

Looking into the Mystery Buyer Study

by Kathie Felix

To help members gain more insight into the Sisters in Crime mystery buyer study conducted by Bowker's Pubtrack Division, SinC hosted an "Ask the Experts" question-and-answer session on the members-only SinC listserv on January 18.

The featured guests for the online event were James Howitt, director of Publisher Solutions at Bowker, Carl Kulo, Bowker's head of research, and SinC member Triss Stein, the SinC coordinator for the study. Sandra Parshall served as moderator for the session.

Project goals

The far-ranging discussion began with an explanation of the goals for the ground-breaking project.

"In general terms, the study looked to identify the primary and secondary buying segments," said Carl Kulo. "It was from there that we looked to focus on the differences in how these segments first became aware of mystery books, what influenced their purchase and, finally, where they made their purchase."

The study defined the two major mystery-reading audience segments as Matures/Boomers and Gen X/Gen Y. Information gathered from these audiences helped develop an understanding of their existing information-gathering and buying patterns, as well as their

emerging responses to new digital platforms and marketing techniques.

"The critical question is 'how to reach them?'" Triss Stein said, "and that is where the report comes in."

E-books

The subject of e-books came up fairly early in the online conversation. SinC member Barbara Fister noted a much greater acceptance of e-books for those in their mid-30s to 50s and asked for some explanation of that finding.

Carl Kulo said that Pubtrack had done multiple studies on e-books that provide a great deal of information.

"We have found that those in their 40s are a 'sweet spot' for e-books," he said. "Part of this is that they are both [at] peak earning years and can afford the devices—and are open to newer technologies to a greater extent than those in older segments."

When questions came up about the large segment of readers at even the youngest ages who seem set against e-books, Kulo said that Pubtrack studies were underway that would track the changes in perceptions toward the digital editions.

"We believe that resistance to e-books will decline as they become more visible in our society," he added.

The e-book discussion continued with some preliminary statistics on 2010 holiday e-book reader sales and their corresponding effect on future e-book purchases. Early data indicated that nine

percent of book buyers received an e-reader during the holidays.

"If this [percentage] holds in the final sample, this should have a snowball effect on e-book adoption going forward," Kulo said.

Covers and art

Nancy Martin, a member of the SinC study team, referred to the study's findings on the importance of book covers and cover art in book purchase decisions. She asked if Bowker could help SinC explore the subject of book covers in the future.

In reply, James Howitt said that Bowker's Image Testing service provides an analysis of what works, what doesn't work—and what confuses—on a book cover. He explained that the service tests covers with a targeted set of buyers, gathering actual customer responses to help determine the best direction for a cover.

The online Q & A also covered the study's data-gathering methodology in areas such as the source of the study responses (readers who purchased a mystery in the previous year) and the cited geographical regions (Census regions as defined by the US government).

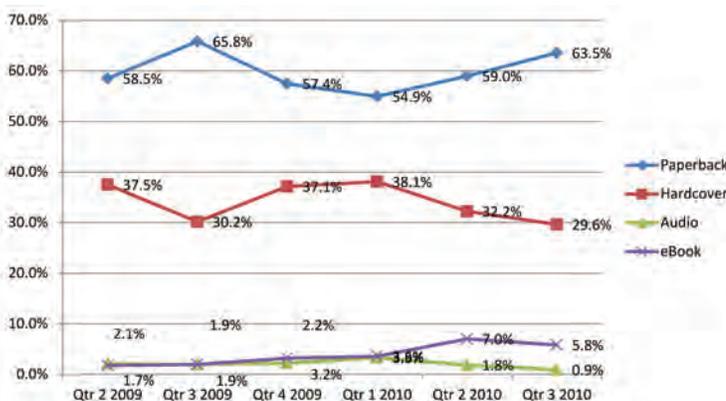
Finding the session

The January 18 "Ask the Experts" session on "The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age" can be found on the SinC listserv in messages #22152 through #22191. As with the Mentor Monday sessions, the event will be archived on the listserv for future access.

Sisters in Crime members not currently registered to participate in the email listserv may sign up to do so. Go to the SinC website at SistersInCrime.org, click on "Resources" and then on "SinCListserv." In the last paragraph, click on "follow this link."

Kathie Felix handles public relations for Sisters in Crime. A journalist and editor based in the Washington DC area. She covers technology, publishing and education for media outlets and is treasurer and program chair of the SinC-Chesapeake Chapter.

E-book Trends Figure 32 in the SinC study, "The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age."



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Deadlines & Submissions

- Deadline for articles for the June issue of *inSinC* is April 15.
- Include name, email and mailing address, and phone number with submissions.
- Send columns, articles, high-res photos, ideas, praise, and story ideas via e-mail to **Molly Weston**

mysteryheel@mac.com
919.362.1436

Docket

- Members' publications since this edition will be listed in THE DOCKET. Include publication dates when submitting.
- Honors, awards and events of great "pith and moment" should be submitted as short, separate notices without publicity/ promotion of individual members.
- Material for THE DOCKET is due April 10 and should be sent to

Patricia Gulley
weyrcottage@yahoo.com

inSinc

the Sisters in Crime Quarterly

The mission of Sisters in Crime is to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry.

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Legend

In 2008, the board of directors of Sisters in Crime implemented a new strategic plan. Three goals emerged from this plan. *inSinc* articles will be marked with icons to represent the appropriate goal.



Advocacy, monitoring, and reporting



Professional education and career development



Membership growth, networking, and forums for members

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Cathy Speaks

SinC has started the year just as we'd like to: focusing attention on the world of mystery. The Mystery Book Buyers Report, commissioned from publishing support giant Bowker, was released in January and, thanks to the PR efforts of Kathie Felix and others, the Report swirled around in the publishing news and blogs. If you haven't read the report, head to www.sistersincrime.org to see what all the talk is about.

In April, our founding mother Sara Paretsky will be honored at the MWA Edgar Awards banquet as Grand Master. The honor is especially sweet as it coincides with the Edgar's 65th anniversary.

As I savored the good news, I also learned some sad news. Ruth Cavin passed away in January. Few editors earn the sobriquet "legendary," but Ruth wore it better than anyone. Ruth was my editor. She was still editing books into her 90s, still taking the train into New York every morning. Readers may not recognize her name, but they know her authors. I'd be afraid to start naming them because I would omit too many, but Molly Weston has interviewed some of them in this issue.

One lesson from Ruth stuck with me above all others. I sat in a Bouchercon panel a few years ago listening to a couple of agents and a couple

of writers talk about the give-and-take involved in creating a good novel. From the back of the room, I heard Ruth's familiar voice asking a question. "How many books have those editors brought out in a year?"

After the panel, I understood the importance of her question. Her daughter Nora told me Ruth brought out twice that number of books every year. Mind you, she was in her late eighties at the time.

At the St. Martin's reception that evening, she and I shared a table in a quiet space. "I wonder," she said, "if I could bring out better books if I didn't bring out so many." I stared at this self-effacing woman and her self-doubts with a new understanding about what it takes to be a good writer—or editor or anything else. The secret is never being satisfied, always seeking to be better. Readers deserve that.

As one of the writers she launched with the St. Martin's Best New Traditional Mystery, I'm glad she took on that staggering workload. More than that, I respect her always wanting to be better. As a writer—and a human being—that's a worthy goal.

Here's to a new year of being even better.



Libby Dickinson

Editor's Note

by Molly Weston

After the unprecedented cold weather and snows this winter, I'm sure everyone is ready to hit the road running with mystery tours, conferences, and a lot of good reading!

