



ORANGE HERRING

Sisters in Crime  Orange County



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Groundhog day was on February 2nd and sometimes I feel a little like the character Bill Murray played in the movie Groundhog Day. In the film, Bill Murray finds himself repeating the same day over and over and seemingly getting nowhere...until he makes a few little changes.

You can spin your wheels in this business, do the same thing every day, and get no further until you strike out on your own with some changes. Attitude, for one. This is the year you will be published! You tell yourself that. For how many years it takes, and believe me, I outta know!

Then, like clockwork you repeat the same thing: write a query with a partial, stamp the SASE, and slip them in an envelope. Hope for the best. Do it again the next day. It's frustrating waiting around until you hear from the agents to whom you sent your manuscript. Fortunately, there are a myriad of ways to take up that time. Blogging, for one. You do have a blog, right? Even if you aren't published it's a way to force yourself into the discipline of daily writing even if it's in short bursts. Pick a topic that interests you. It doesn't have to be about writing (because, Lord knows, there's enough of those out there.) Maybe you are writing a quilting cozy. Write the best darn blog about quilts. Writing something more hard-boiled? How about a little true crime history blog? Get creative. It's your dime.

How about writing short stories? I know, not your favorite thing. But it's good practice and you have the opportunity to send it out to a few magazines for publication. Or write articles for small specialty magazines. It might mean a small check and something to slap on your bio. I wrote on spec, picked topics I was interested in and found magazines that might use them. I wrote a piece about medieval monks and sent it to Renaissance Magazine and they published it! I did a piece on medieval ale (my husband is a homebrewer) and

sent it off to a homebrewer's magazine. Paydirt! What are your interests and hobbies? There's a magazine for that, I guarantee it.

Become a stringer for local newspapers. Journalism can hone your skills like nothing else. It forces you to get to the meat of the problem, cut to the chase, get the story down. And it's nice when someone pays you to write. Because it's a long time between sending out that query and getting a reply.

Stamp, mail, repeat. Groundhog day all over again.

Until that one day something changes.

*Your President
Jeri Westerson*



SISTERS IN CRIME MISSION STATEMENT:

To promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST

2PM: Writer's Forum. Self-editing. What are your best strategies in effective editing of your work? Do critique groups help? Come and share your knowledge.

3PM: *Wendy Hornsby*, author of eight mystery novels, six of them in the Maggie MacGowen series, and many short stories will share her experiences and tell us about her latest book, *In the Guise of Mercy* (published after a 14-year hiatus). She received the prestigious Edgar Allan Poe Award (the "Edgar"), its French equivalent, le Grand Prix de Littérature Policière, the Reviewers Choice Award for Best Contemporary Fiction by Romantic Times Magazine, The American Mystery Award from Mystery Scene Magazine, and has been nominated for many others. These nominations include The Anthony and the Prix Du Roman D'Adventures (France). Wendy and her husband live in Southern California where she is a Professor of History at a local college.

SUNDAY, MARCH 21ST

2PM: Reader's Forum. Why read mysteries? What is it about this genre that keeps you coming back?

3PM: *TBD*

UPCOMING EVENTS:

***Left Coast Crime 2010**

March 11-14, 2010

Omni Hotel in downtown Los Angeles

Speakers scheduled: Lee Child, Jan Burke, Janet Randolph, Bill Fitzhugh

To register: www.westcoastcrime.org/2010

MEMBER EVENTS:

D.P. Lyle:

***March 11-14**

Left Coast Crime

Los Angeles, CA

Eric Stone:

***February 25**

7 pm, Eric Stone & Ray Sharp's Asia
Irvine University Park Library
4512 Sandburg Way
Irvine, CA

***March 11-14**

Left Coast Crime
Los Angeles, CA

Jeri Westerson:

***March 6, 2010**

11 am, Corona Library
Interview, Q&A, book signing.
650 S. Main Street, Corona, CA 92882
(951) 736-2381

***March 11-14**

Left Coast Crime, on panels and such. *Serpent in the Thorns* is a finalist for the Bruce Alexander Historical Mystery Award, which is presented at the conference. Watch for me moderating a panel on Friday at 8:30 am called "Back in the Day" with Kenneth Wishnia, Holly West, and Priscilla Royal.

