



President's Message

When you write your novels, you don't think much beyond the story and the characters who inhabit it. Oh, you give the plot some thought, of course, and consider the audience in a vague sort of way. And then after the book that you worked so hard on is published and people start to buy it from all over the world, that is a special thrill.

And then you hear from those fans, people you will most likely never meet, enjoying *your* words, *your* characters. It is an incredible rush, because you spent an inordinately long period of time alone in a room with nothing but you, some research books, and a computer. Time slips away, housecleaning is a thing of the past, and everything just falls away as you immerse yourself in the world you created. And now that baby has flown and people are reading. But I was nudged back into a bit of reality this week when I was reminded that not all people everywhere love my books. My latest, *THE DEMON'S PARCHMENT*, deals with the very real life and activities of a genuine medieval serial killer, a very nasty piece of work who kidnapped, raped, and disemboweled young boys. This is not a happy slappy story, fun for the whole family. But I thought it would be interesting territory to mine, something meaty for our hero to get into and save the day. I rolled it altogether with the plight of medieval Jews, a real life transvestite prostitute, and a legendary creature let loose on the streets of London. Not your average medieval mystery.

I realize that my novels are enjoyed mostly by people who do like medieval mysteries, the historical mystery crowd, and a host of others. I also realize that many will not notice that I call these "Medieval *Noir*," emphasis on the "noir," especially this time around. But mind you, the worst of it is always off stage, including the sex. Well, most of it. So it was with little surprise that I got what I am calling my "unfan" letter. He told me how much he and his twenty-five year old daughter enjoyed the

first two books. And the third, though very well written, was just too disgusting for them to continue reading. And then he told me he had thrown the book into the trash!

Well, what is one to say to that? I thought about it and penned a rather restrained and polite letter back; how I understood that the difficult subject matter would be trying for some readers; and did you know that you can't kill an animal in mysteries as readers simply hate that? And then I told him that I wished he hadn't thrown out the book but rather donated it to a local library as there were plenty of people who appreciate a darker storyline. And then I told him that I hoped he'd give Crispin another try as the next book doesn't have any of that in there, just good old-fashioned murder. He wrote back to me surprised and pleased that I would reply and he agreed that of course he would buy the next book!

The moral of the story? I think that though it's important to write what you feel is right for your book, be aware that there are real live readers out there who will love it or hate it. I have no intention of catering to any particular reader or their agenda, but I am aware of what my audience usually reads. Breaking out a bit can expand your audience but it can also alienate them, too.

I also learned a little restraint and professionalism goes a long way. This reader had never written to an author before—what a letter!—and perhaps never expected a reply, let alone a polite one (after all, the berk just told me he literally *trashed* my novel. Polite wasn't the first thing on my mind!) But it still pays to be professional. I always try to reply to every fan email but I never comment on a bad review (and if you are interested in a giggle and a half, try this one on what *NOT* to do. Be sure to read the comments. You will be flabbergasted: <http://tinyurl.com/65lxmv7>)

Your prez,
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

APRIL

Don't miss this month's meeting on Sunday, April 17! We begin at 2:00 p.m. with a Reader's Forum on "beach reads": what do you read while enjoying the surf and sand at your favorite beach? What books do you enjoy set at beach locations?

At 3:00 p.m. our speaker will be Don Winslow, writer of mysteries and thrillers, most recently the novel SATORI. Since many of his acclaimed novels are set in California, they should be of particular interest to local writers. His official website is: <http://donwinslow.com/>



Editors' Column

Recently I attended a writer's retreat at a picturesque winery in Temecula, CA. While tourists were busy shopping for antiques in historic Old Town Temecula or riding in hot air balloons high above the clouds, I was sitting in a large room, surrounded by writers. I was in heaven.

On Friday night, we had the opportunity to chat with editors. At a pre-assigned time, two writers sat down with the editor for a whopping ten minutes. We were told this was not a time to pitch our manuscripts, rather to get to know each other in a beautiful setting. As soon as we introduced ourselves, the first editor asked what we were working on. Pitch time!

I had never pitched a project to an editor before, so it was good practice. She encouraged us to keep writing and to write what we love, which sounded a lot like code for "not interested." We had a full minute left, and I had another project that I was working on, so I thought – Why not? I pitched the basic story and saw the editor's face light up with interest. As the timekeeper called us away, she asked me to keep her posted on my project.

The next day, we were treated to presentations by all four editors, and ended the day with a roundtable critique. I sat at a table with five other writers and an agent. We took turns reading the first 500 words of our manuscript and critiquing each others' stories.

