

THE MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA — SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

Q&A: Elizabeth George **Freshening Up With A Murder**

When a mystery series loses its ability to thrill, it becomes relegated to the remainder bin. Not so with the New York Times best-selling novels of Elizabeth George, featuring the aristocratic Scotland Yard Inspector Thomas Lynley and his working class partner Barbara Havers. Even after 14 novels Ms. George continues to garner praise and new fans with each installment in her series. She has been nominated for the Macavity and the Edgar. She has won the Anthony, the Agatha, France's Le Grand Prix de Literature Policiere, and Germany's MIMI award. Most of her novels have been filmed for television by the BBC and can be seen in the United States on PBS's "Mystery."

Ms. George was recently interviewed by MWA SoCal board member and author of the Tucker Sinclair series, Patricia Smiley.

It's a challenge to keep a series

fresh, but Ms. George manages to do so by shaking up the status quo, most recently in her 2005 novel *With No One As Witness*, in which she did something few authors have the courage to do. She killed off one of her series characters.

PS: Why did you do that?

EG: "It was an artistic decision. Writing a series instead of writing stand-alone novels requires the author to keep opening up the story of the lives of the continuing characters, not closing down the story of their lives. The death created a situation in which I can now pick up any one of a number of threads to use in an ongoing story."

When fans learned of the murder, there was an outpouring of grief and anger that left Ms. George

nonplussed but philosophical.

EG: "I've long believed that it's the responsibility of the writer to make the reader feel something. I try to do this with every novel I write. John Steinbeck describes novel writing as a trinity, which only exists when the writer, the work, and the reader are present together. I subscribe to this philosophy in that I wish to engage the reader's emotions. I wish the reader to care deeply about all of the characters. So the fact that people reacted as they did told me I was successful."

Do you ever fear that you won't be able to maintain the high quality of your writing?

EG: "I expect that for any honest

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The President's Rap Sheet

I'm writing this as I return from the MWA National orientation program. Meeting 10 other Chapter presidents, sharing ideas with them, and learning that I'll have these new friends as a resource greatly reduced my anxieties about becoming Chapter president. While

I'm deeply honored to be entrusted with the leadership of our Chapter, I feel a great responsibility to you. We have an excellent Chapter Board, all committed to delivering the programs and services that you want. Patty Smiley has put together a great slate of monthly meetings,

and Eric Stone has assumed editorship of the newsletter. Our workshop has returned to the Mystery Bookstore, we'll be active at both the *Los Angeles Times* and West Hollywood book fairs, and planning has begun for our annual awards event. In mid-

February, we're holding a day-long retreat for Board members, with the help of our previous Chapter presidents, and we expect to develop new and exciting programs as well as revitalize our existing offerings. We'll be calling on you to get involved!

Les Klinger

(Continued from page 1)

writer, the fear is always there. If someone isn't just churning out the same novel over and over again, then this has to be a scary process. As PD James once said, 'When I finish one of these novels, I don't know how I did it and I don't know if I'll ever be able to do it again.'"

Given the corporate bottom-line mentality in today's publishing industry where it is increasingly difficult to sell fiction, what qualities must a person have in order to transition from an aspiring writer into a published author?

EG: "At one time I would have said talent, passion and discipline. But that was in the days when publishers were interested in sponsoring the career of a writer, which they knew would take some time to get off the ground. However, this is not to say excellent writing, passion about the process, commitment to stay the course, and discipline do not get a person published because they do. Excellent writing will find a publisher eventually."

What does it take to sustain a career over the long haul?

EG: "Show up at the computer or the typewriter or the legal pad every working day and stay there until the work gets done. It involves being willing to listen to criticism from editors, write and rewrite, and continue to challenge yourself and grow."

"It's a job. Don't wait for it to be fun."

Ms. George's latest Lynley novel is What Came Before He Shot Her (October 2006), and she is working on the next in the series, Careless in Red.

Barbara Seranella

1956—2007



A good friend, a fine writer, a courageous human being. Winner of the Anthony Award for Best Short Story, and the first recipient of MWA SoCal's Dennis Lynds Award for Social Consciousness in Crime Fiction.

