

# THE STILETTA NEWSLETTER

Sisters in Crime  Northern California Chapter

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## On to Different Pastures

This is my last President's Message for the NorCal Chapter of Sisters in Crime.

It's been three years since I was first elected, and together we've managed to survive the end of Covid, the switch to hybrid meetings (thank you, Susan Bickford, our tech wizard), several in-person showcases, linking with the Southern California SinC chapters for the Sizzling Summer Series, and the production and launch of an anthology, *Invasive Species*.

I'm not going far, though. I'm going to be co-chairing Left Coast Crime 2026 in San Francisco with Ana Manwaring.

Having reached the same age as Garrison Keillor, I'm husbanding my energy a bit because I'll continue to write. I am, in fact, about 10,000 words into the twelfth in the Kandesky Vampire Chronicles series.

But the Bay Area is in my blood. I was born in Santa Cruz and lived in Redwood City, San Francisco, Walnut Creek, Mountain View, and Santa Clara during periods of my life. My great-great-grandfather, John Campbell White, was the first in my family to make it to the West Coast, arriving in San Francisco in September 1849.



## CONTENTS

Page 1:	President's Letter
Page 3:	Upcoming Events
Page 4:	In Case You Missed It
Page 5:	Musings on Author Photos
Page 7:	Notes From a Grumpy Critic
Page 9 :	My First Year of Self- Publishing
Page 11:	Images of Bouchercon
Page 13:	Getting Over a Writer's Slump
Page 15	Percy Cole
Page 16:	New Members
Page 17:	Profile: George Cramer
Page 20:	Member News
Page 22:	Question of the Quarter

## President's Letter, continued

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My grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side went through the 1906 earthquake, evacuated initially to Golden Gate Park, then to friends in San Jose. They didn't marry, however, until 1912 at Trinity Church in San Francisco.

My mother, who lived in Oakland during her childhood, graduated from San Ramon High School in 1936. My father was born in Oakland and raised in Marin County.

Another great-great-grandfather, Samuel Edward Oakley, arrived in San Francisco in 1850.

My family has a few Cal grads, a stagecoach line operator, a ferryboat captain, and several San Francisco merchants.

I don't have a true "hometown," but the Bay is where my heart is, which is the reason I joined NorCal even though I'd earlier served as president of the Sacramento chapter, Capitol Crimes.

Although I'm stepping down as president, I'll continue to be involved with NorCal, possibly taking on the coordination of critique groups and manuscript swaps for our members.

No matter where I am, my magnetic north is always pointed to the Bay!

**Sincerely,**

**Michele Drier**

**President, Sisters in Crime NorCal**



**It's time to vote for our Board members for 2025. Watch your email for a ballot, and please submit your vote by the stated deadline.  
Thank you!**

# Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming SinC NorCal Events

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**Saturday, November 2, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.**

## ***Fall Author Showcase***

*Orinda Books, 276 Village Square, Orinda, CA, and on Zoom*

Our twice-annual Author Showcases are a wonderful opportunity to hear fellow members read excerpts from their most recent works—books or short stories—and you will come away with more on your TBR list. You may even win a book! Authors presenting at this showcase include:

Vinnie Hansen

Victoria Kazarian

Ellen Kirschman

Claudia H. Long

Daisy Bateman/Stacie Grey

Diana R. Chambers

Vera Chan

Michele Drier

Ana Manwaring

Faye Snowden

Robin Somers

**Sunday, December 15, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m..**

## ***Winter Open House with MWA NorCal***

*Alameda Library, 1550 Oak Street, Alameda, CA*

Our December meeting will be an Open House where NorCal chapters of SinC and MWA can mingle with potential new members who would like to know what our chapters are all about. Come with your stories of what membership has meant to you, and please invite anyone who has been thinking about becoming part of the local mystery community. Refreshments will be part of the festivities.

Ample free parking (Sundays) is available a block away in a multi-level garage. There is also a small lot next to the library with accessible spaces.

**As always, there will be no January event.**

**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 . . .

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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.

### August Meeting - *Rhys Bowen*

In conversation with Terry Shames, Rhys told us about her early career with the BBC and how it led her to become a writer of plays, children's books, then YA, before she decided to write what she loved to read—mysteries. Identifying as a pantsier, Rhys prefers to create her characters and let them take over the action. She currently writes "2.5" books per year, including a historical standalone mystery and books in her Lady Georgie and Molly Murphy series (now collaborating on the latter with her daughter, Clare Broyles).



### September Meeting - *Writing True Crime with McCracken Poston Jr.*



Defense attorney and former Georgia State legislator McCracken Poston Jr. gave us a fascinating presentation about his 2024 book, *Zenith Man: Death, Love and Redemption in a Georgia Courtroom*. When, 25 years ago, a TV repairman who was well known in his town (and feared by some for his frequently odd behavior) was arrested for allegedly killing his wife after keeping her confined in their basement for 30 years, Poston took the case. He writes about it in great detail, having kept all of the transcripts, interviews, and research, and the book is just as much about the dogged attorney as it is about the accused.

