



THE MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA - SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER
MARCH & APRIL 2012

MWA MEETS ATF

BY DAN KELLY

Three members of MWA's Southern California chapter recently participated in a fascinating Citizens Academy run by the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

The program, which ran for seven weeks in late 2011, included presentations on all the things you might expect: history of the organization, tales of risky undercover operations, and strategies for successful prosecutions. But the experience shifted into overdrive on three successive weeks in which agents led the civilians in realistic simulations of actual ATF surveillance and assault techniques. This was then capped off by a memorable morning at the Bureau's private shooting range in which participants were allowed to blast away with an amazing array of machine guns, shotguns and handguns.



Stephen Jay Schwartz with the weapon of the day

Naomi Hirahara, author of the Mas Arai mystery series, and your correspondent, enrolled in the program after chapter president, Gary Phillips, was contacted by ATF information officer Christian Hoffman. Stephen Jay Schwartz, author of *Boulevard* and

[continued on page 4]

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

THE PRESIDENT'S RAP SHEET, 2
YOUR EDITORS SPEAK, 3
UPCOMING WORKSHOPS, 7
MURDER, 8
CHAPTER NEWS, 11



THE PRESIDENT'S RAP SHEET GARY PHILLIPS

Here we are at the end of March. Whew. For those of you who were able to turn out for our first lunch meeting in February, I'm sure from the comments I received you enjoyed hearing the interesting and informative stories our guests Detectives Patrick Barron and Heather Gahry related about their cases. If you missed the talk, you can hear a recording of it in the members only section of the website. It's too bad we had to cancel the lively talk and Q&A we were going to do with Brian V. Hunter of the Secret Service as our technical expert lunch speaker, but we hope to re-schedule him.

Your board has more lunches and functions planned for this year that will be rolling out, and we always welcome feedback and suggestions to improve these and other services to you, the membership. In particular, mark your calendars for the L.A. Times Festival of Books. The two-day book fair is back at USC, but is a weekend earlier this year, April 21 and 22. We will like last year gather at Skylight Books that Friday for our book people party. Then that weekend as usual have a booth to meet and greet the public and looking to again coordinate with local booksellers to set up signings. So please be on the lookout for e-blasts about this as we need your involvement in hour shifts at the booth.

Now before I leave you, here's this tidbit; membership in our chapter is over 350 people

[continued on page 3]

The March of Crime is the newsletter of the Southern California Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

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Opinions expressed herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mystery Writers of America, or of the Southern California Chapter.



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YOUR EDITORS SPEAK

DAVID J SHERMAN & NATASCHA JAFFA



I was listening to the audiobook *Extreme Focus* by Pat Williams and Jim Denney, and in it Pat reminded me of the story of Hemingway, the bet, and the six-word short story: "For Sale. Baby shoes. Never worn."

It is good to be reminded that brevity is a key to great writing. Always strive to make it shorter.

You always read TMOG from front to back, right? Make sure you do this month as you'll find info on a very interesting Scottish contest.

Have an awesome spring. We'll be back in May.

Dave

PREZ...

and informally the board has set a goal of 375 members (and, ahem, just to be crass for a moment, more members means a larger percentage of monies from National) by year's end. Spreading the word about the noirish-cozy goodness of So Cal MWA is everyone's job. Don't be shy about talking up the chapter in your writers groups, at your black tie soirees, the grocery store...you get the idea. It may sound trite but it's true, the chapter is only as strong as we make it, and we want to make it work for all of you.

I leave you by stealing a great line from Joseph Wambaugh's *The Choirboys*, "Stay frosty."

Until next time,

Gary

[continued from page 1]

Beat, was already on board, having been sponsored into the program by ATF Citizen's Academy alumnus along with author Andrew Peterson.

The Academy was especially interesting because news of the Bureau's so-called Fast and Furious scandal was breaking at the same time. This scandal arose from a botched plan in which ATF agents allowed guns to be sold to Mexican drug cartels, in the hope of tracking the weapons back to cartel leaders. Unfortunately, the agents lost track of the guns, which later turned up at border crime scenes. The agents leading our program were clearly unhappy about all the negative publicity, but made it clear that the scandal had nothing to do with their office.

Andre Birotte, Jr., the lead U.S. Attorney for Southern California, opened the first session with a brief description of the work done by his staff of 250 attorneys.

A Special Agent from the Riverside field office then related the colorful history of the organization, which was founded in 1919 to help enforce the Volstead Act, which banned the use of alcohol with the help of such slogans such as "Keep sugar in legitimate hands." This agency, a predecessor of the ATF, was known as the Treasury Department's Bureau of Prohibition. It recruited its most famous agent, Eliot Ness, in 1929, at a salary of \$3,000/year.