Barbara died on January 21 of end stage liver disease while waiting for a liver transplant. A celebration of her life is being planned for this month (February.)

For information, please contact: Debbie Mitsch, Barbara's publicist, at martinandmitsch@aol.com.

Sleuthiness: The Name Game

"What's in a name?" Shakespeare asked. But we all know how important the names of our characters can be in evoking images for our readers. Before you pull out the phone book or purchase the latest baby name book for ideas, take a good look at www.babynames.com/.

Also, check out the Google ads on the site for more names and meanings, some specific to cultures and countries – e.g. Irish (www.babynamesofireland.com/), Native American (www.native-languages.org/baby.htm), or mythical and biblical names (www.behindthename.com/ and

www.everyclick.com/uk/topclickjuly/search/?keyword=baby%20names).

For a good chuckle, go to the "fun stuff" drop down menus and "Random Renamer" on some of the sites, enter your information and watch the entertaining results.

Patti Shinnors

Transom Notes

AWARD NOMINEES. EDGARS: Congratulations to our chapter's Naomi Hirahara and Paul Levine, both nominated for Best Paperback Original; and to Clyde Phillips and Thomas Moran, nominated (individually) for Best Television Episode Teleplay. **HAMMETT:** Robert Ward. Good luck to you all. **FEBRUARY:** New chapter member **Robert Fate's** February signings of *Baby Shark* will take him far afield: the Seattle, Nashville, TN, Birmingham, AL, Montgomery, AL, and more locally to Barnes & Noble in Westlake Village on the 26th. **Elderhostel** presents *A Day of Discovery* at the Long Beach Police Department's West Station. Tours are scheduled for February 15, 22, March 6 and April 3. elderhostel@email.elderhostel.org. Unlike the two-hour free Sheriff's tour, this is an all-day event that includes lunch and costs \$65. **Linda Palmer** will be one of the headlined authors at the 8th annual Love Is Murder conference in Chicago in February. **Gay Kinman** is putting together mystery writing classes to begin on the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7pm at the Mystery Bookstore 1036 Broxton Ave., (Westwood) Los Angeles. She's looking for instructors to present a 20 minute class, take questions and then sign their books.. gkinman@juno.com. mystery-bookstore.com. **The Literary Guild** of Orange County presents members **Gayle Lynds** and **Paula Woods**, along with Susan Straight on February 9 at 6:30 for dinner and a program at the Women's Festival. Cost: \$50. Contact Linda Miller at 949-831-5202. **Patricia Smiley** is slated to deliver the keynote speech at the Twenty-Fourth Annual Writers Workshop sponsored by Santa Barbara City College, February 24. patriciasmiley.com. **Ona Russell** has been contributing to the *Orange County Lawyer* magazine. This month, her column is Arguing by the Book. Authorizing Intent will appear in the February issue. onarussell.com. The fourth in **Linda Johnston's** Kendra Ballantyne, Pet-Sitter mystery series MEOW IS FOR MURDER is a February release from Berkley Prime Crime.

MARCH: Sunday, March 4th from 2-4 is **Joanne Fluke's** launch party for *Key Lime Pie Murder*. You're invited for "a bite and some bubbly" at The Bookhouse, 17048 Devonshire in Northridge. murdershebaked.com.

Patricia A. Matthews 1927-2006

When Patricia Matthews joined MWA SoCal in May 1965, she'd been a published author for eight years. By the time she died, on December 7 last year from complications due to congestive heart failure, she'd written 45 novels published in her own name, in the names of Patty Brisco and Laura Wylie, and several in collaboration with her husband Clayton Matthews. She'd written innumerable short stories, articles and poems.

Though Patricia wrote suspense thrillers, and contributed stories to *Alfred Hitchcock's*, *Ellery Queen's* and *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazines*, she was best known for her historical romantic fiction. A number of her romances sold in the millions of copies.

She started writing at age 11 and made her first sales, of poems, at 30. In 1977 she gave up her day job after the success of her romance novel, LOVE'S AVENGING HEART. Her last book was RENDEZVOUS AT MIDNIGHT, in 2004.