### October Meeting - *Adding Paranormal Elements To Your Writing*

Our own Dänna Wilberg, who writes a paranormal series, moderated a panel for authors that may want to delve into the paranormal field. Panel members included Linda Schooler, Erin Burell, and Linda Potter, with insights into psychic readings (humans and animals), Tarot card readings, past-life regression, hypnotherapy, and meditation. They encouraged authors to develop and trust their intuition by working with their dreams and writing down unusual thoughts throughout the day.



# Who Am I?

## Musings on Author Photos

by Terry Shames

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**"Your headshot is a non-verbal introduction to who you are."  
In other words, "A picture is worth a thousand words."**



Yep, it's that time again . . . time to pose for a new author photo. Mine ( at left) is now almost a dozen years old. Not that I don't love the one I had taken when I started out as a published writer — I do! I think it's pretty. But twelve years down the road, I've changed and the photo hasn't. Let's don't mention the wrinkles. Those can be softened. But my hair is longer. And I don't have that same sunny outlook I had when I first started out. Jaded? Moi? Maybe a little. But a crime writer should be a little jaded, right?

So what do I want? I want a certain *je ne sais quoi* (that means "I don't know what"). Here are some random thoughts:

In my photo I want to look straight into the camera with a gleeful smile that conveys wit and congeniality — like Catriona McPherson. I want to convey urbane savoir faire — like James Ziskin. I want to convey serious crime writer chops — like David Corbett . . . and yet, a sense of fun — like Ellen Byron.

When I had my first author photo taken, it was serious business. I hired Margaretta Mitchell, who takes great photos. She nailed it. She even gave me a tip for having snapshots taken that I still adhere to. (email me, and I'll tell you the tip). I told her what I wanted. No "tilted head" photos. Not too dressed up. A sense of fun. What did I choose eventually? A tilted photo in which I'm dressed up and which conveys no fun at all.

A few years later, author/editor Elaine Ash took a quick snapshot of me at a local bookstore (right). It was playful and looked just like me! I liked it so much, I started using it when I needed a photo for event promotion. The problem was that it didn't have the "thingies" you need for a professional photo. Thingies? Yeah. You know: Please send your photo and make sure it has 300 or more DPI, which I think means dots per inch, but I don't know what that means, either. So, thingies. How you comply





## Who Am I? . . ., continued

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with that is a complete mystery to me. So I ignore it. I send a photo. If they write back and say, “this doesn’t work,” I send them my old, standard author photo because I know it has the right number of thingies.



In the past few months, I’ve started using a snapshot someone took of me at the last Left Coast Crime (left). It conveys exactly who I want to be. At least some of the time. But again, it isn’t up to par for an author headshot.

Considering a new, professional photo, it isn’t only the question of what the photo should look like, but who I should hire to do it. I know, I know, research. Find a photo you like and ask who took it . . . then hire them. Now we’re back to the beginning. First, I have to decide what I want to convey, then I have to find a photo of another author who conveys all of that . . . then find out who took the photo. AND where is the photographer? I’m not flying to Minneapolis to have my author photo taken. Nothing against Minneapolis, mind you.

I live in LA now, so I’m sure there are plenty of great photographers who would be delighted to charge me the hundreds of dollars they usually get for wannabe starlets. That ain’t me, babe. And that’s the problem. I’m back to “what do I want?”

Or I could just forget it and go with the old one and put up with the surprised look on people’s faces when the actual me, thirteen years on, strolls into a book event.

Terry Shames writes the small-town police procedural Samuel Craddock series. The eleventh in the series, *The Troubling Death of Maddy Benson*, was released on October 2. The first in her Jessie Madison thriller series, *Perilous Waters*, was published in April 2024. *Booklist* calls it, “The perfect escapist caper . . .” Terry lives in Los Angeles, but her heart is still in Northern California. She is a member of Mystery Writers of America and Sisters in Crime. For more, see <https://linktr.ee/terryshames>.