Yet in many ways, the Bureau's most active phase began in 1934 when Prohibition ended and the government decided to control alcohol by taxing it. The Bureau spent time lodged in several other agencies until it was finally placed in its current position with the Justice Department in 1972.

A Special Agent from the Long Beach field office then profiled a huge 2007 investigation called Operation Ghost Town, in which the ATF acted in concert with the LAPD, the U.S. Attorney, the Los Angeles County District Attorney, and the Los Angeles City Attorney's office. Spurred by intelligence from a confidential informant (a "C.I."), the Bureau focused on illegal activity at the seedy Catalina Hotel in nearby Wilmington. Although the area is dominated by Sureno (Mexican Mafia) related gangs, the Ghost Town crimes were led by a Bloods "set" known as the East Side Pain.

The criminals had established a sophisticated drug-selling enterprise in which spotters were posted on the Pacific Coast Highway to screen prospective drug buyers before allowing them to enter the side streets, where the actual sales took place. The spotters used walkie-talkie cell phones to communicate with their confederates.

In the program's second week, the agent from the ATF Riverside office returned to describe the fast-growing and amazingly lucrative activity in illegal tobacco products. He described one operation in which criminals manufactured fake Marlboro Light cigarettes in China then sent them to the U.S. in giant shipping containers. For an investment of about \$200,000, the gang was able to clear a cool \$2 million per shipment by circumventing tobacco taxes.

Due to ATF's 'churning authority,' operations like this can produce profits that are then used to fund future investigations. The agent confessed disappointment when he was first assigned to this seemingly dull operation, but soon learned why many veteran criminals had switched from the dangers of dealing illegal drugs to the relative safety of selling fake cigarettes.

Week three began our action sequence.

Our class was divided into groups of six then trained by ATF handlers in the use of some big, old-school walkie-talkies. My group's assignment was to follow an undercover ATF agent who hoped to buy guns from bad guys at Glendale's elaborate Americana Mall. The bad guys were played by other agents.

My six-person team quickly overcame initial shyness to form a perimeter around our C.I. as she waited for the bad guys to appear. Since we had no idea what was going to happen, we oriented ourselves in the unfamiliar setting by using big stores and nearby streets as our compass points. After our C.I. met with her buyers, the trio headed for an elevator to the parking area. To our chagrin, we briefly lost track of the group at this point, possibly due to signal limitations of our walkie-talkies, but quickly picked up the scent again and stuck with our C.I. like glue after that.

At the urging of our ATF handlers, we also began changing positions and alternating assignments in an effort to remain undetected. To our amazement, we also managed to stay under the mall cops' radar. And while a handful of shoppers did seem to sense something was going on, none of us were confronted or arrested as we followed the development of the "buy."

Week Four found us in Cerritos, where the ATF has established a tactical training center inside an abandoned medical facility. A squad of about 15 agents led by Ken Tomlinson frisked us as we entered the building, then trained us to form tightly-packed 4- and 8-person teams called "stacks" in preparation for actual assaults. The first team member covers the left side of a room, while the second guards the right and the third is responsible for the center. The fourth team member is posted just inside the doorway to protect the team from any hallway dangers.



Mystery Writers of America, Inc. (MWA) was established in 1945 by a dozen or so like-minded mystery writers for the purpose of promoting and protecting the interests and welfare of mystery writers and to increase the esteem and literary recognition given to the genre.



Naomi Hirahara preparing to shread the target

After at least 20 practice assaults, things got more serious. We donned ATF helmets and flak jackets, and were armed with both paint-ball and rubberized versions of the Sig-Sauer P226 pistol. I understand how a skeptical reader might think this sounds a bit silly, but our ATF trainers – some of whom played 'perps' inside the rooms that we were attacking – created an impressively realistic atmosphere. One agent hid on top of a supply cabinet and effectively killed your correspondent, although



Dan Kelly on the firing line.

fortunately he hit me with mere words, rather than paint (or lead).

Ten days later, we gathered for our most amazing experience at the ATF shooting range up in the Angeles National Forest, near Lake View Terrace. The mood was charged as our ATF handlers split the class in two then led half of us to the shooting range while the others learned about the dangers posed by homemade explosives. This presentation included handling, but not firing, two large bazookas.