I'm looking forward to Malice Domestic in April. Besides seeing lots of long-time (notice I didn't say "old") friends and making new ones, we'll have two SinC events—the Friday chapters luncheon (see "Plan to Celebrate?" p. 5) and the annual SinC breakfast on Sunday morning (see "Briefly from Beth," p. 7).

By now, everyone knows about a major loss to the world of mystery—Ruth Cavin's death in January. Ruth was the driving force behind the

St. Martin's Press/Malice Domestic award for best first mystery. Many SinC members won this award. Several share stories about her influence in their writing careers.

There are lots more conferences already planned for the next year—and we've added several new ones in this issue. Also for the first time in this issue, is a listing of writers' contests. Obviously, this list isn't comprehensive, but we hope it will grow.

At press time, several traditional St. Martin's Minotaur contest details for 2011 were unavailable. New publications and reports are available online—the SinC Mystery buyer report, a new Chapter Handbook, *Shameless Promotion for*

Brazen Hussies, and an update on the *Digital Books World* reports. Check the SinC website often to stay abreast.

Happy reading and writing!



Chapter Highlights

Northeast Ohio

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The home of Bouchercon 2012 is starting its very own SinC Chapter. After almost two years of informal meetings, a group of 15 women in Cleveland, comprised of published authors, aspiring writers, and mystery fans, are taking the plunge and starting Sisters in Crime Northeast Ohio. The group will meet the fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 PM at the Beachwood, Ohio branch of the county library. We've formed membership and programming committees, and are hard at work. A website and Yahoo listserv are right around the corner.

Desert Sleuths

www.desertsleuthssinc.com

Desert Sleuths Chapter is hard at work on WriteNow! 2011, our annual writer's conference to be held in August in Phoenix. We are looking forward to topping WriteNow! 2010's tremendous success with more big names and a fantastic venue; details in the next newsletter. Two of our members were nominated for Awards at LCC Santa Fe: Kris Neri for the Lefty for *Revenge for Old Times' Sake* and Deborah J. Ledford for the Hillerman Sky award for *Snare*.

Sherri Humphries is all smiles after winning an award at the Coveted Dead Bird Event!



Central Virginia

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The new Central Virginia SinC chapter is up and running. Meetings are held at the Tuckahoe Library in Richmond. We voted to accept our bylaws in November, and we'll have our first election in February. We've tentatively scheduled a workshop in Richmond, "Introduction to Book Publishing" with editor Chris Roerden. There will be a charge for this workshop.

New York Tri-State

www.nysinc.org

Besides all the individual good news about book launches, short story publication, online features, and new representation, it's been an exciting season for members in the New York/Tri-State chapter who keep finding more fun ways to get out into our community. Chapter members participated in public readings at the inaugural Astoria/LIC International Film Festival, presented at The Empire State Book Festival, operated a booth for chapter authors at the Brooklyn Book Festival, finalized the judging and manuscript preparation for the chapter's second anthology, and even donated piles of books for youth literacy via a local charity. What happened to winter hibernation?

San Joaquin Chapter

www.sj-sinc.org

The biggest highlight this quarter was our annual Coveted Dead Bird Event—a short story contest written to a different theme each year and must be set in the San Joaquin Valley of California. All Sisters can enter. Since we had almost as many out-of-chapter entries as local this year, we initiated the Bye-Bye Birdie Award.

All first place winners receive a trophy with a black bird—claws up—on top, with a certificate and prizes. We also christened the Laughing Lucas Award—a trophy with a rubber chicken tied to the column and a funky gold turkey statue on top.

Chelle Martin of New Jersey was delighted with her two awards: "Just wanted to let you know my package arrived this morning. The trophies are beautiful! We got another half foot of snow since it started this morning. Which reminds me, does the chicken have a sweater? It's cold here in NJ! Thinking of taking the birds and migrating to a warmer climate. The Laughing Lucas is hysterical. It's nice that you award trophies because they can be displayed and are a definite inspiration to write more. Also a nice reminder of good work when you're having a bad writing day. I wish more chapters and contests offered trophies."

This year's theme is "Signs of Murder" and the due date is June 4, 2011. Is there a Coveted Dead Bird Event in your future?



Meredith Cole and Ellen Byrum relax after their presentation at the September meeting in Central Virginia.



Even rain doesn't dampen the spirits of Tri-State members!



SinC Joins Library Champions

by Mary Boone

I'm very happy and excited to tell you that Sisters in Crime is now a part of the American Library Association (ALA) Library Champions program. As the SinC Board discussed in San Francisco and during our recent phone conference, this membership will go a long way in raising SinC's profile within the library community, especially at the two big ALA conferences, Midwinter and Annual.



Here's a brief description from the Library Champions Office at ALA of member benefits:

The Library Champions' benefit package is aimed at increasing exposure of Champion members at conferences and meetings, as well as throughout the year, to more than 63,000 ALA members (roughly 1/3 of that membership, give or take a couple thousand, attends the ALA annual conference each summer). The benefit package also includes valuable incentives for our exhibitors, including:

- Discount rate on exhibit booth space at ALA's Annual Conferences.
- Discount rate on ALA mailing lists.
- Recognition in a multi-page article in *American Libraries Magazine*, on the ALA website, and in various prominent locations during our annual and midwinter conferences.

I've advocated our membership in Library Champions because I believe by doing so, we'll see more traffic to the SinC booth at ALA Annual. This affiliation also means that even though SinC National does not exhibit at Midwinter, we will still have a "presence" there next January! And, the return for us, hopefully, is that librarians who are not already members of SinC will join—and add SinC authors' books to their collections.

I can't tell you how proud I've been to have served on a board that has for the last two years voted to give a \$1000/month to libraries to buy books. As important and wonderful as that has been, I believe by joining Library Champions, SinC has taken another important step in its on-going support of public, academic, special, and school libraries.

The Library Champions program developed and continues to support the Campaign for America's Libraries, a national advocacy initiative that provides communications tool kits for libraries to use at a local level. The initiative's goal is to "keep attention focused on the lifeline libraries provide communities and the value they offer." As funding for libraries continues to diminish, this advocacy couldn't be more critical.

I can't wait to go to ALA this summer and see Sisters in Crime's name on the huge "wall of Champions" which greets attendees entering the exhibit hall!



Mary Boone is a reference librarian and PR coordinator at the Wood County District Public Library in Bowling Green OH. She serves on the SinC Board of Directors as library liaison.

New Chapter Handbook

by Sandra Parshall

How do you start a new SinC chapter? What's involved in producing a chapter anthology? Where can you find answers to these and other questions? In the new *SinC Chapter Handbook*, now available for download from the national website.

Chapter leaders from New England to California pitched in to produce a handbook that's packed with practical guidance for presidents and board members at the local level. Subjects covered include effective PR for chapter events, social networking, newsletters, tips for keeping a chapter vigorous, local workshops and conferences, and much more.

Any SinC member may access the *Handbook*.

- Login to SistersinCrime.org
- Click on "Resources"
- Click on "Chapters"
- Look on the second paragraph for the link "Chapter Handbook"

Or, go to tinyurl.com/35f4lvq.

SinC's New National Publicist

Interview with Kathie Felix by Ellen Hart

In September, Kathie Felix became our national go-to PR representative. Working for years as a journalist, editor, and publicist, her experience spans radio and TV, national PR programs for trade associations and professional organizations, as well as special projects for small businesses and promotional work for award-winning authors. She has direct experience in the book business, working for a time as a manager for the nation's two largest book-selling chains. We are lucky to have such a talented, knowledgeable, and energetic woman helping us make our way through the maze of today's promotional possibilities.

Last week, I had a chance to ask Kathie a few questions about PR in general, and her work for Sisters in Crime in particular. Here are her fascinating responses.

Tell us a little about your background with Sisters in Crime? When did you join?