# Killer Nashville and Bouchercon: Notes from a Grumpy Critic by Ellen Kirschman

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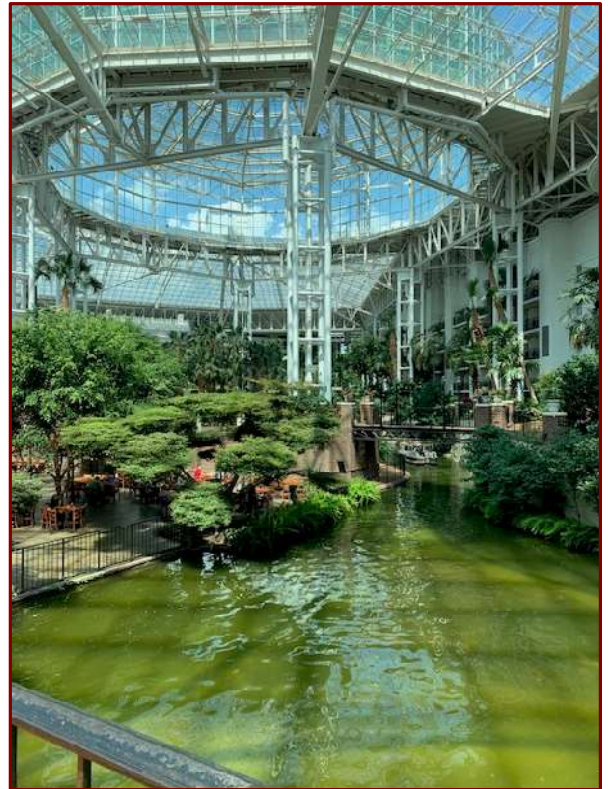


I've always said that being a critic is the easiest job in the world. Just sit back and point out what's wrong. Unfortunately, I'm in the middle of marketing madness for the November release of my fifth Dot Meyerhoff mystery, *Call Me Carmela* – up now for pre-order. (See, I'm learning.) I'm tired. The only jobs I can handle right now are the easy ones. I hope you understand.

There is lots to love about both Killer Nashville and Bouchercon 2024. I'll let my fellow attendees write about the positive with a bit more depth. Instead, I want to talk about inclusivity. Writers' organizations are working diligently to be inclusive of every demographic. Have they forgotten people with disabilities and the elderly?

**Killer Nashville:** In many ways, my first Killer Nashville exceeded my expectations. There was lots to like about it: good book room management, plenty of time to schmooze with other authors, mercifully upbeat interviews with celebrity writers, and lots of panels on marketing, mostly taught by clever, younger people talking techno-speak. My Spanish is tourist-level, my French is passable, but my techno-speak is almost nonexistent. I grew up with dial phones, party lines, black and white TVs with test patterns etc. I had no idea what many of the panelists were talking about, and neither would my street team. (I'm not a total luddite, I have a street team, most of them my age.) Next year – I do plan to return – I hope they listen to my feedback and have marketing panels for dummies of all ages.

**Bouchercon:** It's hard to call the world's largest writer/fan mystery conference a comedy of errors, but, in many ways, it was. Hard-working volunteers assembled a stream of generous and witty celebrity writers, zillions of excellent panels, lots of free food and



## Notes from a Grumpy Critic, continued

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many bonus events, like a dance party or the free book event to support libraries and the freedom to read (thank you, Kelli Stanley).

There was a snafu in book ordering. The first vendor quit, and most authors' books never arrived on site. This was a major disappointment for writers and for the fans who love to have their books autographed. (Bouchercon fans are serious note takers and collectors.) I can live with this. Stuff happens. My biggest gripe was the hotel.

The Gaylord Opryland Hotel is located under a nine-acre glass atrium maintained at 72 degrees and filled with gorgeous living plants and a small river. It was like a giant terrarium or an insane asylum for the rich. We were almost totally disconnected from the outer/real world. I needed a map to navigate the ten-minute walk from my room to the convention center. The first day I was there. I passed a fellow attendee leaning against a wall, trying to catch her breath. There were stairs everywhere. Folks who counted their steps clocked in at 16,000 to 18,000 steps a day.

Like every writer/fan conference I've attended, people with disabilities represented a significant portion of attendees. It was hard to watch those in electric scooters juggle themselves into two small Convention Center elevators, inadvertently creating a traffic jam. Same for the non-disabled elders, myself included, who needed to walk great distances carrying bags full of books.

Enough griping, back to marketing.

Ellen Kirschman is an award-winning police psychologist, the author of three nonfiction books and the Dot Meyerhoff mystery series. Dot is a spunky psychologist who should be counseling cops, not solving crimes. Fifth in the series, *Call Me Carmela*, launches November 26 and is up now for pre-order.



# Reflections on My First Year of Self-Publishing

## by Nannette Potter

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My debut thriller, *Pierce the Darkness*, just celebrated its first birthday!

When deciding between indie and traditional publishing, I weighed the pros and cons. On the one hand, I could spend time searching for an agent and waiting for a publisher. On the other, I could maintain full control and release my book within months. I chose Indie publishing – and I’ve never looked back.

After a year under my belt, I’ve analyzed what worked and what didn’t. I asked myself: What strategies could I incorporate to be financially successful? How could I improve my relationship with readers? What could I have done differently?

If I could turn back time . . .