A curious thing happened. After we had gone around the table once, we discovered we still had plenty of time left; some of the writers had brought other stories, so we repeated the process and critiqued the additional manuscripts. In each case, the second manuscript was much better than the first. The stories were bolder and more compelling, taking us into the minds of characters who dared to say something outrageous or do something



remarkable.

It's as if we thought it best to play it safe, present the more conventional manuscript first. Then, because we had survived the first round of critiques, we felt emboldened to present the "other" one, the one we weren't so sure about, the one we thought might not be received as well. Thank goodness we did.

Is there a lesson to be learned here? Do you have a similar story about a time you took a chance and were rewarded for it? Please share your experience with the Orange Herring readers, by sending your thoughts on this topic or another to Ocsinc.newsletter@gmail.com.

Theresa Schultz

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.

MEETING ROUNDUP

If you were daring enough to brave the rain on March 20th, you were treated to a wonderful presentation by four mystery writers: Hannah Dennison, Dorothy Howell, Linda O. Johnston and Melinda Wells. All four women write cozy mysteries starring female amateur sleuths, who juggle complicated private lives while helping to solve murders. Our Vice President, Patricia Wynn, led the writers in a discussion of the challenges and rewards of writing a cozy series.



A cozy is a kinder, gentler version of the murder mystery, with violence and gore kept to a minimum. The murder usually takes place "off stage," and the body is discovered later; the person who discovers the body is often the initial suspect. Frequently, the protagonist is an amateur sleuth.

Hannah Dennison is the creator of the Vicky Hill mysteries, set in the small English town of Gipping-on-Plym. Vicky, an aspiring investigative journalist stuck writing obituaries for the *Gipping Gazette*, is the daughter of criminals, a fact she must keep secret. Each novel introduces readers to a unique British hobby, such as hedge jumping, snail racing and Morris dancing, the subject of her most recent book, *THIEVES!* For detailed information on the rather unusual path Hannah took to becoming a writer, visit her website at hannahdennison.com.

Dorothy Howell has sold twenty-six novels to three different publishers. Her books have been translated into a dozen languages, with sales approaching three million copies worldwide. After writing several historical romances under the name **Judith Stacy**, Dorothy made the switch to mysteries with *HANDBAGS AND HOMICIDE*, starring Hayley Randolph, who has a habit of discovering dead bodies wherever she goes. Her newest book, *CLUTCHES AND CURSES*, will be out in June. Check out her website at dorothyhowellnovels.com.



Linda O. Johnston got her start writing for Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. She is the author of the Kendra Ballantine Petsitters Mysteries, and she is currently working on a spinoff series, the Pet Rescue Mysteries. The first book is titled BEAGLEMANIA and stars Lauren Vancouver, director of HotRescues, a no-kill pet shelter. Linda's website, lindaohnston.com, is a wonderful source of information about pet rescue as well as writing.

Melinda Wells writes the Della Cooks series, which includes the added bonus of ten recipes at the back of each book. Her latest is THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING, which originally had a different name. When her publisher wanted to change the title of the book, Melinda quickly adapted and rewrote the book to include pudding. Her first series was published under her legal name **Linda Palmer**, but she adopted the pen name Melinda Wells for the culinary books. More information can be found at her website, lindapalmermysteries.com.



One of the prime challenges of writing a series about an amateur sleuth is giving the protagonist a reason for getting involved in the investigation in the first place. She may be a suspect herself and must prove her innocence. More likely, she is trying to defend a friend or loved one wrongly accused of the crime. Either way, she has a real stake in finding the killer.

All four of our writers' series have a romantic undercurrent, just to keep things interesting and, at times, troublesome for their sleuths.

Join us in April when Don Winslow, author of the Neal Carey Mysteries, will discuss his latest book, SATORI.

Theresa Schultz

THE WRITER'S BOOKSHELF

Several years ago, the San Diego chapter of Sisters in Crime asked best-selling mystery writer Nancy Pickard to give a presentation. Tired of dishing out the same old advice, she created a workshop on the stages of a writer's career. Psychologist and self-help author Lynn Lott attended the session and with Pickard's permission, used the material for her therapy clients with great success. That sparked their book, SEVEN STEPS ON THE WRITERS PATH: THE JOURNEY FROM FRUSTRATION TO FULFILLMENT, ISBN 0-345-45524-X.

After interviewing more than fifty living writers and researching famous dead ones, Pickard and Lott confirmed that the seven steps: Unhappiness, Wanting, Commitment, Wavering, Letting Go, Immersion, and Fulfillment, are a path that writers traverse repeatedly, often more than once in a single project. It's not an easy path, nor a straight one, but it's extraordinarily rewarding.

