



President's Message

Last month we were graced with the presence of Jan Burke for our first month of our ForensicsFest, and this month we have a Forensic Panel with a lively group of specialists talking about the dead. And when you are a mystery author, dead is what it's all about.

I even have a statue of Death on the shelf in my office, along with skulls of various animals that found their demise in the area in which I live. So what's with this death obsession anyway?

Well, mystery authors usually deal with murder. There are the exceptions, of course, but for the most part, we want the ultimate crime, the one you can't come back from. So dead is how we like it. Now the manner of that death is what gets us all frothy. Will the victim be stabbed; poisoned; thrown off a building; strangled; shot; run over by a train/bus/car; dropped out of an airplane; shoved over a cliff; get mercury poured into his ear (for something classical); coshed on the head with a candlestick/telephone/frozen leg of lamb/hammer/statue; blown up; lasered; chopped in two with a sword/ax/elevator doors/garbage truck; dumped into a wood chipper; sliced by turbine blades; tossed into a vat of toxic waste... Gosh, that was fun!

Any way you look at it, dead is the deal. But we want to get the minutiae right. That's where research comes in. Sometimes you'll need to describe in gruesome detail what the body looked like. Suppose it was dragged out of the water after floating around for a

few weeks. What would the color of the corpse be? In what state of decay? Could you identify the face just by looking at it? What would it smell like? Mmmm. What does it take to mummify a body out in the desert? What about a corpse frozen in a lake over the winter? So many possibilities. We'll find out what happens to the dead when our panel of experts explains the gory details to us. Take lots of notes. It should be a fun afternoon.

*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

MEETING PLACE:

Irvine Ranch Water District
15600 Sand Canyon Avenue
Irvine, CA 92618

For more information: www.ocsistersincrime.org

FEBRUARY MEETING:

February 20, 2011

2:30 PM: Special starting time for Forensic panel



On February 20, the ForensicsFest continues with a star-studded panel of Orange County experts in their fields to discuss their specialties.

Panelists include nationally-acclaimed **Dr. Judy Myers Suchey**, forensic anthropologist, who works with the U.S. Department of Justice and other law enforcement authorities on identifying and dating human remains, including cold cases.

Award-winning author **Dr. D.P. Lyle**, forensics consultant to crime writers and television shows and author of HOWDUNNIT FORENSICS and other books, will describe his latest cases and how he incorporates his scientific knowledge when writing his own thrillers.

Michael Streed, at SketchCop Solutions, is a police, military and government sketch artist whose talents can create a suspect's facial features so precisely his work has resulted in the capture of many, many criminals. He'll talk about some of his most successful sketches and cases.

And how about cleaning up after the cops, let alone the killers? The fourth February panelist is **Gary Bittner**, of ServPro, a specialist in crime scene and trauma clean-up. He'll describe his work when wearing a Hazmat suit to remove blood and body fluids off walls, carpeting, furniture and floors.

MARCH

Don't miss next month's meeting either, a cozy panel with Avery Aames, Hannah Dennison, Linda O. Johnston and Dorothy Howell. March 20, at 3:00 p.m.



Editors' Column

Gayle K. Brunelle and Theresa Schultz are taking over as editors of the newsletter from Linda Smith, who has moved on to other opportunities in life. We wish Linda the best and thank her for her years of service with the newsletter. We hope that we can follow in her footsteps and do a good job with the *Orange Herring*. We hope you will be patient with us during the transition.

Please note one important change. As Jeri announced at our January meeting, the newsletter will now be delivered electronically to all members who do not specifically request a hard copy. This will save the organization money and time. To request a hard copy, please email Ocsinc.newsletter@gmail.com. Please also send any news you might want included in the newsletter to this address.

Your editors will have two new monthly columns, one reporting on the events of that last meeting, the other from us discussing news or topics that we think might be relevant to OC Sisters in Crime. This month we will use our column space to introduce ourselves.