### Start Marketing Before Launching a First Book

Experts recommend starting your marketing well before a launch. But I wondered, “How can an unknown author market a book that’s not published yet?” That mindset was my first mistake. I should have designed my website, created book trailers, designed engaging graphics, launched a newsletter, and established a social media presence. I started these marketing efforts too late! While my book launch was fantastic, mostly thanks to friends and family, it took me months to build an email list and, by extension, engage a wider readership.

### Hire Professionals

As authors, we’re creative multi-talented entrepreneurs. But sometimes it isn’t worth the time or frustration to tackle aspects of our business that are best left to professionals. I spent part of my publishing budget on a developmental editor and cover designer (who also created a trailer and social media graphics). While I initially built my own website, it was mediocre at best. I eventually hired a web designer, and wish I’d done it sooner.

### Communicate Clearly with Professionals

As an Indie author, you’ll hire professionals for various tasks—editing, cover design, photography, etc. Remember, you’re the client, and it’s okay to be assertive. If things aren’t going as you envisioned, speak up! I learned this the hard way. My first photographer missed the mark, and I

# Reflections on My First Year of Self-Publishing, continued

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didn't communicate my dissatisfaction during the shoot or afterwards. Fortunately, I found another photographer who delivered exactly what I wanted. But this lesson cost me a few hundred dollars.

## Be Mindful of Release Dates

Publishing my first book was one of the most exciting moments of my life, but I'm a slow writer. Looking back, I wish I had postponed the release so I could have published my second book closer to the first. A long gap between releases can stall momentum.

## Indie Publishing is a Financial Investment

Publishing a quality book isn't cheap. Between a developmental editor, cover designer, and web designer, costs added up quickly. Could I have spent less? Sure. But I considered these expenses an investment—in my book and myself.

## Limit the Noise

There are countless experts and courses, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed. I recommend choosing one or two trusted experts and starting there. For me, *Sisters in Crime*, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), and certain podcasts were invaluable.

## Advertise Wisely

As a debut author, I didn't have an email list, a social media following, or any other means of sharing my work with readers. I took classes on Amazon ads, but the results were disappointing. I also ran Facebook ads without fully understanding how to gauge their effectiveness. Now, after taking a course on click-testing, I'm ready to improve my ad strategy. My advice? Do your homework before spending hundreds of dollars without a return on the investment.

## What Would I Do Differently?

- Start marketing about six months before a book launch.
- Be more assertive with professionals, insisting on calls or FaceTime when necessary.
- Delay the release of my first book by six months to give me time to finish the second in the series.



## Reflections on My First Year of Self-Publishing, continued

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- Click-test Facebook ads before wasting money on ineffective ads.
- Hire a web designer from the start instead of struggling to create the website myself.

Despite the challenges, I'm happy with my choice to indie publish. Being part of Sisters in Crime has been a tremendous support, helping me navigate the lows and celebrate the highs. I'm truly living the dream.

An adventuress at heart, Nannette Potter lives vicariously through her fearless and impetuous characters, inventing lives balanced on a knife's edge. *Pierce the Darkness*, her debut international thriller, inspired by her Christian faith, was a 2024 Killer Nashville's Silver Falchion Top Pick.



### Images of Bouchercon 2024





## Images of Boucheron 2024, continued

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# Getting Over a Writer's Slump

## by Alec Peche

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After 24 books and 11 years of writing, I lost my writing mojo towards the end of 2023, and that carried on to August of this year. Part of the reason for my slump was a lot of life changes. I don't find writing relaxing, rather it's hard brain work. My way to deal with the stress was non-thinking activities such as landscaping, home improvement, cooking. I even thought about ending my writing career--being satisfied with my 24 published books. However, a few years ago, I wrote a strategic plan for my author business that included the goal of 200 books by the time I passed away. The math behind that number

was I had to write four books a year, every year. I was disappointed in myself for both not writing and not making progress on that strategic goal.

I continued to feel guilty about not writing. I'd sit down at my desk and eke out 300 words. I continued to hope that my idea lightbulb for the mostly silent characters in my head would start talking. I'm a pantser, so I need my characters to be talking in my head (yeah, you're probably thinking that is my real problem). Hope was a source of self-sabotage—I kept showing up at my keyboard, but I had nothing to say. So how did I fix this sorry situation?

I went back to what I knew. My struggle in writing words was in part because I had switched genres. Right now, my favorite genre to read is urban fantasy—I like a little magic with my mystery. My favorite authors weren't producing books fast enough so I thought I would increase the supply by writing a story with all the things that I like about their books. Dragon shifters? Check. Handsome elven warriors? Check. Mid-life intelligent female protagonist? Check, and so on. I discovered somewhere along the way that just because I like to read a genre, it doesn't mean that I can write it, or at least write it with ease.