I attended my first Sisters in Crime meeting in the 90s, not too long after the launch of the Chesapeake Chapter. I was intrigued by the luncheon speakers and the meeting place—a spot that looked like the perfect location for a film about a private investigator working the mean streets of the 1950s or 60s.



My work schedule caused a hiatus in my membership, but I returned to SinC about four years ago and have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to make new friends, learn more about the current state of the book publishing industry and lend my on-the-job experience to help the organization in any way that I can. I'm currently the Chesapeake Chapter's treasurer and program co-chair (sharing program planning with Donna Andrews) and I handle other chapter assignments as they come up.

You've had a fascinating career, working on such projects as the Quincy Jones-produced opening ceremonies of President Bill Clinton's first inauguration televised by HBO and "An Evening with the President at Ford's Theatre," produced for ABC. What brought you to this field?

The simple answer is my college education. While studying print journalism at American University, I had the opportunity to experience communications jobs of all types—from sitting in the control room with the director of a live television news program to serving as the lead editor on the school's professional news service to crafting PR programs that were actually used for years by national and local nonprofit organizations. The university had some of the nation's best communicators on the faculty and I really enjoyed the time I spent working on projects for their classes.

Since becoming our go-to publicist, you've worked on a number of projects. What's been the most interesting? The most challenging?



Easy answer. The most interesting and the most challenging project was the launch of the mystery buyer study. The media representatives I've spoken with have been very happy to have the information contained in the study. As one editor said, this is the type of information he often wishes for—and it's the type of information that is the most difficult for him to obtain. It's been an honor and a privilege to help Sisters in Crime get the recognition it deserves for launching this important effort.

What changes have you seen in working with the media over the years? Is it harder today to get publicity? Easier?

A good story and good information presented in a professional and useful manner will always lead to news coverage. I've worked as a magazine editor and a newspaper columnist and that background helps me to understand what's helpful on the receiving end of a press release.

Obviously, though, when working with media outlets that may have lost as much as 80 percent of their staff and more than 50 percent of their news space, you're going to have to be creative and nimble to make the most of the possible placement opportunities.

Over the years, however, one thing has remained constant—it's the first rule of com-

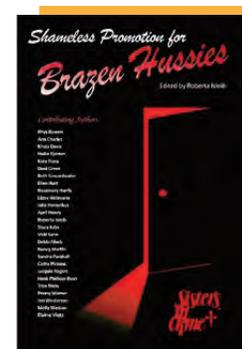
See [Interview p. 7](#)

SinC Publications

Congratulations! You've just sold your first book. Then you get the big question: How do you plan to promote it? Worry no more. In the revised version of *Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies* (don't you love the title?), 28 members of Sisters in Crime share their expertise and experience on the subject of book promotion—from book tours, bookstore visits, library events, blogs, group blogs, blog tours, television, Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads, website development, e-book marketing, and more. You'll find a little of everything here. If one kind of promotion doesn't suit your personality or your budget, another should.

To get your copy of this must-have guide (only for SinC members), go to www.lulu.com/product/paperback/shameless-promotion-for-brazen-hussies/14847372 (pb) www.lulu.com/product/ebook/shameless-promotion-for-brazen-hussies/14848330 (ebook)

Breaking and Entering, originally available only to SinC members, has now been released to the public in paper and e-format from Lulu.com.



Interview - Cont'd. from p. 7

munication—you must first identify your audience and the best way to reach that audience. It's always been part of the PR job to consider the constantly-changing world of the media carefully and match it to your message in the best way possible. The only difference now is that changes in media can occur at an amazingly rapid speed.

What do you like most about the work you do?
The best part of a PR day is its unpredictability. When you work in PR, you're always adapting to the needs and circumstances of the job. In some ways, it's a lot like being a detective.

You've been working on SinC communications projects for a while now. Is there anything you'd like to say about current efforts or plans in the pipeline?

Oh, yes! We've got more than a few things going on in the communications department. I've been working with Beth Wasson on some upcoming changes to the SinC website. We're looking at a variety of ways to present information online—and methods to analyze the hits and page views.

In other areas of the digital realm, we continue to explore the best ways to use electronic media, including Twitter (follow us @SINCnational), Facebook (SistersIn Crime) and the SinC blog (sisters-in-crime-sinc.blogspot.com).

The mystery buyer research project will continue and, as new data becomes available, SinC will be releasing more information. In addition,

we'll be releasing data on the latest findings from the review monitoring project.

We've got some great writer resources to promote, such as the SinC-published books—*Breaking and Entering* and *Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies*—the SinC breakfast at Malice Domestic, and a writing conference to be scheduled later in the year.

We're expanding our communications efforts with libraries and library professionals. Recently, SinC completed arrangements to become a partner in the American Library Association's Library Champions program, a strategic communications effort focused on the value and benefits of libraries.

In addition, we've initiated an ongoing series of email reports to library professionals on SinC resources that they may find of interest, such as the "Find An Author" search engine on the SinC website. And, of course, we're working to keep the "We Love Libraries!" book-funding program in the spotlight now that it's been extended through 2011.

These are just some of the highlights from the top of the PR "to do" list. Overall, the Sisters in Crime PR program can be expected to highlight the many resources and practical tools that SinC provides for members of the mystery and crime fiction community.

Digital Book World Reports

Authors S. J. Rozan and Rosemary Harris attended the second Digital Book World summit in New York at the end of January and provided a series of thought-provoking entries for the Sisters in Crime blog.

S.J.'s three-part entry examines 10 of the sessions presented on Day 1 of the conference. These included a presentation of the results of a 2010 publishing executive survey commissioned for the event, a panel discussion by publishing industry CEOs, and industry predictions from the event organizers. Additional sessions focused on enhanced content, e-publishing in Europe, Google's view of its publishing mission, a financial analysts' discussion on the future of brick-and-mortar bookstores, a consideration of the future of independent bookstores, a look at the publishing sales department in transition, and a discussion of author branding.

Rosemary's two-part take on Day 3 of Digital Book World provides insight into opinions, polls, surveys, charts, predictions—and conflicting information. "The one thing everyone agreed on was that the existing business model for book publishing was being challenged seriously, both in terms of print versus e-book sales and the sales of print books online," she wrote. "The differences arose in how those challenges would be met, and how fast, and who would still be standing when they were."

To see the five blog entries spanning February 3–8, go to sisters-in-crime-sinc.blogspot.com.

Briefly—from Beth

SinC Renewal Deadline— March 30

Still need to renew for 2011? Not sure if you've renewed? Visit www.sistersin-crime.org and log in.

Once logged in, click on your membership profile and make sure your date is 2011.

Or, click on the membership directory and check to make sure your membership date is 2011. It is quick and easy. You may also retrieve your username and password by clicking on "log in" and entering your email address. If our system has your current email address it will help you with your username and password.

SinC Annual Malice Domestic Breakfast

Sunday, May 1, 2011 at 7:30 AM
Hyatt Regency, Bethesda MD

Don't miss our annual breakfast at Malice. Come meet new friends and enjoy a plated breakfast, fun door prizes, and a toast to Sisters in Crime's 25th Birthday.

Reservations are needed and can be made by MC/Visa on this site or by sending your \$20 check to:

Sisters in Crime
PO Box 442124
Lawrence, KS 66044

Deadline: April 22, 2011 in Lawrence KS. Please include your e-mail address and a confirmation will be sent to you.

Please send special dietary requests to Beth at SistersinCrime@juno.com.



We Remember Ruth

by Molly Weston



Although most mystery readers can rattle off names of their favorite authors without thinking, many look puzzled when asked their favorite editor. Genre insiders—readers, librarians, authors, bookstore owners, and SinC members—show no hesitation: Ruth Cavin. Ruth died Sunday morning, January 10, in New York and the news reverberated around the mystery community.