***March 16, 2010**

1:30 pm
Sun City Library talk and signing.
28127 Bradley Road, Sun City, CA 92586, (951)
679-3534

***March 17, 2010**

7 pm EST
Murder Loves Company Book Club via speakerphone.

***March 20, 2010**

9 am to 3 pm
Assistance League Day of Authors at California State University Fullerton. Admission \$85. For full info contact Bobbie Cooper 714-270-4203 b_cooper@sbcglobal.net

SDSU WRITERS CONFERENCE

By Linda Smith

For my first writer's conference, I seem to have stumbled onto the best. At least, that's what I heard from the veterans I talked to at the San Diego State University Writer's Conference

the last weekend in January. I totally concur. The opening remarks were only a glimpse of what was to come.

The offerings at the conference were many and I was wise enough to begin by taking in the lecture entitled: Getting the Most Out of This Conference. In it, I learned what not to do, like make a pitch to an agent in the bathroom. I also learned how best to pitch my work. Shameless self-promotion is not a bad thing.

After that, I sat through three agent panels. In these, four or five agents introduced themselves, told us who they worked for and how best to approach them with our work. I learned what slush piles were and who actually looked through them. Some agents only took referrals, some take on only certain genres, and a select few only cared about marketability. Their talks gave me an idea, also, where I had to be in my writing process before seeking an agent. In fact, the best part of this conference, I thought, was the accessibility of the agents. We sat with them at lunch, we networked with them over wine and cheese, and we met them all over the hotel. They were relaxed, congenial, and no one took advantage of that. And most of them asked “What are you writing about?” or “So, what's your project?”

Many of the talks and lectures were specific to certain genres such as Writing and Rewriting Children's Books while others considered specific writing challenges: The Craft of Observation, The Mystery of Voice, Page Turners – What is it that makes Fiction Compelling?, etc. There were several opportunities for on-the-spot critiques. I tried to take advantage of this, but it turned out to be the most disappointing experience at the conference for me. The facilitator picked my short story out of the pile but refused to read it because it was a genre that she didn't “understand.” And here I thought good writing was good writing, no matter the genre. Silly

me.

That leads me to one last thought. We were given the chance to critique the conference by written form. I made sure that I mentioned my concerns about the reluctance of the aforementioned facilitator with the hope that next year they will have someone who will be brave enough to look at the writing before succumbing to stereotype.

I heartily encourage writers, especially newbies like me, to consider attending this conference. It happens every year and even my husband who paid for it believed it was well worth the money. You may be able to cut costs by staying in a less expensive hotel or motel nearby or by sharing a room. (There were certain advantages to being in the hotel where the conference was held.) If you've never been, start saving for next year.

Need a roommate?



2010 CALENDAR

February 21st – 2 pm Writer's Forum, 3 pm
Wendy Hornsby

March 21st – 2 pm Reader's Forum, Why read mysteries?

April 18th – 2 pm Writer's Forum, 3 pm Panel of authors from the anthologies - *Orange County Noir* and *L.A. Noir*. Barbara de Marco-Barrett and Patricia McFall, (*O.C. Noir*) and Denise Hamilton and Naomi Hirahara (*L.A. Noir*)

May 16th – 2 pm Reader's Forum, 3 pm Martin J. Smith - Senior Editor of *Orange Coast Magazine* and mystery writer (*O.C. Noir*) plus mystery novels and non-fiction books) hosted by Gary Phillips, editor of *O.C. Noir* and *L.A. Noir* plus mystery writer.

June 13th – Tentative date for joint event with SoCal Mystery Writer's of America.

July 18th – 2 pm Writer's Forum, 3 pm Kristen Weber, previously the Sr. Editor at Penguin, now a free-lance editor here in California

August 15th – 2 pm Reader's Forum

September 19th – 2 pm Writer's Forum

October 17th – 2 pm Reader's Forum

November 21st – 2 pm Writer's Forum

December 12th – Holiday Party



FYI

Book Carnival mystery bookstore in Orange will be closing at the end of February due to illness. It is up for sale if anyone is interested. Contact Tim at the store for more information, (714) 538-3210.

