

MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA—SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

ONE THING I LEARNED AT CCWC

By Naomi Hirahara

(Note: We asked various conference attendees, both experienced authors and aspiring ones, to share one thing that they learned from the California Crime Writers Conference, cosponsored by SoCal MWA and Sisters in Crime L.A. The inaugural conference on June 13-14, which featured keynote speakers Laurie King and Robert Crais, attracted a larger than expected crowd and many of the workshops were standing-room only. On the SoCal MWA side, special thanks go to president Les Klinger, Jeri Westerson, who designed the program booklet; Kathryn Lilley, the manuscript consultation chair; Pamela Samuels-Young, the flier designer; James Lincoln Warren, web master; Hannah Dennison, agents reception coordinator; and Richard Brewer, our MWA conference staff member. Other volunteers included Carol Hughes, Dan Kelly, Ginny Lieberman, and Jill Amadio.)

After having been to numerous of his book signings, I expected Robert Crais to be entertaining and funny as the Sunday keynote speaker at CCWC. He didn't disappoint. But, interwoven with the humor was the most inspiring talk on writing I've ever heard.

He talked about writers writing because that's what we do. We do it not only to transport our readers into another life, but ourselves as well. He spoke of being moved by the loneliness of one of his own characters. Every writer in the room knew what he meant and cherished the time they'd felt the same.

His message was essentially, no matter what the economic circumstances or condition of the publishing industry, write in the genre you love and let the world catch up. When Robert Crais started writing fiction, the conventional wisdom was that the PI novel was dead. Well, the world caught up and mystery fiction is the better for it. --Matt Coyle (*Matt Coyle lives in San Diego and is currently seeking representation for his novel, Yesterday's Echo.*)

I attended both of Gayle Lynds' workshops at the CCWC: "9 Secrets to Writing Best-Selling Thrillers" and "You, Too, Can Plot." Loved 'em both! In fact, I was so impressed with "Secrets" that I had to attend "Plot," even though I've written enough stuff that I thought I knew how to plot. But Gayle's second talk contained both refreshers

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GUMBO TIME! ALL INVITED!



Bill Fitzhugh: Crawdad King.

Laissez les bon temps roulet! The Southern California chapter of the Mystery Writers of America invites you (and a guest) to **The Gumbo Party, Saturday, August 15, starting around six.** Place: the home of Bill and Kendall Fitzhugh. Where's that? Plug this into your Google map: **23062 Sylvan Street, Woodland Hills, CA 91367.** Dress is casual and cool (it's been known to be warm in the west end of the Valley in

August). RSVP to: mail@billfitzhugh.com.

Award-winning home-brewer Craig Westerson will provide a keg of his latest creation. Water, wine, and soft drinks will also be provided. Anything else is BYOB.

The President's Rap Sheet

Leslie S. Klinger



I'm very, very proud to tell you that we just completed our inaugural California Crime Writer's Conference in Pasadena, co-sponsored with Sisters in Crime-Los Angeles. Naomi Hirahara was co-chair of the Conference on behalf of SoCalMWA, and she deserves tremendous credit. We were very, very cautious about the program. Although SinCLA had put on a similar program in the past, this program was expanded to two days and the price was commensurately higher (\$300 registration, with some early-registration discounts); therefore, we budgeted it very tightly and projected break-even at 80 participants. We ended up with almost 150 registrants, making a

very nice profit for each organization. Of course, it could not have happened without the great leadership and volunteers from both SinCLA and SoCalMWA. This is the third time we've partnered with SinCLA on events, and it's a great partnership (we've also shared events with SinC-Orange County and hope to share one in Las Vegas soon).

Not only was it financially successful, the program received uniformly high marks from participants as one of the best ever. We had two keynoters, Laurie R. King (who stayed for the entire conference) and Robert Crais, and a stellar faculty, including Gayle Lynds, John Morgan Wilson, Christopher Rice, Dianne Emley,

Melody Johnson Howe, Robin Burcell, Gary Phillips, Eric Stone, Jerrilyn Farmer, Lee Goldberg, James Lincoln Warren, Patty Smiley, Jan Burke, Doug Lyle, and others I'm forgetting as well as numerous experts. This was not a panel-oriented program but instead provided focused workshops on topics like plotting, editing, marketing, contract negotiations, forensics, weapons, and the like; it also included manuscript reviews for an extra fee and an agents' cocktail party that was well attended. A significant number of participants were not MWA or Sisters members, and it was a good recruiting opportunity as well.

We look forward to repeating the effort in 2011!