Because so many SinC members have won the St. Martin's Press/Malice Domestic (SMP/MD) best first novel mystery contest which Ruth founded, I contacted members who got their start by winning this prestigious award. The response was overwhelming.

Notifying winners

"Most writers have a vivid memory of the moment when they learned their work was finally going to be published. The time of year, the time of day, what was going on before the phone call or the email or the letter, and what happened after it . . . all of these things are emblazoned on the memory in moments like those," Vincent O'Neil said. "For me, it was a phone call from Ruth on a wintry day in March 2005. She didn't immediately start talking after I picked up the phone, making me think I was speaking to a telemarketer. When she did start talking, it was to say that *Murder in Exile* had won the SMP/MD competition that year, and I will never forget the sensation of receiving that news. Thanks, Ruth."

Elizabeth J. Duncan remembered a March afternoon when looking at a pile of papers that needed grading. "Should I make a cup of tea and make a start on those papers or take a nap? The nap was winning when the phone rang." It was Ruth, making her splendid announcement. "And in that moment, my life changed. I worked with Ruth through the publication of two books. She made very few changes to the manuscripts but suggested a change for the title of *The Cold Light of Mourning*. She said *Dead Posh* would not resonate with American readers. Maybe she was right.

Writer's editor

Almost every author referred to Ruth's editing. "She was my first and only editor. She guided me through eight books so smoothly I hardly knew they were being edited," wrote Robin Hathaway. "Ruth has often been described as an icon in the mystery field, and, of course, she

was. But 'icon' is a cold and aloof word, and Ruth was neither. She was warm and down-to-earth and funny, as well as an expert editor.

"She had a knack for ferreting out those nasty weak parts that every author knows are there but tries to ignore or cover up. Ruth zeroed in on every one of them, drawn to them like a magnet, and wrote in the margin something such as, 'This doesn't seem to be working,' or 'Better look at this scene again.'

"The wonderful thing about Ruth was, she rarely told you how to fix the problem. She merely drew it to your attention and left the solution up to you. Usually this was enough, but if you needed help, she was more than willing to make suggestions. She viewed her role as a sympathetic guide rather than an all-knowing dictator.

"Ruth was sympathetic and kind, but she also demanded your best work. And, because of her skills as an editor, she usually got it."

SinC President Cathy Pickens wrote, "When my first book came out, Joanne Sinchuk at Murder on the Beach in Florida said, 'You have Ruth for an editor? A writer told me he'd give his right arm to have Ruth.' That was the day I knew to be thankful that (1) she'd picked my book and (2) I still had both my arms.

"Ruth . . . had a surgical precision when it came to editing. I never got long editorial notes from her, but what I got was always exactly what the book needed.



"She just knew what made a good book. As my friend Terry Hoover said, 'I always knew I'd like a Ruth book from St. Martin's.' That made her a reader's editor, too," Cathy finished.

"Any smoothness or grace in my books is due to her sharp eye and even sharper editorial pencil," recalled Charlene Weir. "If she said a section must go, it went. The only exception was a description in one book of stone fence posts. She insisted there wasn't any such thing as stone fence posts. I insisted there was. Finally I had to send her a picture. It was the only argument with Ruth that I ever won."

Sarah Shaber agreed, "Ruth was an authors' editor. She encouraged her writers to write their own books. She never suggested plots and rarely requested changes in my manuscripts. But when she did see an issue, she made herself clear. I am a pithy writer, and once I added about 25 pages to a book to get to 50,000 words. Ruth identified every single bit of padding and recommended, strongly, that I remove it! When I told her I was worried that the book was too short, she said, 'The book is as long as it is.'

"On one visit to her office, I noticed that the other manuscripts in her office were noticeably thicker than the one I'd just sent her, and again expressed my wish that I could write longer. 'My dear,' she said, 'of all my authors you are the one who knows best what to leave out of a book.' I considered that a compliment and have never forgotten it.

"Ruth Cavin edited my first five books. I wouldn't be a working writer without her encouragement. It was a privilege to know her."

Ruth was Ruth

Meredith Cole's story reflected Ruth's humor. "When I won the SMP/MD competition, Ruth said she was glad that I was local so we could go to lunch. I went to the Flatiron building and

Ruth - cont'd from p. 8

she gave me a small tour of the Minotaur offices. And then she said apologetically that she couldn't walk very far these days, so we would go to Bobby Flay's restaurant nearby. She was bent over from osteoporosis, and I was shocked at how frail she was. But she had a great sense of humor and spirit. She said a friend who also had osteoporosis got tired of people asking why he was bent. He would walk around pretending that he had lost something and was searching for it on the ground. Ruth thought that it was a great idea, and she said she tried his technique frequently when she walked to the train station."

"When I met Ruth," Sarah Shaber recalled, "I was struck by her lack of pretense. She wore a denim dirndl skirt, a checked shirt with the tail hanging out, and sandals. No jewelry, no make-up, and hair that she might have cut herself! She just wasn't concerned about appearances—hers or anyone else's."

Remarkably, Ruth continued working until a few weeks before her death. Her attitude about her age inspired many of her authors. Elizabeth Duncan shared, "She taught us that you're never too old to enable the dreams of others." Sarah Shaber agreed, "Despite her advancing years Ruth never behaved like an elderly person. At every convention she held court in the bar—unless she was outside smoking a cigarette!"

"I may have been the last winner Ruth chose in the SMP/MD contest—there was no winner in 2010," wrote Gerrie Ferris Finger. At any rate, I'm very lucky and happy to have begun my career with Ruth and St. Martin's. Ruth was 90 when she chose *The End Game* in 2009.

Beyond SMP/MD

Ruth didn't confine her influence to traditional mysteries. Thomas Kaufman sent a note about Ruth and another St. Martin's Press contest.

"I first met Ruth at Bouchercon in 2000, but we didn't really get a chance to talk. A few years later I submitted a manuscript in the Private Eye Writers/St Martin's Press PI Novel Competition, then forgot all about it. Really. I mean, I knew there was no way I would win, right?"

"Fast forward three months, and I'm in Wisconsin shooting a commercial when my cell phone went off. I sent the call to voice mail (hey, I was in the middle of a shot). The message was from Ruth. I wish I could've saved it, she

had this warm tone in her voice, as though she had something extraordinary to tell me. What she said was, "Hi, this is Ruth Cavin calling from St Martin's Press. I have wonderful news for you, but you have to call me back to find out what."

"Now, other folks might have just left a message saying, hey, you won the competition. But not Ruth, she wanted to do it person-to-person, in real time. That's the kind of lady she was.

"Shortly after that, I went to see her in New York. I was nervous about meeting her, but she put me completely at ease. We talked about mysteries . . . and my book. When she asked me what I thought about my book, I said I hoped she could help me make it better. She smiled, nodded and, of course, that's just what she did. Not just for me, but for so many writers who came before and after.

"There are very few people who have helped me as much as Ruth. She knew so much more than I about mysteries, yet she always treated me with kindness and respect. For this I'll always be grateful. And I will miss her very much."

"Ruth had impact well beyond her authors, too," Marcia Talley said. "Once at Malice, when I was between publishers, totally out of the blue, she invited me for breakfast and gave me some good advice. I ended up signing elsewhere, but I'll never forget her kindness."

The Ruth I knew

Ruth gave me an opportunity to meet and review so many authors. At my first Malice in 1992, Ruth made her annual request for judges for the SMP/MD award. I'm sure I didn't actually knock anyone over when rushing to give her my contact information, but I could have. Even before the thick envelopes began arriving, Ruth added my name to her "News from the Flatiron" mailing list. When I talked with her about the great releases, she was the first to tell me that "if you're a reviewer, you don't have to buy the books—we'll send them to you." None of my selections ever won the SMP/MD contest, but several of the authors have published excellent mysteries later. I've always reveled in their success. I can only imagine the delight Ruth felt in seeing so many of her proteges become household mystery names.