The agents imposed strict rules within the actual shooting range, including the wearing of eye and ear protection at all times. The weapons were arrayed on approximately eight tables, all of which faced a series of paper targets. We were allowed to shoot any gun we wished. Among our options, all seized in ATF raids, were a fully-automatic AK-47, a vintage Thompson automatic machine gun, the classic M4 Army rifle, a 10-shot shotgun, plus a variety of smaller arms, including an actual Sig-Sauer P-226, a .357 magnum, and several Glocks.

The ATF itself uses the Glock 22 pistol and the M4 rifle.

As you might expect, firing live ammo from such powerful weapons is vastly different from reading about them or watching them on TV. My personal favorite was the M4 in its semi-automatic setting. I felt I was in control of its lethal force. Author Schwartz preferred the H&K USP .40 pistol.

But I confess to being appalled by the uncontrollability of the fully-automatic guns. We watch heroes and villains grab such weapons all the time in our popular entertainment, but in my opinion, there is no way to avoid collateral damage when using automatic weapons.

We returned to ATF headquarters in Glendale for our final two sessions. The first of these included what the agents called "shoot/no-shoot" training. The sessions begin with us facing a video screen while holding a specially-rigged pistol then a series of short film clips appear on the screen, during which you had to make snap decisions on whether to shoot any of the characters on screen.

The classroom portion of this session included a presentation by a Certified Fire Investigator from the ATF Santa Ana field office, who shared recollections from his 24 years experience. An ATF Explosives Enforcement Officer then told some hair-raising tales from his 16 years with the Bureau, which included time spent with the Dept. of Defense in Iraq and Afghanistan. The session closed with an appearance by Explosives Detection Canine Marianne and her ATF handler. The pair has worked events such as the 2010 Super Bowl and a Presidential inauguration, although Marianne is now preparing for a comfortable retirement as the agent's family dog.

Our final class centered on the experiences of the agent described as the world expert on biker

gangs. His main target has been the Mongols, which was seriously disrupted after this agent helped an undercover agent become a full member of the gang during a three-year effort known as Operation Black Rain. A small army of 1,600 law-enforcement personnel were involved in the 5 a.m. take-down, which included serving 122 Federal warrants, 90 arrest warrants, and the seizure of 109 bikes. To learn about the full scale of this operation, author Schwartz recommends the book *Under and Alone* by William Queen (Ballantine Books, 2007).

This class then concluded with a graduation ceremony led by John A. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles field division. This was a bittersweet moment for the agents involved, as they had just learned that Agent Torres was moving to the Bureau's Washington headquarters.

On April 23, Agent Tores' replacement is joining the team. Steven J. Bogdalek is coming from the St Paul Field Division where he was the Assistant Special Agent in Charge there overseeing five criminal enforcement groups and one intelligence group in a three state area of responsibility.

The next Citizens Academy is expected to happen in Spring 2013. Interested parties should contact Special Agent Christian Hoffman. The price is certainly right for this amazing program; whole shootin' match is free of charge.

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club has just started a writing workshop at their facility on 4th street. It is on Thursdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, and costs \$5.00, which is tax deductible as the money goes to charity.

Your Plot Thickens is hosting a free seminar, "How to Publish for the Small Press". Special Guest Edan Lepucki will be at Gatsby Books, Long Beach, on May 24, 2012 from 7PM-9PM. Edan Lepucki author of *If You're Not Yet Like Me*, will discuss the pros and cons of publishing with Flatmancrooked, how she got her publishing deal as well as how she is marketing her book. Lepucki will also be reading from her novella and signing copies. For more information or to RSVP visit www.yourplotthickens.com

Independent Writers of Southern California has invited all writers (member or non-member) to bring their writing, ideas, problems, questions and complaints. Receive support, laughs, juicy controversy, and plenty of networking at a free satellite session located in the Pasadena/Altadena location on April 13th. The session starts at 8:30AM. Coffee Gallery, 2029 N. Lake Ave, Altadena 91001. 626.-398.7917. Information: janenrollins@gmail.com

MURDER: WHAT'S HANDWRITING GOT TO DO WITH IT?

BY SHEILA LOWE

On the morning of February 19, 2000, I was preparing for a trip to a forensic conference when my cell phone rang. I didn't catch the name of the person on the other end, but he asked for my ex-husband. "We've been divorced twenty years," I said, annoyed. "Why are you calling my cell phone and asking for him?" The caller's next question put me on high alert: "Do you know Jennifer Lowe?"

My heart started racing. "Yes, she's my daughter." She had called me the evening before, telling me she was leaving her boyfriend, Thomas Schnaible, a special agent for what was then known as INS and is now Homeland Security. She was planning to come home and sort out her life. I conjured up all sorts of horrors that the Orange County Sheriff's investigator on the phone might be about to impart. But nothing I imagined could have prepared me for his next words: "I'm sorry to tell you, your daughter has been murdered."