So, I put aside my second book in an urban fantasy series and decided to return to basics. I thought of an idea for the 15th book in one mystery series and an idea for the 6th book in the other mystery series. I then ordered my book covers, as seeing a book cover makes a book feel real. I started writing the first book. When I reached 2,000 words and I could see where the story was going, I put the book up for pre-order on Amazon and notified my readers through my newsletter. I need the pressure of a deadline to get me working every day. I've never failed to meet a deadline so, with my

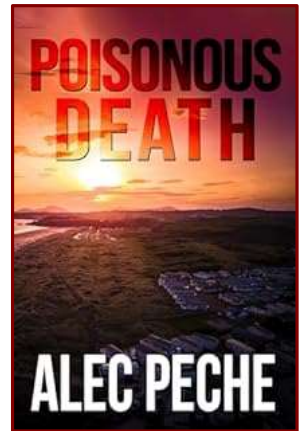
## Getting Over a Writer's Slump, continued

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readers and Amazon holding me accountable, I picked up speed in my writing. I celebrated a 600-word day, then a 900-word day, and now a 2500-word day. I can find my writer muscles firming and my imagination wheels turning. I do have frequent days where I slip and don't write the required words. Amazon allows you one 30-day postponement, and I took it with this book. Sometimes you must give yourself grace as a writer.

Those of you who are outliners are probably horrified by this description of my process—how can I start a book when I don't know where the story is going? Feeling blocked can also be a message from the writer's unconscious that there's a plot or character issue that needs to be worked out. As a severe pantsier, I start with a dead body (Jill Quint, MD series) or a cold case (Damian Green series) and I start writing. Another author calls that writing into the dark.

I'm showing up and sprinting more, as that helps with accountability. My sprint friends know I'm capable of writing more than 500 words in 25 minutes. If I don't get there, it's because I've distracted myself with doom scrolling. So with a little help from my writer friends, I'll meet my deadline to publish *Poisonous Death*.



Alec Peche is the Green Bay, WI author of 24 books (though they were all written in NorCal). There are 14 books in the Jill Quint series. She's a vintner in the Central Valley of California. She's also a PI and forensic pathologist who offers second opinions on the cause of death. She's solved murder cases all over the world. There are five books in the Damian Green series set on Red Rock Island beneath the San Rafael bridge. He teams up with a retired SJPd cop to solve cold cases. There are three books in the Michelle Watson series. A former cop that nearly dies, she comes back to life with an ability to teleport. She joins the CIA to save the world. There's one book so far in her urban fantasy series featuring Stephanie Jones, a physician who works at a Sacramento trauma center but discovers she has magical skills, thanks to an elven warrior and a grimoire. *Poisonous Death*, book 15 in the Jill Quint series, will be released November 29, 2024. *Emerald Bay Murder*, book 6 of Damian Green, will be released in winter 2025. *Witch's Quest*, book 2 of the Stephanie Jones series, will be released in mid-2025. Alec is the Treasurer of SinC Coastal Cruisers and hangs on to her California writer friends from Wisconsin.

## Percy Cole by Heather Haven

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Bear with me if I've said this before, but The Persephone Cole Vintage Mysteries were born out of a challenge by my then editor to write a protagonist who looked and acted more like a real person, not a model. Could I do it? Did I even want to? Did I want a heroine who wasn't typical of many a detective story? After I thought about it, the answer was yes! I wanted to write about a smart woman who wasn't *Mad Men* classically feminine. And of course, I wanted it all. She should like herself and be comfortable in her own skin.



So along came Persephone (Percy) Cole. Percy is 35 years old, considered middle-aged by '40s standards. She's also a single mother, overweight, and at 5'11" is extremely tall. When she tells people what she does, it usually raises a few eyebrows. Not too many women have her job. In fact, she's the only one that she knows of. Percy once heard of a woman detective in Wyoming, but it wound up the lady in question was the sheriff's wife. She did more laundry than detecting. If she was lucky, he let her file. Nothing our Percy would put up with.

That's what makes Percy Cole a winner! As Winston Churchill said, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." And Percy has attitude up the wazoo. She exudes self-confidence. She's smart and savvy. She's a no s--t lady. I just love her. And she's taken to the gumshoe life completely, down to wearing her father's fedora and customized men's suits.

As for me, her creator, they say you don't know what you're writing until you've written it. Well, little did I know that by making Percy as large if not larger than many men of that era, she was able to compete in a man's world in every way, including physical intimidation, a very pseudo '40s-PI-Noir thing. Percy doesn't use physical threats all the time, but she's not above it. Her grabbing some lowlife by the scruff of the neck and hauling him off to jail is just plain fun to write about. And readers seem to like her fearlessness, her sense of self, of not compromising, which is all done with humor, style, and a touch of whimsy.