Photos, clockwise from top of page 8

Young Ruth contributed from Ruth's family to Hector DeJean, Minotaur Publicity Manager.

Ruth and her publisher, Thomas Dunne, contributed by Hector DeJean.

Robin Hathaway and Ruth at Malice Domestic, 1998. Contributed by Robin Hathaway.



Conferences & Happenings

Sleuthfest 2011

Deerfield Beach FL • March 3-5

Florida's premier mystery writer's conference, sponsored by the Florida chapter of MWA. Guests of honor are Dennis Lehane and Meg Gardiner, and the spotlight speaker is S.J. Rozan. Workshops and expert panels, including a full track devoted to forensics. See www.mwafloida.org/sleuthfest.htm.

Left Coast Crime

Santa Fe NM • March 24-27

The annual mystery convention sponsored by and for mystery fans will be at the La Fonda Hotel. Guests of honor include Martin Cruz Smith, Margaret Coel, Steve Havill, Steve Brewer, and Marvin Lachman. For more details visit www.leftcoastcrime.org/2011/.

Just Write!

St. Louis MO • April 8-10

Elaine Viets and Nancy Pickard are featured speakers at the Missouri Writers' Guild conference which will include pitch session, panel discussions, book signings, buzz sessions, and networking. Details are at www.missouriwritersguild.org.

UW-Madison Writers' Institute

Madison WI • April 8-10

"Writers helping writers" will have seminars, panels, nationally-known mystery agents accepting pitches, manuscript and proposal critiques, speed coaching, and more. For more information see www.UWwritersinstitute.org

Malice Domestic

Bethesda MD • April 29-May 1

The annual "fun fan" convention in metropolitan Washington DC salutes the traditional mystery. Special guests include Carole Nelson Douglas, Donna Andrews, Sue Grafton, Janet

Rudolph, and Anne Murphy. More information is at www.malicedomestic.org.

Crimefest

Bristol UK • May 19-22

The venue for the conference "where the pen is bloodier than the sword" will be the Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel. Featured guest authors include Deon Meyer and Don Winslow. More details will be added at www.crimefest.com.

Mayhem in the Midlands

Omaha NE • May 26-28

The Embassy Suites Hotel is the host. Guest of honor is Laurie R. King. Toast-master is S. J. Rozan. Contact Terry Wingate at twingate@omahalibrary.org or Sally Fellows at sallyfellows1@cox.net for information. See www.omahapubliclibrary.org/programs/mayhem.

Bloody Words

Victoria BC, Canada • June 3-5

The venue will be the Hotel Grand Pacific. Guests include Michael Slade and Laurie R. King; the MC will be Denise Dietz. William Deverell will receive a lifetime achievement award. Highlights include panels, agents, a short story contest, and forensics. For more information see www.bloodywords2011.com.

California Crime Writers Conference

June 11-12 • Pasadena CA

Four tracks of workshops, a cocktail party with agents, manuscript critiques, and keynote speakers T. Jefferson Parker and S. J. Rozan will highlight the biennial conference at the Hilton Pasadena. Conference details are at www.ccwconference.org.

Historical Novel Society Conference

San Diego CA • June 17-19

The Society's bi-annual celebration of historical fiction will feature Cecelia Holland, Harry Turtledove, Jennifer Wertz, Diana Gabaldon, and C. C. Humphreys. For more information contact the program chair at rscott@san.rr.com or visit www.historicalnovelsociety.org.

American Library Association

New Orleans LA • June 24-27

Sisters in Crime will host a booth in the exhibit hall at ALA. Author and librarian SinC members who live in the area or who may be

traveling there during the conference dates, are invited to represent SinC. For more information, contact Mary Boone, Library Liaison at macboone@me.com.

Public Safety Writers Conference

Las Vegas NV • July 14-17

Open to those writing fiction or non-fiction about or for any public safety field. Conference speakers include a coroner, fire firefighters, police officers, and others in the writing field. See www.policewriter.com.

Thrillerfest 2011

New York City • July 6-9

Hosted by The International Thriller Writers, the conference will feature R. L. Stine and Ken Follett as Thrillermasters and Robert Crais, Diana Gabaldon, and John Lescroat as Spotlight Guests. For more information see www.thrillerfest.com.

Threkstons Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival

Harrogate UK • July 21-24

The festival where "your only crime... would be to miss it" will be high quality, wall-to-wall crime for four solid days. Featured guests are Linwood Barclay, Lee Child, Martina Cole, Lisa Gardner, Tess Gerritsen, Denis Lehane, and Howard Marks. For more information and to book, contact the Festival Office at +44 (0)1423 562303 or email crime@harrogate-festival.org.uk. Details and updates are at www.harrogate-festival.org.uk/crime.

St. Hilda's

Oxford UK • August 19-21

Plans are underway for the conference "The Anatomy of Justice." More information is forthcoming.

Seascape "Escape to Write" Writers Retreat

Chester CT • September 9-11

Participants in his non-conventional conference will pre-submit 25 pages of a work-in-progress (WIP). S. W. Hubbard, Hallie Ephron, and Roberta Isleib will lead focus groups which will examine the WIP from different perspectives. Full details can be found at www.robertaisleib.com/seascape.html.

See **Conferences & Happenings** p. 11

Conferences & Workshops

Please send all conference and workshop information, including those sponsored by SinC chapters, directly to Molly Weston, *inSinC* editor, at mysteryheel@mac.com. Include conference name, date, location, brief description, contact information, and website. Please include "Conference" or "Workshop" in the subject line. Deadline for March is January 15.

SinC Board Meeting

December 7, 2010 (Conference Call)

Cathy Pickens focused our first meeting of the newly-elected board on a discussion of basics: Why do we exist? Who do we serve, who do we want to reach, and what do we hope to accomplish? We serve not just our current members but the broader cause of equality for women crime writers. Part of the issue is calling attention to continuing inequity. What evidence do we have that we as an organization are effecting change?

Providing professional development is one role. We can provide programs both to develop writers' craft and to promote an understanding of writing as a business, both for pre-published writers trying to get started and more established writers who want to keep up with changes in the industry. We discussed outreach through regional and local book festivals as well as other means of connecting with readers.

We also can become a "go to" source of information. The Publishing Summit reports and the SinC/Bowker study of mystery book buyers are the kind of research that can make a difference for writers and establish our "brand" in the book publishing world.

Cathy Pickens urged us to continue to think about how to focus our efforts and what partnerships would be valuable and will set up future conference calls.

Our new Vice President/President-Elect Frankie Bailey was welcomed by Cathy Pickens.

We voted to make our publication *Breaking and Entering* available through Lulu.com to anyone who wants to purchase it. *Shameless Promotion for Brazen Hussies*, out in February, will be available first to members only for a period of time.

We agreed to supply bookplates to go with library grants as suggested by Sandy Parshall.

We discussed plans for a SinC into Great Writing program at Bouchercon next fall in St. Louis; more to come as plans develop.

Beth is working on website upgrades. There will be a SinC breakfast and a chapter luncheon at Malice as well as a time for discussion among members.

We discussed ways to get the SinC name out there: A SinC panel proposal has been submitted for the Public Library Association meeting next year. Meanwhile, we will be discussing how to maximize our presence at the American Library Association this summer. We discussed publicity plans for the release of the SinC/Bowker Mystery Buyer Study; Barbara Fister reported she will present a paper, "Sisters in Crime at the Quarter Century" at the Popular Culture Association in April. Triss Stein is also presenting the Bowker data at a national conference.