Talking to *Contemporary Authors* (a biography series available for download on Amazon.com), Patricia said: "To bring pleasure and escape and mental stimulation to others is not an insignificant thing."

Amen to that.

Saturday, March 10 from 3-5, **Sheila Lowe** will be signing her new mystery, *Poison Pen*, featuring a forensic handwriting expert, at The Mystery Bookstore, Westwood, 1036 Broxton Ave. She'll talk about using handwriting analysis to help solve crimes. sheilalowe.com.

OTHER NEWS: **Doug Lyle** invites everyone to visit his updated website and offer feedback. dplylemd.com. The audiobook of **Andrew Klavan's** latest novel, *Damnation Street*, has received a 2006 Listen Up Award from *Publishers Weekly* and was awarded Best Author-Read Fiction. andrewklavan.com. **Joan Blacher's** non-fiction article, *Murder on the Campus*, appears in the winter 2006 edition of the Mystery Readers Journal. The **L.A. Times Festival of Books** is April 27-29, and the annual pre-Festival anniversary party at The Mystery Bookstore is on Friday the 26th. Mark your calendar. Lastly, a reminder that **Hawaii** has a new **Sisters in Crime** chapter that is interested in having MWA members speak to it. Contact Debby Atkinson, atkinsond001@hawaii.rr.com, and use "SinC speaker" as a subject line.

Compiled by Sheila Lowe

A New Independent Bookstore? In Downtown L.A.?

In the wake of independent bookstore closures, Metropolis Books, recently opened in the heart of the gentrifying historic core of downtown Los Angeles. The first bookstore launched in the area in 25 years, Metropolis is owned and operated by a self-published mystery author, Julie Anne Swayze, a member of Sisters in Crime L.A. She hosted a number of mystery writers at her grand-opening festivities. MWA SoCal Board member and author of the Mas Arai series, Naomi Hirahara interviewed Ms. Swayze.

NH: I've heard people say, "a new independent bookstore? Is she crazy?" How do you respond?

JAS: 'Independent' says it all, I wanted to work on my own, and I love books, and working for other people all of my life in retail and in the buying offices gave me the experience to open my own store. [Once the idea] was in my head, it just stuck.

What was the hardest part?

Location is key. I really wanted it in Pasadena, but it didn't need another bookstore. It occurred to me that downtown was an underserved market, and had been for a long time. My friend Mark Schmacher opened Old Bank DVD in 2005 and has been very successful, I talked to him and he said whatever you do be sure your store is located in the historic core of L.A., because that's where revitalization is happening first. So, I wrote the business plan, took classes from the Small Business Administration, brushed off my dusty business degree, and remembered what it was like for those 17 years that I managed stores for large corporations. The hardest part was finding the space, everything else was easy, Of course being featured in the *L.A. Times* (Calendar Section, Page 1, December 18) helped my marketing plan.

I was surprised to see how much development is taking place on Main Street. How are you reaching out to the community there? What sort of events have you had?

Events were the first thing on my mind after the grand opening; you want to keep people coming into the store, so I partnered with Teka-Lark Lo, who is the downtown poet broker, and we will have poetry read-



Photo: Ed Fuentes/viewfromaloft

ings every second Saturday from 4-6 pm at the store. I have authors booked from now until April. I'm working with publishers to get their front-list authors to come down, and we have organized a book club.

Now that you're wearing a bookseller's hat vs. an author's hat, what sort of things do you wish writers would understand about the retail book biz?

What surprised me most is that everyone sells to you, large press, small press and self-published authors. Without promotion or an event, it is very hard to sell an author who a customer may not be familiar with. I would tell any author, particularly self-published, to be professional. I have authors dropping off books all day long who want me to put them in the store. It's best for authors to put together a proposal, send it to the store, and then call the bookseller later. I wish I had the time to read all of

the books. It's just not feasible to do that and run the store.

Are your customers interested in mysteries? If so, any particular type?

My customers range in their love of mysteries. We have quite a few hard-crime, true crime and lots of chick-lit mysteries readers. I plan on bringing in a mystery author that writes from a different type of genre each month so that we showcase a variety of styles.