Theresa Schultz



Theresa Schultz is a freelance writer who is busy working on her first mystery novel for adults,



Driven to Destruction. She is currently looking for representation for the initial book in her children’s mystery series, AMAZING APPARITIONS IN AURORA: A SUNRISE STAGECOACH MYSTERY.

She lives in Irvine with her husband and three children.

Gayle K. Brunelle

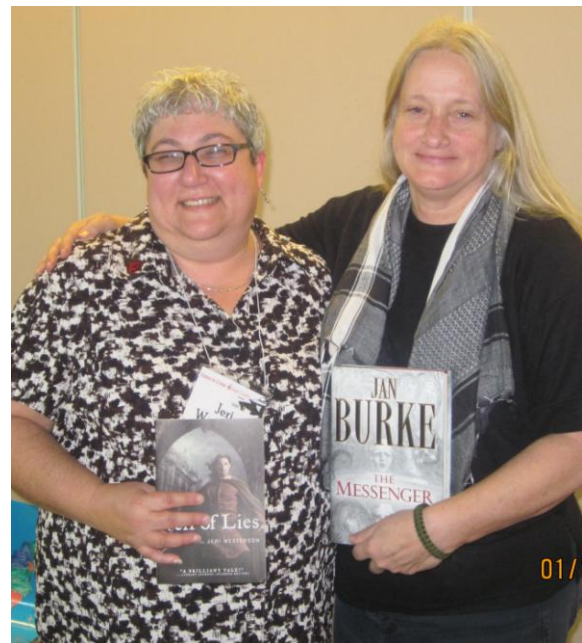


Gayle K. Brunelle is a Professor of History at California State University, Fullerton. Aside from academic publications, she is now publishing in the genre of historical true crime. Her latest book, MURDER IN THE MÉTRO: LAETITIA TOUREAUX AND THE CAGOULE IN 1930S (May, 2010) recounts the history of the first murder ever committed on the Paris Métro, in 1937. It is co-authored with Annette Finley-Croswhite, Gayle’s best friend from her (now distant) graduate school days, with whom Gayle is now authoring two sequels, “Vengeance: Vichy and the Assassination of Marx Dormoy and “Terrorists of the National Revolution.”



JANUARY MEETING RECAP

For those of you who missed the January meeting, we were treated to a very interesting and informative presentation by award-winning mystery writer Jan Burke. Jan is the author of the Irene Kelly series, as well as THE MESSENGER, BLOODLINES, and the Edgar winner for Best Novel, BONES. She is also an award-winning short story writer and founder of the nonprofit Crime Lab Project.



[Our President, Jeri Westerson and Jan Burke, 1-16-2011]

Jan began her talk with a quote by W. H. Auden.

Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest.

She stressed the importance of telling the victim’s story, as the victim is at the intersection of the protagonist and the villain. Someone must speak for the victim, in storytelling as in real life.



Jan focused primarily on the state of death investigation in the U.S., noting that it is “a mess.” Unlike the impression we get from movies and television, relatively few autopsies are conducted, and budget cuts often influence the depth of an investigation.

Politics plays a role as well. Frequently, coroners are appointed for political purposes, and no formal medical training of any kind is required. In some places, the only requirement for becoming a coroner is that the candidate must be at least 18 years old, must not have a felony conviction, and must be a resident of the county.

For the writer’s among us, Jan stressed the importance of doing thorough research before writing about coroners and medical examiners, policies and procedures, as they differ widely from state to state, even from county to county.

To make our jobs a little easier, she provided a packet filled with helpful information on death investigation. If you would like an electronic copy of the materials, send an email to Jan Burke at crimelabproject@gmail.com and write SinC Handouts and Bonus Materials in the subject line.

Theresa Schultz



THE WRITER’S BOOKSHELF

This month, I’ll save you some loot. Don’t buy **WRITIE IN STYLE: USING YOUR WORLD PROCESSOR AND OTHER TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING** by Bobbie Christmas (ISBN 1-58042-134-2). The author, who advertises herself as a professional editor, reiterates her title approximately every other page, yet asks: “Are You Repetitiously Redundant?” Her next paragraph contains “write in style” twice.