Submitted by
Barbara Fister, Secretary



Plan to Celebrate?

Will your chapter celebrate Sisters in Crime's 25th birthday? A milestone year for our organization is coming up, and it's time for chapters to start planning special events at the local level. All chapter presidents and board members attending Malice Domestic are invited to meet over lunch for a planning session. We'll talk about things that worked well for SinC's 20th anniversary, such as author panels at libraries and birthday parties at independent bookstores, and we'll brainstorm fresh ideas. Any former chapter leaders who were involved in 20th anniversary events are welcome to attend and share their experiences and suggestions.

The lunch will be on Friday, April 29, at a time that will not interfere with conference

Conferences & Happenings - Cont'd. from p. 11

Bouchercon

St. Louis MO • September 15–18

"Spirits of St. Louis" will convene at the Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel with special guests Robert Crais, Charlaire Harris, Colin Cotterill, Val McDermid, Sara Paretsky, Kate Stine, Brian Skupin, and Ridley Pearson. The ever-developing website is at www.bouchercon2011.com.

Writers' Police Academy

Jamestown NC • September 23–25

Experience the most hands-on, interactive and educational experience writers can find to enhance their understanding of all aspects of law enforcement and forensics. Speakers include Dr. Katherine Ramsland, Dr. Denene Lofland, Alafair Burke, Rich McMahan, and Josh Mouin. See more at writerspoliceacademy.com.

Love Is Murder

Chicago IL • February 2012

Love is Murder provides an educational forum to writers and readers to further their knowledge of writing, publishing, and the business of book production. See www.loveismurder.net.

Law & Fiction: Getting Facts Straight

by Leslie Budewitz

In a mainstream novel I recently read and enjoyed, a legal secretary tells the protagonist that an object he took from a murder victim's home can't be used because stolen evidence is inadmissible. Now that's just pure fiction. Nothing in the Rules of Evidence precludes the use of stolen evidence—unless it was stolen by the police, which is a whole 'nuther matter, and not one we'll talk about today. So, what should have happened when the client's son walked into the lawyer's office with stolen evidence?

First Step

The secretary should have been very careful about what she discussed with him. While it's tempting to share information with family members, the attorney-client relationship is with the client, not the family. The lawyer's obligations are to the client—regardless of who's paying the bill.

That may mean drawing some lines—not always easy, or comfortable. More often, it means seeking and accepting information from relatives, while exercising extreme care in what is said in return. The client gets to make the final decision and should be consulted before critical information is shared. Revealing information to a non-client could also violate the attorney-client privilege, which belongs to the client and is waived if the information is shared with a third person. As well, relatives don't always have the same goals and interests—especially if the evidence could implicate them or someone else close to them. Ratchet up conflict by creating relatives who refuse to be left out of the loop.

Keep in mind that staff are bound by the same rules as lawyers on issues like confidentiality and conflicts of interest.

Second Step

The secretary should not have made a pronouncement about what's admissible in court and what isn't. Experienced legal secretaries can be very knowledgeable, but good ones are careful not to step into the role of the lawyer and to avoid offering legal opinions. To her credit, the fictional secretary did tell the client's son to show the object to the lawyer, and he promptly did. The lawyer quickly recognized its significance to the defense. That's when things get tricky.

Tricky Business

An object has evidentiary value because of what it demonstrates or suggests—whether it makes the existence or non-existence of a material fact more or less probable. Whether the object was stolen won't usually effect that determination. But the theft may raise other questions: Where has the item been? Has it been tampered with? Why was it stolen? And, is the thief credible? In other words, as lawyers say, "it goes to the weight" of the evidence, not its admissibility—that is, how much credence and value the jurors should give it.

Fiction vs. Reality

In that story, the criminal investigation was incomplete, but far enough along that the crime scene had probably been released. The police either did not find the object—or more likely, given its nature, didn't think the item had any evidentiary value. Under the US Supreme Court decision in *Brady v. Maryland* (1963), prosecutors have an obligation to disclose to the defense any exculpatory evidence—material evidence helpful to the defense—even without a specific request. Failure to do so is reversible error if the appeals court concludes that the evidence was material and could well have created a reasonable doubt about guilt. In *Brady*, a murder case, the prosecution withheld a co-defendant's statements admitting the actual killing. Failure to disclose was clearly reversible error. In the fictional case, if prosecutors had the object and knew its potential impact, they would have been required to disclose it.

But the defense lawyer quickly recognized the object's import. So what are his obligations? *Brady* doesn't apply to the defense because in a criminal case, the government has the burden of proving its case beyond a reasonable doubt, while the defense doesn't have to prove—or disprove—a thing.

Still, defense counsel may be required to disclose the evidence in the discovery process, and even if not, may choose to do so for other reasons. "Discovery" is the legal process of exchanging information about the case. In olden days, trial was often by surprise, but in the modern era, with codification of the Rules of Civil and Criminal Procedure and the Rules of Evidence, the system trends toward disclosure. Discovery is limited to facts—neither party has to reveal its strategy or arguments.



In some states, the rules require reciprocal discovery. Others require advance disclosure of persons known to have relevant information, or of witnesses, exhibits, and physical evidence the parties intend to use at trial. Written notice of certain defenses may be required, most notably the intent to rely on an alibi. Disclosure allows the other side to investigate and respond appropriately. Disclosure also promotes "judicial economy"—meaning that trials will proceed more smoothly and quickly, and unnecessary trials will be avoided.

Plus, disclosure could give defense counsel sufficient grounds for dismissal, or for negotiating a plea to a lesser charge.

Back to the fictional case

If the crime scene hadn't been released, the defendant's son could be charged with tampering with evidence—or the equivalent local crime. Prosecutors could charge him with theft. Make it more or less likely in your fiction depending on how much heat you want to put on your character. The lawyer could also be charged with receipt of stolen property, another reason why he or she would probably report the incident to the prosecutor. Receipt of stolen documents may be one charge in a possible prosecution against WikiLeaks for publication of documents known to have been obtained without authorization.

Bottom line

Be careful with your assumptions. Stolen evidence may be admissible—if it's relevant. Problems in its acquisition go to weight, not admissibility. Court rules and ethical obligations bind staff as well as lawyers. An attorney's obligations are to the client, not the family. Prosecutors must disclose "exculpatory evidence." Local rules on disclosure of other evidence vary—check them out. And remember

See [Law and Fiction](#), p 13

Deviant Addiction: Why Offenders Go Back for More

by Katherine Ramsland, PHD

Ted Bundy. Ed Gein. Jeffrey Dahmer. Even experts can be mystified about an appetite for heinous acts like cannibalism, necrophilia, and other bizarre fetishes. If not outright psychotic, behavior is either egosyntonic (internally harmonious) or egodystonic (disharmonious). Most sexual serial predators commit egosyntonic crimes. That is, they experience no personality disruption during their activities. They're comfortable with what they're doing because their sex drive downplays odious aspects (like odors and maggots) while promoting their desires. This is known as orgasmic conditioning.

The Research

A team of psychologists proposed this theory in 1965 as they studied the way masturbation assisted the formation and maintenance of deviant sexuality. They surmised that whatever was associated with an orgasm, whether an image or object, the stimulation derived gets physiologically recorded. The more regularly this occurs with a consistent image, the stronger the image grows as an erotic trigger. Although this can remain a private fantasy, if acted out it can become compulsive, especially when drugs or alcohol relax inhibitions. If the person lacks social bonding that supports moral behavior, isolation can inspire dependence on fantasies that ignore—even defy—social protocol. Such individuals then become entrenched in an addictive cycle of craving. If the experience is as good as (or better than) expected, the brain's reward mechanism ensures more of the same. It may also pressure a person to act out.