## Percy Cole, continued

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Yes, Percy's tough to the core, but I do try to show a bit of softness through her dealings with her mother, father, kid sister, and in particular, in the raising of her eight-year-old son, Oliver, the child that gives her life meaning. Frankly, it is a rare woman who does not deal with family and family matters, no matter how tough they are. Even Wonder Woman. Of course, Wonder Woman is a real hottie. But Percy has her moments; she has her moments. There are men who fall for this redheaded broad with her wicked sense of humor, who knows how to make her way in the world. All very enticing. All very Percy Cole.

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/>



**to our newest members**  
**(joining SinC NorCal from July 1, 2024 through September 30, 2024)**

Donna Darling  
Stacey Gordon



# Member Profile: George Cramer

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



After forty years in Dublin (CA), George Cramer and his wife moved to Sun City-Roseville. He draws on his rich personal and career experience in his writing. George hosts a literary blog that is popular with fellow writers and encourages all interested writers to contact him and post about their work, whether it has been released or not.

*Stiletta:* George, please tell us about your 40-year career in investigative law enforcement, including some highlights as a police officer, corporate investigator, and private investigator.

*George Cramer:* I left the U.S. Navy early to become a San Leandro, California, police officer. I don't recall the exact quote, but I never went to work; I loved every minute. I retired due to injuries on the job after sixteen years.

I spent a number of years working in Vice and Narcotics, both as an officer and sergeant.

*Stiletta:* What inspired you to volunteer as a missing persons volunteer for the San Leandro Police Department, and what was your most memorable case?

*GC:* A lieutenant I have known for over fifty years asked me if I was interested in volunteering at the police department. I started by shuffling cars for service. Then, another command officer asked me if I would be willing to do background checks for the volunteers. I did that for a while before taking on property crimes and missing persons.

My most memorable case was my saddest. A young woman was divorced from a man who was a domestic violence person. One evening, she went to a party in another city/county. The ex was there. They left together, and she was not seen again. About ten years later, her skull was found in a third county.

I know she was murdered, but her case remains classified as a missing person.

*Stiletta:* When did you start writing for publication, and how did your career influence the content you write about?

*GC:* A dozen years ago, I had the most incredible job since leaving the police force. I worked for an

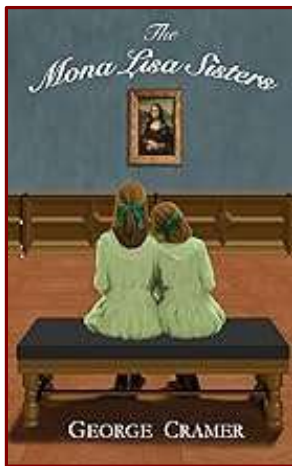
## Member Profile: George Cramer, continued

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international company managing investigations. My two investigators were the finest I had ever had the opportunity to work with. A much larger company bought our company, and we were laid off. I was sixty-eight and not ready to quit work. I learned all about age discrimination.

I was a Parks and Recreation Commissioner and heard about a writing class offered at the Senior Center. I signed up for the class in hopes of improving my resume. I was surprised to find it was a fiction writing class. I fell in love with writing and quit my job search.

Because of my police and investigative background, I began a police procedural with a protagonist who could have passed for George Cramer. After 30,000 words, I was bored to death.



.One day, the writing instructor passed out pictures. My picture was of two young girls looking up at the Mona Lisa. The assignment was to describe the setting. We had fifteen minutes to complete the task. I had an epiphany and ignored the assignment. I knew I would write *The Mona Lisa Sisters* in those fifteen minutes and had a rough outline completed. I spent the next eight years working on the novel. I enrolled in English classes at the local community college. I learned about a wonderful poet and visual artist, Joy Harjo. She would be speaking at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. I called the IAIA and was accepted into the Low-Res MFA program in time to hear Ms. Harjo. A fellow student introduced us and arranged a cafeteria meal together. I was in hog heaven.

*The Mona Lisa Sisters* became my master's project.

**Stiletta:** What are the different genres in which you have written?

GC: *The Mona Lisa Sisters* was women's lit and told from a woman's point of view. This was followed by *Robbers and Cops*, a dark historical police procedural. My third book, *New Liberty*, is book one in the Hector Miguel Navarro police series. *Unfinished Business*, book two in the series, should be released in early 2025.

**Stiletta:** Are you a plotter or a pantsier?

GC: I try to plot but fail every time. I'm doomed to live life as a pantsier. A good friend has me creating a spreadsheet with fifty chapters. I try to write a line or two, which helps keep me organized. It is easy to change numbers and change chapter order.