Never mind that I'd told him I was on my cell phone and might have been driving on the freeway. He never asked if there was someone else at home with me. But in the end, what good way can there be to break that kind of news?

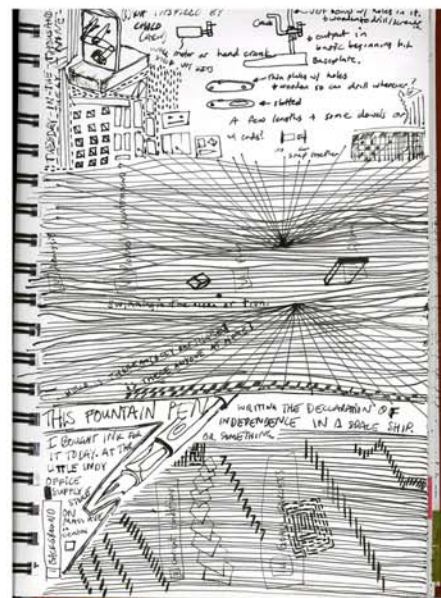
Through my disbelief and shock, I knew immediately that Tom was responsible. Oddly, I don't remember the investigator telling me that he had saved a bullet for himself, but he must have because Tom was just as dead as my beautiful, troubled, twenty-seven year-old daughter. He had shot her as she ran from him, his bullets striking every vital organ. One more round struck a child's bicycle, another slammed through the neighbor's wall, lodging in their entertainment center.

It was this neighbor that I interviewed and took his statement after hearing six conflicting stories from various police officers in (former) Sheriff Michael Carona's department. It was his front door that was blocked by the bodies of my daughter and her killer, his child's bicycle damaged by a bullet.

"I'll never forget her eyes," the neighbor told me, having witnessed the entire horror. When I asked him to explain, he said, "She was gone instantly."

It's strange how in these circumstances one bargains. "At least she died instantly," "At least it wasn't a random killing for no reason." "At least..." As if that makes it better, somehow. But it doesn't. I still tremble twelve years later as I type these words.

When a friend introduced Jennifer and Tom, there was an immediate and intense attraction. So, what does a daughter do when she has a court-qualified handwriting expert for a mother? Of course, she asks for a sample of his handwriting (fig 1).



Inha Leex Hale (<http://bit.ly/H4o5KC>)

Few people would notice anything unusual about Tom's handwriting, but alarm bells were screaming in my head at the red flags that leapt from it. I even wrote a note to myself, "potential for explosive behavior." As tactfully as I could, I explained to him and Jen that his handwriting suggested the type of person who needed to be in total control of his environment and everyone in it, which would not work with Jen. Hey, I had tried and failed on that score myself, and as her mom, it was my job.

As I look out at the green mountains.
Looking at the people interact, as the sun
sets in the sky. I smell the greenness of
Virginia, that I miss at west. I had forgotten

fig 1

Handwriting carries markers for physiological issues and one of those prompted me to ask Tom if he had sustained a head injury. He said yes, he had been hit in the head so hard he'd almost been blinded and was under a doctor's care for severe headaches. One of several danger signs in his handwriting was the extremely light pressure.

Just as a writer whose pen digs hard enough to almost tear the paper, one who glides across the surface, barely touching the paper has difficulty appropriately expressing emotions. In the former case, the writer often explodes as the feelings touch him. The light-pressured writer, however, keeps his emotions tamped down inside until they build into a volcano that eventually must explode and release some of the stress. That's what happened with Tom. Stress on the job, stress at home, the head injury, and add alcohol to the mix—his BAC on the autopsy report was .16, twice the legal limit for California.

As the months went on and the shiny newness of the relationship tarnished, Jen relayed some of the threats Tom made, as well as other subtle forms of abuse—he had never physically struck her, but they had known each other less than a year when he killed her. The greatest irony was that Jen was attracted to him because she believed he would protect her.

Handwriting is no crystal ball, but based on past behavior as seen on the page it reveals potential for future behavior. Numerous peer-reviewed studies in scientific journals support handwriting analysis, and as with most studies, there are unfavorable ones, too. An annotated bibliography (albeit not recently updated) is available on the FAQ page at sheilalowe.com for anyone interested in downloading it.