Dahmer

Take Dahmer, for example. He'd lured and murdered 17 men before one victim broke away and returned with the police. In Dahmer's apartment, officers noticed the smell of decomposition. In the refrigerator, they dis-

covered human heads, intestines, kidneys, and a heart. Around the apartment were skulls, bones, rotting flesh, dismembered torsos, and complete skeletons. Polaroid snapshots showed mutilated bodies. That day investigators carried out the remains of 11 different men, and Dahmer admitted to six more. He'd overcome the vileness of his activities because his addiction had influenced his evaluations: What mattered most was gratification.

Dahmer had surrendered to an addictive feedback loop that began with whatever had aroused him as he'd developed a sex drive. As a shy boy who'd sought refuge from parental battles, he'd wandered around the woods. As he grew fascinated with dead animals he found, his brain offered a rush of pleasure with each new discovery. Whenever he grew bored or scared, he went looking for what he enjoyed, growing accustomed to death and decomposition. With puberty, he began looking at pictures of men in pornographic magazines. He wanted to touch a naked body, so he fantasized about knocking out a jogger in his neighborhood. Gradually, his sexual desires featured unconscious people over whom he had control. The fusion of sex and death was but a short step away.

One day he took a hitchhiker home. This excited him. When the man decided to leave, Dahmer killed him. Now he had the body he'd craved. Even if he'd initially been shocked, he'd also been aroused. While dismembering the body for disposal, he grew even more excited, masturbating several times. This vital rush cemented his erotic enthrallment with a corpse. Although it was years before he killed again, nothing in his life of successive failures had equaled that high. To stave off depression he would fantasize about, and then actively seek, the thing that made him feel good. Thus, the cycle would repeat, further strengthening the



erotic charge. To enhance it, he would take greater risks and do more things to bodies, or lure victims more often.

In Summary

This same process applies to others. Their bizarre sexual compulsions can be traced to images or acts that stimulate the brain's reward mechanisms. When what's dangerous and forbidden appears erotically transcendent, it will lure those with little inhibition. Over time, their neural reward system processes these behaviors into body memories, ensuring pleasurable repetition.

In sum, orgasmic conditioning is a developmental process involving self-stimulation for release. Due to the dynamic of our physiological feedback loop, the person is likely to repeat whatever it took to achieve sexual satisfaction. If this act associates stimulation with a deviant idea, object, experience, or image, the individual will incorporate it into a masturbatory stimulus. It may then become necessary for arousal. Substance abuse, social isolation, and fantasy processes erase deviant aspects as they prioritize self-centered pleasure.

Katherine Ramsland is a writer and a professor of forensic psychology and criminal justice. Among her 38 books are The Forensic Psychology of Criminal Minds and The Mind of a Murderer: Privileged Access to the Demons that Drive Extreme Violence. She has also published more than 1,000 articles.

Law and Fiction - Cont'd. from p. 12

that there may be good reasons for disclosing information even when not required, if it can help the client. At any point along the way, things can go wrong—and for a fiction writer, that's good.

For more on using the law realistically in your fiction, see my columns and Questions of the Month at www.lawandfiction.com.

Leslie Budewitz is a practicing lawyer and a fiction writer. Her book for writers, tentatively titled Books, Crooks & Counselors: A Fiction Writer's Guide to Getting the Law Right, will be published by Quill Driver Books in 2011.



A Conversation with Val McDermid

by Sandra Parshall

Val McDermid, the internationally-known author of the Tony Hill suspense novels and many others, serves on the national board of Sisters in Crime as an at-large member. A native of Scotland, she now divides her time between Northumberland and South Manchester. Recently, Val shared her thoughts about crime fiction and gave a glimpse into her own writing life.

Your books are popular in many countries. What makes some books click with readers in different cultures, while others appeal only to the home audience? What's the universally appealing ingredient?

I've often wondered myself what readers in Tokyo or Buenos Aires make of life on the mean streets of the North of England! The only answer I can come up with is based on what I enjoy in novels set in other cultures—the characters chime with my experience of the world. I recognise their attitudes and reactions and that's what anchors me in a story whose environment is unfamiliar. So when I read Andrea Camilleri or Karin Fossum, I find myself in the familiar world of human behaviour that makes sense to me. I hope that when readers pick up my books, they have that experience too.

Do you see differences between US and British attitudes toward violence in crime fiction, and violence toward women in particular? Do you have any thoughts on why so many women enjoy serial killer novels in which female victims are mutilated, tortured and murdered?

I don't see much difference between US and British crime fiction in terms of the way we write about violence. There's been an ongoing debate in British mystery circles about the issue of how violence is portrayed, particularly about women both as creators and consumers of

Sandra Parshall



books that explicitly deal with violence against women. As far as reading it is concerned, I think there is a complex set of motivations in play. Women are brought up believing they are potential victims of violence—"don't walk down

that alley, don't go out alone after dark, don't talk to strange men." These are the voices we all have in our heads and one way to confront those fears is to read about what can happen, but in an environment where we know we're safe and where we know there will be a protagonist who will wreak some sort of vengeance on the perpetrators. I think of it as a way of cauterising fear. And of course, it's fun to be scared in a safe way—think of fairground rides, where we scream and scream and scream, then get off and stand in line to do it all over again!

The big plus of having been conditioned to look at the world as a potentially threatening place is that women get to understand the fear of violence and powerlessness from the beginning. Generally speaking, when women write scenes of violent attack, it's written from the inside, from the perspective of the victim. That's what makes it all the more scary when women write violence—the reader's experiencing being on the receiving end. With a few notable exceptions, when men write similar scenes, they write as spectators. And that's just not so scary. Maybe that's why women who directly confront what violence is and what it does get so much more stick than men doing the same thing.

Do you think crime fiction on the whole, in all countries, has become more graphic in recent years? Have we all gone a little crazy or is it simply an effort by writers to match the real violence we see on TV every day—to present crime as it really is, instead of cleaning it up?

The crime novel has moved on a long way from the cosy drawing room of Agatha Christie or the stylised knight errant of Raymond Chandler. One of the challenges contemporary writers have taken on is to write much more honestly about the society we live in. So when a writer is dealing with crime, it's necessary to be direct and authentic. There's still a place for the mystery novel as pure entertainment, but I think the really interesting writing comes when we try to offer a realistic picture of the world we inhabit. But that doesn't mean writing tacky gore-fests. I've no interest in the kind of novel whose prime directive seems to be to shock and disgust and there are authors whose books I will not pick up for that reason.

Your police detective, Carol Jordan, is refreshingly real and normal, unburdened by the quirks and disastrous personal problems that some fictional



Val McDermid at Bouchercon 2010

female cops have. She doesn't drink on the job, she's not snarky and defensive, she's a strong person but doesn't act as if her main goal in life is proving she's more of a man than the men around her. Where did Carol come from? Did you create her as a deliberate balance to Tony Hill's tortured persona? Or did you base her on real women detectives you've known or observed?

Thank you. When I first created Carol and Tony in *The Mermaids Singing*, I thought I was writing a standalone, not the start of a series, so I didn't do any long-term planning for either character, just gave them the personalities and histories that would work in terms of that novel. But, as soon as I'd finished, I realised how well they could carry other stories between them and so the series was born.

My first intention for Carol was that she should be a good cop, driven by a powerful sense of justice, but set apart from her colleagues because of her gender. She would be the bridge between Tony and the police. As the book progressed, she developed a more rounded personality.

She's not based on any one individual, but she's drawn on my observations of women operating in a predominantly male world, which in my case was the world of national newspapers in the 1980s. (I worked in the northern bureau of Mirror Group Newspapers. When I joined in 1979, there were only three women journalists on a staff of 137!) As the series has progressed, I've allowed her to assimilate the weight of what's happened to her and around her. She's probably my favourite of all my characters.