Grammar, usage, and punctuation errors also spoil this text--two in the table of contents. Chapter Three: “Ellipses, Dashes, Parenthesis. . .” Like subjects and verbs, nouns in a series should agree in number. “Ellipses” and “Dashes” are plural, “Parenthesis” is singular. Another chapter is titled “Put the Pedal to the Mettle.” Figuratively, the expression means to go as fast as possible; literally, to push a car’s accelerator to the metal floorboards, so should be spelled “metal”. Since Christmas knows the homophone “mettle” means spirit or courage, she unwittingly gives us this warning: She who tries too hard to be clever may end up looking ignorant.

Hoping things would improve, I turned to the introduction and read: “Many books teach grammar. This ain’t one of ,em.” Though “ain’t” is viewed by some as socially inferior, the contraction itself is grammatically correct. What’s incorrect in Christmas’s sentence is the single open quotation mark that curves right (,) preceding “em.” She probably meant to use an apostrophe, which curves to the left (’), but Microsoft Word doesn’t allow an apostrophe to begin a sentence because it’s the same symbol as a closing single quotation mark. The solution is to either turn off the “smart (curly) quote” feature, or hit the apostrophe key twice and the curly pair appears (’). Delete the first and you’re left with the correct symbol. Tedious? You betcha. Enough, I hope, to make a writer ponder the reason for cluttering a manuscript with apostrophes masquerading as missing opening letters. Still, inaugural apostrophes are occasionally appropriate, and since Christmas’s focus is using a computer to improve your writing, she should know her punctuation and how to produce it correctly. She doesn’t. Nor did she tell readers that using Ctrl + F (Control plus Find) is more efficient than using the Edit menu.

The biggest drawback of this text for fiction writers is that revision examples contain howlers any decent editor knows. For instance: “Greta stepped out of her car at Travelers Square and remembered an earlier visit, when she was young.



Her mind raced back to the time her patent leather shoes strolled the wide cement sidewalk that bordered the area.” The weary cliché, “her mind raced back,” is bad enough, but what was Greta doing while her shoes went philandering down the sidewalk all by themselves?

Another solecism is Christmas’s promotion of the popular myth that Dickens and other classics authors used passive voice and long phrases because they got paid by the word. This is not true. Worse, it’s not just sloppy research, it’s literary ignorance; the main ingredient in a classic, or any good work, including genre fiction, is not writing style, it’s deep insight into human nature.

Christmas tells us she uses the computer techniques in her book, as well as in her critique group and as an editor. Whether she needs better advice or the ability to take her own reveals the actual lesson in this book: Though much of the advice on how to write well is correct, the text is poorly written, proving that a superficial understanding of a principle is no substitute for the hard work needed to apply it. This book could be an accessory to manuscript murder. Don’t let yours be one of them.

Laurie Thomas

MEMBER EVENTS

Jeri Westerson:

Wednesday, February 23, 2011, 10:30 am to 11:30 am—Hermosa Beach Library book club. I’ll be discussing all three Crispin Guest books! Come join us. 550 Pier Avenue, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254 (310) 379-8475

Saturday, February 26, 2011, 2-4pm —Oakland Library Mystery Panel with Cara Black and Kelli Stanelly. 125 14th St., Oakland, CA 94612

MYSTERY INK EVENTS

Friday, February 11, noon
Tea & Cookies with Maggie Sefton
signing her latest book in her Knitting Mystery Series
SKEIN OF THE CRIME

Saturday, March 5, 1:00 p.m.
Sue Ann Jaffarian signs her latest Ghost book,
THE GHOST IN THE POLKA DOT BIKINI

Tuesday, March 15, 1:00 p.m.
British author Zoe Sharp will be joining us for
a signing of her new Charlie Fox book,
FOURTH DAY,
during her U.S. book tour.