A basic problem is, in the U.S. anyone can pick up a how-to book and claim to be an expert. There is no licensing, which has damaged not only the clients who fall victim to charlatan practitioners, but to the entire field. Reputable handwriting analysts are well-versed in psychology, both developmental and abnormal. They become professionally certified by one of the educational non-profit organizations, such as American Handwriting Analysis Foundation (ahafhandwriting.org). Certification may not be recognized by any government entities, but it does provide a standard for the practitioner to reach for.

The EEOC has been asked on several occasions whether graphology has been challenged as discriminatory and the answer has always been No. Professionals explain to employer clients that the analysis should not be used as the sole basis for hiring, but only one of several tools, including the interview, background check, and skills testing.

I am personally aware of big name companies who use graphologists in the hiring process, but

those names are confidential. My own clients tend to be smaller companies—dentists, employment agencies, etc. Some companies use the software I authored with RI Software, as well as law enforcement and government agencies. TMOG readers are invited to try it out free at writinganalysis.com

Besides analyzing employment applications, I work with private investigators when someone is being stalked or threatened. And, licensed by the State of California Board of Behavioral Sciences, I provide continuing education for marriage and family therapists (superceu.com). There are also the personal clients, such as the couple who requested a compatibility report after twenty years of marriage. Their relationship had reached a crossroads and they wanted some objective insight, which they reported they found in the analysis. They said it increased their understanding of each other and helped them move forward together, rather than continuing to grow apart.

So, while handwriting analysis is certainly no panacea, it can be a valuable tool with applications in a wide variety of areas. It's only the amateurs who look for personality traits in how wide your e-loops are or how you cross your t's. Handwriting professionals examine the big picture of spatial arrangement, writing form, and writing movement, which are comprised of thousands of variables. Bottom line, though, information is only as good as how the person uses it. I was able to warn Jennifer of the red flags for violence in Tom's handwriting, but I couldn't force her to pay attention to them.

Sheila Lowe is the author of the Forensic Handwriting Mysteries series (Signet) featuring handwriting expert Claudia Rose (claudiaroseseries.com), and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Handwriting Analysis. She is happy to help any MWA member who has questions about handwriting. sheila@sheilalowe.com



CHAPTER NEWS

The *Magic Line* by **Elizabeth Gunn** is available in bookstores and on Amazon now. Publishers Weekly said, "Gunn pulls it all together in a satisfying fashion that should entice readers to seek earlier titles in the series."

Thomas Perry's, *Poison Flower*, was published by Mysterious Press March 6, 2012.

Edward Wright's *From Blood*, is due in April from Vantage Point Books. The British edition was named one of the six best mystery novels of the year by the Financial Times of London.

Andrew Kaplan's *Scorpion Betrayal*, is due March 27 from HarperCollins. He will sign on Friday, April 13 at 7:30 PM at Mysterious Galaxy in Redondo Beach. andrewkaplan.com

Natascha Jaffa, writing as Nichole Severn, is excited to announce her romantic suspense novella, *White Trash Beautiful*, is due in April from Evernight Publishing. This is her first published story. Also *Let Me Out*, was released on March 1. nicholesevern.com

Carol Costa has two new releases: *The Secret of Eastman Springs* from Open Books Press, and *Lost in the Shadows* from Champagne Books.

Derringer Award-winning author **Robert S. Levinson** is pleased to announce *The Girl in the Golden Gown* was chosen for February's Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine's Podcast. Read by editor Mark Lagasse. <http://bit.ly/H6s3S4>

Gay Tolti Kinman's *Upclose and Personal* from Mysterious Women is now available along with "London Spy", which is a prequel to *Death in Covent Garden*. Also out, *Gilly's Divorce* and *The Adventures of Lauren Macphearson*.

Donald W. Moore's history book, *Where the Custer Fight Began; Undermanned and Overwhelmed, The Reno Valley Fight* was published Nov. 2011 by Upton and Sons. <http://bit.ly/GMYgiM>

GOT SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH OUR CHAPTER?

Send it to themarchofcrime@gmail.com
before April 15th for the May/June issue

Please no BSP. Thanks!

CONTEST

Like its whisky, Scotland is world-renowned for the exceptional quality of its crime fiction.

To celebrate and recognise this synergy, Glengoyne Highland Single Malt is proud to announce the launch of a new short story writing competition as part of Scotland's inaugural international crime writing festival, Bloody Scotland (14-16 September 2012) in Stirling.

With the aim of discovering the next big name in crime fiction the Glengoyne Short Story Writing Competition opens for entries giving amateur writers the opportunity to be read and reviewed by some of the most respected authors, publishers and editors in the crime literary world.

<http://www.glengoyne.com/bloodyscotland/>

HAVE A GREAT SPRING!