You're best known for your thrillers, but you've also written some lighter, traditional mysteries. Which is easier? Which comes most naturally?

I've been lucky enough always to have written the stories I was passionate about. They often take a long time to travel from the initial seed

See "McDermid, p. 15



D.V. Berkom, *Bad Spirits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*, Books ToGoNow.com, November 2010

Dorothy Bodoin, *Spirit of the Season*, October, 2010, *Another Part of the Forest*, Wings ePress, February

Leslie Budewitz, "The Afterthought," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, December 2010

Warren Bull, "Murder Manhattan Style," *Ninth Month Publishing*, December 2010

Jane Cleland, *Deadly Threads*, Minotaur Books, April

Sheila Connolly, *Fundraising the Dead*, October 2010, *A Killer Crop*, Berkley Prime Crime, December 2010

Sue Curran, *Battle of Wills*, Create Space, October 2010

Hannah Dennison, *Thieves!*, Berkley Prime Crime, January

Carola Dunn, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, St. Martin's Minotaur, March

Hallie Ephron, *The Everything Guide to Writing Your First Novel*, Adams Media, January and *Come and Find Me*, Wm. Morrow, March

Peggy Ehrhart, *Got No Friend Anyhow*, Five Star, January

Susan Furlong-Bolliger, "Death by Jello," November 2010 and "Christmas in Killarney," December 2010, Untreed Reads Publishing, "The Queen's Necklace," *Woman's World*, March

Beth Groundwater, *Deadly Currents*, Midnight Ink, March

Karen Harper, *Dark Harvest*, Mira Books, January, *The Irish Princess*, NAL, February

Victoria Heckman, *Kapu-Sacred*, Revenge Publishing, November 2010

Sue Ann Jaffarian, *The Ghost in the Polka Dot Bikini*, Midnight Ink, February

Stacy Juba, *Sink or Swim*, Mainly Murder Press, January

Debbi Mack, *Least Wanted*, Renegade Press, February

Nina Mansfield, "Summer Reading," *Mysterical-E*, Winter 2010

Nancy Martin, *Sticky Fingers*, St. Martin's Minotaur, April, *Foxy Roxy* (originally, *Our Lady of Immaculate Deception*) St. Martin's Minotaur, January

Frances McNamara, *Death at Pullman*, Allium Press, March

Katherine Ramsland, *The Forensic Psychology of Criminal Minds*, Berkley Trade, February

L.J. Sellers, *Passions of the Dead*, Spellbinder Press, December 2010

Connie Shelton, *Sweet's Sweets*, Secret Staircase Books, January 2010

Cathi Stoler, *Telling Lies*, Camel Press, and "Fatal Flaw," *Beat To A Pulp*, April

Leslie Wheeler, *Murder at Spouters Point*, Five Star, and "Dead Man's Shoes," *Thin Ice*, Level Best Books, November 2010

Elizabeth Zelvin, "Choices," *Murder to Mil-Spec*, October 2010 and "Navidad," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, January

Amnon Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage:1950-1975*, Scarecrow Press, April

Awards

Gloria Alden won first place for "Cheating on Your Wife Can Get You Killed" in the Love Is Murder First Short Story Contest.

Norma Huss' "Yesterday's Body" was nominated for an epic award in the mystery/suspense category.

Sending Your Entry

- Author, book or story title; publisher, magazine, or anthology; release month
- Awards and nominations in sentence format with period
- Docket in subject line
- No further information, entries older than six months, or colors.
- Editor(s) of anthologies only with a story in anthology
- Pen name? Add real name in parentheses. Indicate if you do not want this included.
- Send to Patricia Gulley
- weycottage@yahoo.com

McDermid - Cont'd. from p. 14

of an idea to the finished book. 'A long time' can be as much as 20 years!

There's a different set of challenges between series and standalones. With a series, the central character nexus is always the starting point, with the abilities and the limitations of those characters steering how the story can develop. With a standalone, the plot is the primary driver, then I have to sit down and work out whose story it is and why these people would do the things I need them to do to make this damn book work.

Writing books with a different tone—*Fever of the Bone* vs. *A Darker Domain*—is as much a pleasure as a challenge. I can't write two similar books back to back—I get too easily bored!

How do you divide your time between travel, promotion, and writing?

Badly! I seem to spend the months between August and December traveling and promoting. I don't go anywhere the first three months of the year because I deliver at the end of March. I spend the rest of the time doing a bit of promotional stuff—festivals and the like—and thinking about the next book.

Are you able to write while you're traveling?

I prefer not to work on novels while I'm traveling—short stories and journalism work OK, though—but I have learned the hard way that, when I have to, I can finish a novel on trains and planes and in hotel rooms. Yuck.

One of your favorite diversions is playing the guitar. Tell us about this. Do you have a favorite piece you play over and over, perhaps when you're trying to work out a plot problem in a book?

I have two acoustic guitars because I divide my time between two houses. I have a Yamaha FG-

160, I've had for 37 years, and a Martin D-16-GT, I've had for seven. I play what I suppose one would call contemporary folk. I've not been playing enough lately. I need to get back into the habit of picking up the guitar daily. The last really challenging thing I taught myself was "Tonight" from *West Side Story*—a bit off my usual beat but my son wanted to play it on violin and needed the accompaniment.

This interview originally appeared on the Sisters in Crime blog at sisters-in-crime-sinc.blogspot.com.

Visit Val's website at www.valmcdermid.com — where you can find a 1974 photo of Val playing guitar on the lawn at Oxford and a 1977 picture of her with Prince Charles.

Sandra Parshall is the author of the award-winning Rachel Goddard mysteries. She serves on the national SinC board as Chapter Liaison.



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Writing Contests

Helen McCloy/MWA Scholarship

Annually, End of February

The Helen McCloy/MWA Scholarship for Mystery Writing seeks to nurture talent in mystery writing—in fiction, nonfiction, playwriting, and screenwriting. See

www.mysterywriters.org/?q=AwardsPrograms-McCloy

Coveted Dead Bird Event

June 4

Sponsored by the San Joaquin SinC, entries to this short story contest are written to a different theme each year. Story must be set in the San Joaquin Valley of California. All Sisters can enter. Full details at www.sj-sinc.org.

The Al Blanchard Short Crime Fiction Award

Midnight, April 30

Cash prize, publication in Level Best Books' anthology, Dead Calm, and free admission to the Crime Bake Conference. For details, visit www.crimebake.org/Al.htm.

William F. Deeck-Malice Domestic Grants Program for Unpublished Writers

Annually Mid-November

Grants to two unpublished writers in the malice domestic genre at the Malice Domestic Conference.

Golden Donut & Don Knotts Silver Bullet

Watch for updates

The Golden Donut short story contest and Don Knotts Silver Bullet Novel contests are sponsored by the Writers Police Academy. Updates at writerspoliceacademy.com.

St. Martin's Minotaur/MWA First Crime Novel

Annually, November

Open to any writer who has never been the author of a published novel (excepting self-published or one who is under contract). Murder or serious crime or crime must be at the heart of the story.

www.mysterywriters.org

[/?q=Contests-writers](http://www.mysterywriters.org/?q=Contests-writers) or

us.macmillan.com/Content.aspx?publisher=minotaurbooks&id=4933

Writing Contests

Please send all information for mystery writing contests, including those sponsored by SinC chapters, directly to Molly Weston, *inSinC* editor, at mysteryheel@mac.com. Include contest name, entry deadline, sponsor, and website. Include "Contest" in the subject line. Deadline for June is April 15.