The Body on the Bench

A Review

by Jeri Westerson

(First seen on [The Rapsheet.blogspot.com](http://TheRapsheet.blogspot.com))

If Ross Macdonald and James M. Cain are the Kings of Noir, then surely Dorothy B. Hughes is the Queen.

This is the woman who brought us *In a Lonely Place* (1947), which followed the psychological meanderings of a serial killer. She wrote pulp mysteries, as much as any of those stark novels could be called “pulp.” Hard to believe that these great stories were bought for a quarter and were never meant for library shelves.

I’ve always been fond of Hughes’ work. Her tales usually start off slow, allowing for the necessary details of her superb sense of place to emerge from the page. She keeps her stories localized, set in places like Los Angeles or Santa Fe, New Mexico. In *Ride the Pink Horse* (1946), we get a sweaty, close concoction of Santa Fe, and you are definitely there with the protagonist, schvitzing right along with him in the fiesta heat.

So when I came across this little book from 1952, *The Body on the Bench*, I assumed I’d be getting another noir mystery by one of the best of them. Instead, and to my surprise, the author gives us a sort of spy novel. This is all Hughes, though, from the descriptions of the Sunset Strip to the raw characters who populate the book. Getting the Hughes treatment means you’ll get characters with dense back stories, not just spear carriers.

In the novel, also published as *The Davidian Report*, we are yanked into the world of Steve Wintress--or is it Stefan Winterich?--fresh from Berlin. An agent, spy, whatever you wish to call him. He has a ruthless edge but with the patience of a sniper, biding his time till he can get ahold of this all-important document, the McGuffin that propels the action. Davidian is the man he needs to see and the report on him is in the hands of his contact, Albion. But while waiting for Wintress’ diverted plane, Albion is found dead (the titular body on the bench). Our spy then gets thrown in with a dubious

crowd, including Haig Armour, who's from the F.B.I.--or is he? He also meets up with dark little men, thick with accents and scared of the feds ("those Cossacks!").

The trail for Davidian also leads Wintress to someone he had not wanted to find. The woman.

There's always a dame.

She was a dancer in Berlin. Well, more than a dancer ... He knows he's got to get close to her again because he's certain she knows where Davidian is.

I like the details of Hollywood Boulevard in 1952, when this book was written. The Red Cars were still running in those days and the same chintzy Christmas decorations were hung from lamp posts then as now. And, we discover, men and women in California had abandoned wearing hats in 1952, unlike their East Coast counterparts, and only older women wore overcoats. It's tidbits such as those that make historical fiction authors like me giddy.

I have an original Dell paperback edition of *The Body on the Bench* from '52. I don't know if there are better copies out there, but there are words and sometimes whole sentences missing from this imprint. Bad copy editing. It's annoying and a bit confusing, but it's also not crucial. Whaddya want for 25 cents?

The plot is heavy on dialogue, which is fine by me and also fine for Hollywood. Actor Robert Montgomery, on his TV show Robert Montgomery Presents, produced an episode entitled "The Davidian Report" in November of 1952. With only cursory research, I'm almost willing to bet that it was an episode on television first before it was novelized, or at least novelized at the same time, since the book came out the same year and has the subtitle "The Davidian Report."

At any rate, this is a top-notch Hughes tale. Set against the backdrop of postwar anxiety, *The Body on the Bench* strikes a nerve with Cold War murmurs of the Communist threat.

What secrets does Davidian know? Where is he? Who wants him? The body on the bench knew, but now he's dead. More have to die to keep the secrets safe, and in the meantime, get on your running shoes, 'cause you'll be trotting along with Wintress before time runs out.



YOUR INPUT INVITED

This is every "Sister's" newsletter. Let us hear from you if you have events coming up or news that we'd all like to share. If you have any suggestions for the Orange Herring, let us know that, too.

Send your contributions and suggestions to:

Linda Smith:

softpoet@yahoo.com

Deadline for March newsletter is March. 10th.