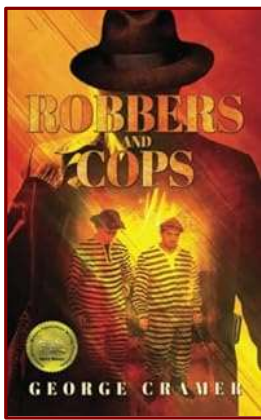
## Member Profile: George Cramer, continued

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**Stiletta:** Why did you choose to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA)? How does it relate to your background?

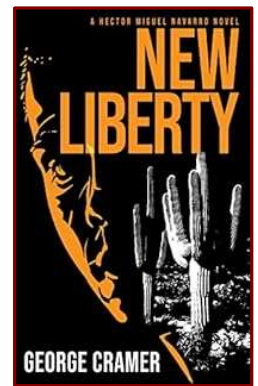
**GC:** I had not heard of IAIA until a community college instructor introduced the work of Joy Harjo. I am a descendant of the Karuk Tribe of California, so IAIA appealed to me. I had just been accepted into the MFA program at one of the California State Universities. I blew that off and headed for Santa Fe.

**Stiletta:** Tell us about your crime fiction books and their protagonists.



**GC:** *Robbers and Cops* began with me as the protagonist. It sucked—I threw it in a drawer and started over. The “climax” was based on an actual case. I had the ending but had to create a 40-year history for the brothers, robbers, and heroes.

*New Liberty* is book one in the Hector Miguel Navarro Series. Everything in this book is fictionalized. I went down deep rabbit holes doing research for my first two books. This allowed me to dive in and work without those lengthy searches resulting in hooptedoodle. Hector is a young police officer in New Liberty, Arizona. On the verge of a promotion, he is transferred to a unit investigating street gangs. He makes a few good choices and a couple of bad ones. He grows tremendously throughout book one and two. I expect *Unfinished Business* to be released in late spring 2025.



**Stiletta:** How do you relax when you're not writing?

**GC:** I like to read and write reviews. My blog and five grandchildren under eighteen months don't allow for much free time.

**Stiletta:** What is your objective for your blog, and how do you select the authors you feature?

**GC:** I am terrified of self-promotion, so I created a blog that promotes other authors and industry professionals. I reach out in many ways to get authors to agree to post—many are even more reluctant than me.

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

**GC:** I started scuba lessons when my oldest son began training as a professional hard-hat diver. I loved it. Did I mention I don't know how to swim—thank God for fins?

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George Cramer was interviewed by Margie Bunting, SinC NorCal newsletter editor.

# Member News

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## *New and Upcoming Releases*

*Call me Carmela* by Ellen Kirschman, book #5 in the Dot Meyerhoff Mysteries series, will be released on November 26 by Open Road Media.

Linda Townsden published the fifth book in her Spirit Lake Mystery series, *Time-Lapse on Murder*, on September 13, 2024 on Amazon.

Susan Bickford's short story, "The Lucky One," was published in September on <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/> You can read it there for free.

Margaret Lucke's story "Haircut" has been published by *GUILTY Crime Fiction Magazine*. When her romance goes wrong, a young woman takes matters and a pair of scissors into her own hands. Those who might like to read this flash fiction tale can find it on the magazine's website: <https://www.guiltycrimemag.com/flash/haircut-by-margaret-lucke>

Vinnie Hansen's story "Dire Wolf" is included in *Friend of the Devil: Crime Fiction Inspired by the Songs of the Grateful Dead*, released September 30 from Down and Out Books.

Level Best Books released the new edition of Vinnie Hansen's suspense novel, *One Gun*, on October 22,

"Scared Straight," by Vinnie Hansen appeared in a Halloween issue of *Kings River Life*.

The sixth in G.M. Malliet's award-winning DCI St. Just series, *Death and the Old Master*, launches November 5 from Severn House.

## *Public Appearances*

On December 7, at 2:00 p.m., Book Sage Blogger Lloyd Russell will be interviewing Ellen Kirschman at Beyond Text, 318 N Santa Cruz Ave, Los Gatos CA.

On December 8 at 4:00 p.m., Ellen Kirschman will be interviewed by thriller writer Samantha Downing at the launch of Ellen's book, *Call Me Carmela*, at Book Passage in Corte Madera. Ellen hopes all her sisters will come to the launch.

Ellen Kirschman will be *On Air* with Lisa Towles: on November 22.