The book is a useful mix of sobering realities and comforting encouragement. The authors say that most emerging writers ask about getting published--Fulfillment--but warn that starting at the end of the path leads to discouragement, and that the only way to Fulfillment is to be "willing to look foolish, make dumb mistakes, start over, revise, change your mind, admit it when you don't know squat, and be as incompetent as you need to be, for as long as you



have to be.” Brutal, but true.

Despite many wonderful quotes by other writers, and quotable ideas of their own, these two bright women fell into the trap of promulgating that weary cliché, “Kill your darlings,” meaning cut any line that calls attention to itself. What is BARTLETT’S FAMILIAR QUOTATIONS but an entire tome full of sentences that called attention to themselves? If something is inappropriate, cut it, but just because it’s elegant, shocking, or--heaven forbid--metaphorically brilliant, is no reason to pounce on your delete key.

Another minor flaw is stories of authors who dumped their day jobs, racked up staggering debt, then succeeded. For the 95% of writers who will never make a living as a novelist, that type of Letting Go is fiscal suicide. But tips on how to dump old habits that can stifle creativity--doubt, cynicism, perfectionism, etc.--are excellent. For example, Judy Goldman’s reminder: “We think that if we run all our errands, then we can sit down & write. That’s wrong. First, we get our writing in. Then we tackle the to-do list.”

Perhaps the greatest value of this delineation of a writer’s journey is the comfort of seeing in print, things writers try to hide, things family and friends often disapprove of: That wanting like crazy to be a professional fiction writer is necessary for success; that we must immerse ourselves in our projects; that interruptions can be deadly, and that “There’s a special bond that writers feel with one another that we don’t feel with anybody else We don’t want to hurt our loved ones’ feelings, but the truth is, they just don’t *get it*.”

Such validations give writers courage and resolve. To balance their picture of the hurdles every author must leap, SEVEN STEPS ends with examples of women who didn’t get published until their seventies or eighties, and notes that mystery writers typically get started in middle age. Pickard and Lott insist that not only is it never too late, but like Mildred Wirt Benton, who wrote the first twenty-four Nancy Drew mysteries, and penned her last newspaper column two days before her death at

age 96, writers need never retire from their calling. Now isn’t that a happy thought.

Laurie Thomas



**WRITING SEMINAR
OPPORTUNITY –
Another SinOC Member Benefit!**

James Bell, organizer of **So What Does It Really Take to Sell Your Novel or Screenplay?** will be offering discounts to some select writing groups, like SinC chapters. For any three or more people from a group who sign up, he’ll knock \$50 off the price...for EACH person. For more information, email him directly at: jamescottbell@gmail.com. For more information about the seminars, go to: http://web.mac.com/jamescottbell/Site/The_Seminar.html.

MEMBER EVENTS

Jeri Westerson will be at the following locations this month: Saturday, April 9 she was a panelist at Literary Orange at UC Irvine. On Saturday, April 16 at 2 pm, she will be at the Burbank Library on a panel sponsored by SinC LA called “The Grim Reaper: Lies, Sex, and the Dark Side of Murder” 300 North Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91505. On Monday, April 25 at 4:30, she will be lecturing and reading at Mt. San Antonio College 1100 N. Grand Avenue, Walnut, CA 91789, (909) 274-7500. And she’ll be at Malice Domestic on a panel on Saturday, April 30 at 1:45 on “Taboo: Authors Who Tackle Difficult Subject Matter.”



MYSTERY INK EVENTS

**Saturday, April 16th 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. -
Susan Goldstein**

Susan Goldstein will be signing and discussing her first novel, HOLLYWOOD FOREVER already in it's 4th edition. 1st editions will be available at the signing. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER is, "Full of fun references to Hollywood's glamorous past..." PW

**Thursday, May 5th, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m. –
Carolyn Hart**

Carolyn Hart will be discussing and signing her new Death on Demand mystery, DEAD BY MIDNIGHT, featuring bookstore owner Annie Darling.

**Friday, May 6th, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. –
Earlene Fowler**

Earlene Fowler will be talking about and signing SPIDER'S WEB, the 17th installment of her Benni Harper Mysteries.

**Saturday, May 21st, 4:00 p.m. - Thomas
Perry**

Thomas Perry will be discussing and signing his new novel, THE INFORMANT, featuring the title character first introduced in his Edgar-winning debut novel THE BUTCHER'S BOY.

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



Local and Regional

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Check out these great, not-to-be-missed opportunities for mystery writers and readers!

Andrea Grossman, Founder of Writers Bloc in Los Angeles, CA (www.writersblocpresents.com) announces that on Monday, April 11, 2011 at the MGM Building in Century City, Writers Bloc will present **Jacqueline Winspear, Cara Black** and **David Kipen**. Ms. Winspear and Ms. Black will be discussing their new books, A LESSON IN SECRETS and MURDER IN PASSY, respectively.