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February Luncheon:

Charles Higham Talks With Les Klinger

Charles Higham is a literary detective.

In his *ORSON WELLES*, he found the director's lost South American epic *IT'S ALL TRUE* in an obscure vault.

In *THE ADVENTURES OF CONAN DOYLE* he traced the Sherlock Holmes stories to their original murder cases and in the course of writing the book found the whereabouts of the missing manuscripts as instructed by Conan Doyle's daughter.

In *THE DUCHESS OF WINDSOR*, which spent 23 weeks in the top five of the *New York Times* Bestsellers list, he traced the facts that for the first time solved the infamous 1943 murder of the world's then richest man, Sir Harry Oakes.

In *MURDER IN HOLLYWOOD* he solved the killing of Hollywood director William Desmond Taylor after interviewing the murderess-star.

In *ERROYL FLYNN: THE UNTOLD STORY* he proved, through previously hidden documents, Flynn's Nazi connections, which the *Washington Post* confirmed following an international furor. For many years Higham was the *New York Times*' Hollywood

correspondent. He has had a total of six bestsellers and has been awarded the prestigious Prize of the Creators of the Academie Francaise and the Poetry Prize of the London Poetry Society. His plays have been hits in Los Angeles and New York, and at the nation's leading



Williamstown Theatre Festival. He has been featured on Entertainment Tonight, Larry King Live, the History Channel (three times), Today and Good Morning America. Later this year, W.W. Norton is bringing out a full scale reprint of his book *ADVENTURES OF CONAN DOYLE*, complete with blurbs from notably reticent blurbers, Paul Theroux and John Fowles.

Les Klinger is the new president of SoCal MWA and arguably, having won an Edgar for *THE NEW ANNOTATED SHERLOCK HOLMES*, our chapter's greatest Sherlockian. Perhaps he and Higham will lock horns over who takes that honor. Even without a fight, it should make for a fascinating conversation.

RESERVATION FORM: Sunday, February 25 2007 / Taix Restaurant

1911 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles 90026 (parking on premises: \$2.50)

Reception from 11 am / Luncheon 11:45 am sharp / Program from 12:30 pm

Advance reservations \$20 (member or guest); Payment at the door: \$25

Make Checks Payable to: MWA-SoCal; Remit to: MWA-SoCal / 12021 Wilshire Blvd. #506, Los Angeles, CA 90025

Member & Guest(s)Names _____

Phone _____ **or E-mail** _____

Please specify entrée for each attendee:


	MEMBER	GUEST
Chilled Salmon Salad		
Chicken Diablo		
Penne Pasta Monagasque (vegetarian)		

All meals include choice of soup, salad, sourdough bread, coffee, tea, sherbet.

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Southern California Chapter
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* To advertise in *TMOC*, visit our website at *
* www.SoCalMWA.com for information. *

The Crime Calendar

Left Coast Crime—Feb. 1-4, Seattle, WA,
www.lcc2007.com
Love is Murder— Feb. 2-4, Rosemont, IL,
www.loveismurder.net
Murder in the Magic City—Feb. 10, Birmingham, AL,
www.southernsinc.com/
High Desert Crimes Book Fair—March 24, Sierra Vista,
AZ, www.clik.to/sistersincrime
Sleuthfest—April 19-22, Miami Beach, FL www.mwa-florida.org/sleuthfest.htm
Edgars Symposium & Banquet—Apr. 25-26, New York,
NY, www.mysterywriters.org
L.A. Times Festival of Books—Apr. 28-29, Los Angeles,
CA, www.latimes.com/extras/festivalofbooks/
Malice Domestic - May 4-6, Arlington, VA,
www.malicedomestic.org
Mayhem in the Midlands—May 24-27, Omaha, NE,
www.omahapubliclibrary.org/mayhem/
Murder in the Grove— June 8-9, Boise, ID,
www.partnersincrimeboise.com/murder.htm
Hardboiled Heroes & Cozy Cats—June 15-16, Dallas, TX,
www.mwasw.org/conf.html

Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter

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