Friday, March 18, noon
Cara Black (**MURDER IN THE PALAIS ROYAL**)
and Libby Fischer Hellmann
(**SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE**)
will be signing their latest novels.

Saturday, March 19, Noon – Darryl Dawson Signing
his horror novel, **FEAR OF SLEEP.**

And in May, Carolyn Hart will be signing her new
Death on Demand mystery,

DEAD BY MIDNIGHT on May 5, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

FYI: Possibility of getting signed copies of the new Alexander McCall Smith’s universally known No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series, **THE SATURDAY BIG TENT WEDDING PARTY** due out next month. Please order a copy by February 15th if you are interested in getting a signed copy. (714) 960-4000.

Mystery Ink Bookstore (across from Goldenwest College): 7176 Edinger Avenue, Huntington Beach, CA 92647, (714) 960-4000, mysteryink@hotmail.com.



MEMBER NEWS

Jeri Westerson's third Crispin Guest novel, *THE DEMON'S PARCHMENT*, was nominated for the Bruce Alexander Historical Mystery Award to be presented at Left Coast Crime in March. This is the second nomination for the novel, with another nod from *Romantic Times Magazine* for the RT Reviewers' Choice Award for Historical Mystery.

Gayle K. Brunelle's *MURDER IN THE MÉTRO* historical true crime book got a great review in the December 17, 2010 *London Times Literary Supplement*, and in the *Virginia Pilot*, also in December. Catch an interview with Gayle in the *Fullerton Observer* at: <http://www.fullertonobserver.com/artman/uploads/foearlyfeb.pdf>.

Links of Interest:

This is a social network of crime readers and writers.
<http://crimespace.ning.com/>


And here's another, for the North American branch of the International Association of Crime Writers: <http://www.crimewritersna.org/>. The IACW is based in England, and can be found at: www.iacw.org.

[Pass on any links you think that might be of special interest to our members to Ocsinc.newsletter@gmail.com]



FROM NATIONAL

Recent News

- Sisters in Crime has invested in America's Libraries by becoming a Library Champion with the American Library Association. Click [here](#) for more information. 
- Our "[We Love Libraries](#)" lottery continues! Monthly grants of \$1,000 will be awarded from through December 2011. To enter, simply fill out an easy application form and upload a photo of one or more of your staff with three books in your collection by [Sisters in Crime members](#). At the end of each month, a random drawing will be held and the winner announced. [Click here](#) for more information and for the link to the entry form. You only need to enter one time to be eligible for duration of the contest.
- On January 11, Sisters in Crime released the results of a collaborative study on the mystery book buyer. The study, the first of its kind, was designed to provide an overview of the mystery/crime fiction book-buying landscape, with information on who buys mystery books, what they buy, where they buy their books and why they buy them.

The survey is based on publishing industry data gathered by R.R. Bowker's book sales analysis division, PubTrack. A full report on the research, titled "The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age," is available [here](#).



Support your local SinC chapter. Buy a lovely cup at the next meeting, and bring your novels for our Sister Share raffle!



UPCOMING EVENTS

March 24 -27

Left Coast Crime, Santa Fe, New Mexico

April 30 - May 1

L.A. Times Festival of Books, USC campus

OC SinC will be at the Mystery Ink booth talking up our chapter and its benefits.

June 11-12

California Crime Writer's Conference,
Pasadena, CA

September 15 - 18

Bouchercon 2011 - World Mystery Conference,
St. Louis, Mo

TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK!

Very little in this life cannot be improved upon. And, since we are all writers and avid readers, we must have some ideas about how this newsletter could be better. Let us know. Also, if you have events coming up or announcements you want to make, or ideas for columns you'd like to share, let us know that too. We want to support our members in their literary endeavors and publicize your signings and achievements far and wide.

Send your contributions and suggestions to:

Ocsinc.newsletter@gmail.com.

The deadline for the newsletter is the 1st of each month!