## Member News, continued

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Margaret Lucke will be one of the featured authors and panelists at the Local Author Showcase at the Hercules Library, 109 Civic Drive in Hercules, CA, on Saturday, November 2, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Details are here: <https://ccclib.bibliocommons.com/events/66d9097eba1dd236002176e7>

Margaret Lucke will be speaking to the Mystery Book Club at the El Cerrito Library, 6510 Stockton Ave, El Cerrito, CA, on Saturday, November 20, at 6 pm. Details are here: <https://ccclib.bibliocommons.com/events/66f34a4733e81f52914a02c6>

Margaret Lucke will make a presentation on “The Economics of Freelancing” to the Palm Springs Writers Guild, via Zoom, Friday, January 1, 2025 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Details are here: <https://palmspringwritersguild.org/event-5873443>

### *Awards and Recognition: Congratulations!*

Heather Haven reports that her *Bewitched, Bothered, and Beheaded* is a 2024 Readers' Favorite International Book Awards Bronze Medal Winner in the Fiction - Mystery - Sleuth genre, complete with a medal. She says she may even go to the award banquet in Miami in November.

Diana Chambers' book, *The Secret War of Julia Child*, was chosen one of *People's* Best Books of Fall 2024.

*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, was 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 is your favorite type of swag to give out at conventions and public appearances, and what is the favorite swag you have received from an author?**

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The most popular swag I've given away at appearances were these "attractive" horseshoe glasses after *Dying for a Dude* was launched. My favorite swag was a rubber gripper. Still using it to open jars 12 years later! **Cindy Sample**



I do book giveaways, or bookstore gift cards. I also have a nice canvas beach bag. **Josie Brown**

I like to give and get bookmarks. I sometimes give out stress balls, but they are hard to pack. **Ellen Kirschman.**

In the past, I've done keychains and pens. Not very original. Some of the best swag I received was a small traveling kit including a stapler, staples, paperclips, scissors, pencil, eraser, and tape. Perfect for a traveling writer. The other was a potholder with the title of the author's foodie book emblazoned on it. Some of my fellow writers are so clever! **Heather Haven**

The swag I give out is a small "leave behind," about 2" x 3" with a front & back cover and two inside pages with: the name of the work, date of the event (reading) and some pictures that support what I am reading. I have also taken the business cards of our local bookseller and added an Avery label to the back with my book title and my name so that if I'm out somewhere and don't have a book with me, I can direct them to the local store. I attended a Patricia Smiley SinC reading years ago where she gave out yellow plastic wrist bands with the words "Crime Scene - Do Not Cross." I wear it sometimes for fun. **Elena Smith**

As a recipient, I get rather overwhelmed by bookmarks. I prefer to get business cards, which I can process into contacts easier. So I also go with those, but I do have some bookmarks, just because. My favorites are personalized pens. Love them. Love to give them, love to get them. **Susan Bickford**

Bookmarks and postcards and pens, oh my! So many swag options to choose from. My most successful swag giveaways have been simple paper items that I've produced myself—a leaflet called "10 Clues to Writing Great Fiction" and word search puzzles based on one or another of my books. When my first book, *A Relative Stranger*, came out, my husband and I owned a printing business. We made quarter-sheet-size notepads containing 50 pages with "Notes from A Relative Stranger" printed at the top along with relevant book info. Those were very popular. Of course, my favorite swag items to receive are more elaborate. I cherish a mug that the late Bette Golden Lamb and J.J. Lamb were giving away to promote one of their books. A squeeze ball for exercising my hands lives on my bureau. I regularly use one of those rough-surfaced rubber pads that help you open a jar, and my tea mug often rests on a swag coaster. I've picked up recipe cards from swag tables. And pens! Some of

## Question of the Quarter, continued

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my favorite pens are author swag. But I have to admit, some of my least favorite pens are, too. When I cruise by a swag table at a convention, I'm always on the lookout for something different and interesting to catch my eye in the sea of bookmarks and postcards. *Margaret Lucke*

I only like swag that is functional. Someone put out a flashlight for your keychain, and I LOVED it! A great pen is always useful. I got a fan once and I still use it. *Maureen Studer*

I like receiving lip balm as swag. I give pencils—just to be different from all those pens—and bookmarks, of course. *Vinnie Hansen*

When I come home from a conference, it usually takes me a couple of weeks to sort through everything I picked up, including books, bookmarks, and occasional swag. I'm usually most interested in swag that's edible. I know, not very corporal but it's tasty, makes an impression, and bolsters happiness. Certainly, something agreeable! The physical swag I've most appreciated were a keychain flashlight and a pen shaped like a submarine. A submarine? From a friend who wrote a thriller about small homemade submarines used in drug smuggling. One of the most personal things wasn't exactly swag. A friend who loved candy died and for her ceremony had small bags of M&Ms (one of her faves) with her face printed on them.

I don't usually give out much swag, although I have mugs for the Kandesky Vampire Chronicles that are given to fans who buy three or more books in the series. Nor do I have bookmarks. Because I have so many books in different series and genres, I have a trifold brochure that I give out listing all my books and a brief description of the series. And for launches in my mystery series, I make enigma cookies—small butter cookies in the infinity shape. A friend of mine usually has trays of dead body cookies in the shape of a chalk outline. *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 **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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OUR NEW LOGO!