; everybody has a lot to say. Be confident: you know your stuff and your knowledge is valuable. Finally, have fun! The audience is always in favor of having a good time! *Maureen Studer*

I have sat on many panels at various conferences over the years, and the advice I can give is: Don't sit on a panel just to be on a panel! Choose ones of which you have some knowledge of the topic—you don't have to be an "expert"—and do some research to increase your knowledge of the topic. When speaking or answering questions, keep your answers succinct and to the point. Remember, time is limited, so don't ramble on! *John Schembra*

Our fellow panelists are partners handed to us by FATE (aka the event organizers). This is a great opportunity to discover unexpected allies and friends. I like to get acquainted with my panel colleagues virtually beforehand, through their websites and writing, and meet up in person before we go on. I look for common ground—themes, locations, pet peeves—that can spark a good discussion onstage. *Carol Verburg*

Read the books of all of the other panelists and moderator. This is the polite thing to do and creates goodwill among your colleagues. Also, it will give you something to say if you draw a blank. And, at a convention, hang out at the bar. 😊 *Diana Chambers*

Wear bright lipstick. Most people lip-read whether they realize it or not, and it really helps the audience "hear" you. What men are supposed to do, I can't tell you. *G.M. Malliet*

You wouldn't have been asked or have volunteered to be on the panel if you knew nothing about the subject, so . . . relax. Find out who the moderator is and ask that person for questions they might ask the panelists. Find out who the other panelists are, and check out their background and books. Have a telling personal detail related to the panel's subject. People love personal stories. For example, when I started my radio job, my predecessor said, "When you've run through all of your interview questions, ask—is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to say?" I found that's when the really good stuff came pouring out. Lastly, it's always more interesting and fun for both panel and audience if there's interaction among the panelists. *Michal Strutin*

Remember that most panels are fun, friendly conversations—and the people in the audience are there because they want to hear what you have to say. If possible, connect with your moderator and fellow panelists ahead of time to get to know each other a little and discuss what you might cover

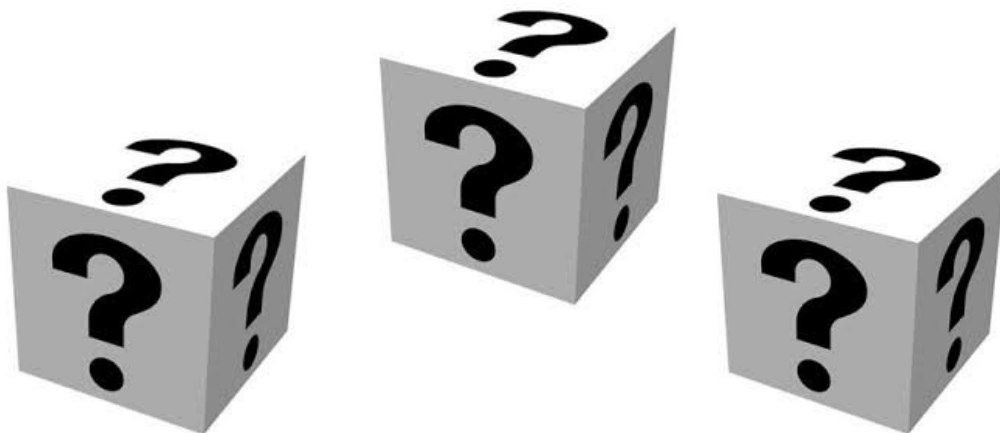
Question of the Quarter, continued

during the panel. If you've not met them previously, check out their websites and social media to get an idea of who they are and what they write. Before the panel, jot down three or four thoughts you wish to include so they'll be fresh in your mind when the time comes. Be polite. Speak up when it's your time to speak, but don't be a mic hog. Smile. And remember that your fellow panelists are nervous, too, and your audience understands that. *Margaret Lucke*

Read the books of your fellow panelists. Engage them when you answer questions. Know who is on your panel. *Susan Bickford*

My advice would be to read at least one book from each panelist. If you don't have the time, at least read a chapter or two. It helps you to be an engaged panelist. You can pick up on things your fellow panelists say and engage in conversation, which always makes for a more interesting panel. *Terry Shames*

When all is done, be sure to show your appreciation to the organizers (including your panel moderator). A simple written "thank you" note (email, snail mail, etc.) can go a long way in building goodwill. Plus, as my mother would point out, it's just plain good manners. 😊 *Ann Parker*



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 **Dänna Wilberg**, Events (dannawilberg (at) gmail.com), with meeting and venue suggestions and **Margie Bunting**, Newsletter (mbunting (at) sbcglobal.net), with newsletter article suggestions and submissions.

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