Forensic Scientist and novelist **Dr. D. P. Lyle**, a speaker in our recent "Forensics Fest," will be appearing at several events this spring:

Villa Park Rotary Club
Thursday, April 14, 8 a.m.
Villa Park City Hall
17855 Santiago Blvd
Villa Park, CA

Santa Fe Springs City Library
April 28, 2011, 6 p.m.
11700 Telegraph Rd.
Santa Fe Springs, CA
[562-868-7738](tel:562-868-7738)
<http://www.santafesprings.org/library>

Los Angeles Times Festival of Books
Sunday, May 1, 2011
Talk/Signing: Forensics For Dummies
Wiley Booth 2-3 p.m.
Signing: Stress Fracture



Mystery Ink Booth, 3-4 p.m.
USC Campus
Los Angeles, CA

MEMBER NEWS

While having a great time at the Left Coast Crime meeting in March in Santa Fe, OCSinc member Aileen Baron received great news! Rob Rosenwald, the publisher of POISONED PEN told Aileen that since she regained the rights to her novel THE FLY HAS A HUNDRED EYES, they wanted to do a reprint as a trade paperback and an e book.

LINKS OF INTEREST

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

North American branch of the International Association of Crime Writers (IACW):
<http://www.crimewritersna.org/>. The IACW is based in England, and can be found at:
www.iacw.org.

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

PUBLICATION POSSIBILITIES

Kings River Life Magazine is a California online magazine. Due to our expanding mystery readership, we have created a special mystery section, Mysteryrat's Maze, and we are now accepting submissions of mystery short stories. Stories need to either be written by a California author or set in California, and can be up to 2000 words in length.

This is a non-paying market, but every author will have the chance to include promo information with each story for whatever project/website they are currently promoting. A new issue goes up every Saturday. Visit: <http://KingsRiverLife.com>
Contact Lorie Ham, publisher, at:
life@kingsriverlife.com

Call for Articles: London: Mystery Readers Journal (Volume 27:1)

The next issue of the [Mystery Readers Journal](#) (Volume 27:1) will focus on **Crime Fiction set in London**. I'm looking for **articles, reviews** and **Author! Author! essays**. We may go to two issues, but in the meantime, the deadline for reviews, articles and author essays is **March 15!** Beware the Ides of March!

Author! Author! essays are 500-2500 words, first person, upclose and personal about yourself, your mysteries and the 'London' connection. Think of it as chatting with friends, writers and writers in the bar or cafe. [Send me an email](#) if you're interested or know an author who would like to write an essay!

[SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW](#) your subscription to **Mystery Readers Journal** for 2011 (Volume 27). If you're not sure if you've renewed, send her an email.



FROM NATIONAL

Recent News: Sisters in Crime Really Loves Libraries!

Sisters in Crime has invested in America's Libraries by becoming a Library Champion with the American Library Association. Click [here](#) for more information.



ALA Library Champions

For Library Champions Inquiries:

Phone: 800.545.2433, ext. 5050

Fax: 800.280.5015

mhuber@ala.org

The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age

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 on the Sisters in Crime website, but you have to be a member to access it.

Please sign up to help at the LATFOB!

The LA Times Festival of Books will be held at USC this year and we are helping to sponsor a booth. Please contact Debbie Mitsch if you would like to participate to help pass out brochures and promote our chapter. mysteryink@hotmail.com



UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND CONVENTIONS

April 29

The Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter is delighted to announce it will

host its Pre- Los Angeles Times Festival of Books Party on Friday, April 29, from 6pm to 9pm at Skylight Books, 1818 N Vermont Ave (between Hollywood Blvd & Franklin) Los Angeles, CA 90027 (323) 660-1175 www.skylightbooks.com

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.

For more information, go to:

<http://events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks/>

April 29 - May 1, 2011

Malice Domestic at the Hyatt, Bethesda, MD
SinC National will be holding its annual breakfast at the meeting on May 1. For more information on Malice Domestic, go to:

<http://www.malicedomestic.org/aboutmalice.html>.

For information on the SinC breakfast, go to:

<http://www.sistersincrime.org/cde.cfm?event=338155>.

June 11-12

California Crime Writer's Conference,
Pasadena, CA

For more information, go to:

<http://www.sistersinrimela.com/ccwc.htm>

September 15 - 18

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

For more information, go to:

<http://www.bouchercon.info/>



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

TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK!

If you have 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 their signings and achievements far and wide. Please send your contributions and suggestions to:

Ocsinc.newsletter@gmail.com.

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