Killer Quote



Patricia Highsmith

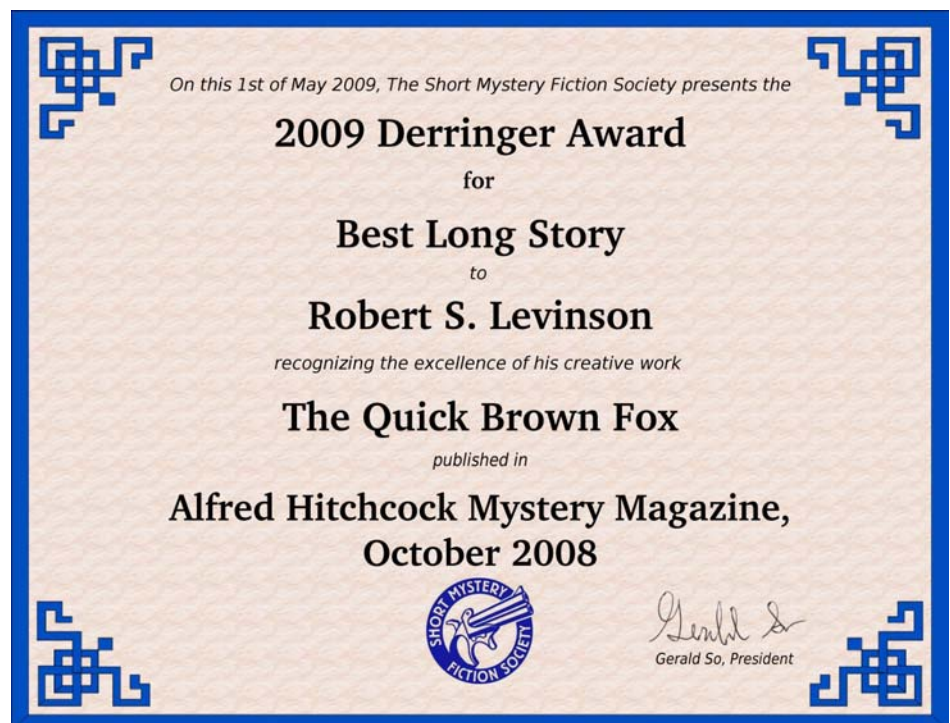
Bruno slammed his palms together. "Hey! Cheeses, what an idea! We murder for each other, see? I kill your wife and you kill my father! We

meet on the train, see, and nobody knows we know each other. Perfect alibis! Catch?"

Patricia Highsmith
--*Strangers on a Train*

"Oh, I can do a number of things – valeting, baby-sitting, accounting... I can forge a signature, fly a helicopter, handle dice, impersonate practically anybody, cook... Shall I go on?" Tom was leaning forward, counting them off on his fingers. He could have gone on.

Patricia Highsmith
--*The Talented Mr. Ripley*



Bob Levinson was recently awarded with the certificate above. Way to go, Bob!

NEWS

MEN OF MYSTERY 2009 on November 21, 2009--Celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of this MWA Raven Award-winning Event on Saturday, November 21st. They are featuring **Michael Connelly** who will be joined by fifty other mystery-writing gentlemen of the genre at the Irvine Marriott Hotel near the John Wayne Airport in Orange County. If you wish to be with the 500+ attendees on this exciting day, please send your postal mailing address to Joan Hansen so that you will be able to receive the official brochure at the end of September ---send to jhansen36@juno.com.

37th annual **Wrangling with Writing Conference** sponsored by the Society of Southwestern Authors will take place at the Palo Verde Holiday Inn on September 26th and 27th. Thirty-two workshops and one-on-one interviews with agents, editors, and producers. For complete details and registration forms visit: www.wranglingwithwriting.com

Renewal notices were mailed the first week of June and should be returned as soon as possible. Don't miss important upcoming events that might pass you by if you don't renew!

Jan Burke and Lee Child will be the Guests of Honor for Left Coast Crime 2010, which will be held in Los Angeles, March 11-14. **Bill Fitzhugh** will be the Toastmaster and Janet Rudolph is the Fan Guest of Honor. Registration for the event is available online at <http://www.leftcoastcrime.org/2010> Among the events planned is a special Forensic Science Day, which will be held on the day before the convention, Wednesday, March 10. This event is limited to 100 people, and is open only to registrants of LCC 2010. Participants will spend a day at CSULA and the new LAPD/LASD lab, and hear from a variety of experts. Cost

for the day is \$100, with all proceeds going to the California Forensic Science Institute.

Gayle Lynds will be at ThrillerFest in New York from July 8th to 12th, presenting a workshop on "The Set-up," sitting on the "Why Spy?" panel, interviewing David Morrell, the 2010 winner of the ThrillerMaster Award for lifetime achievement, and chairing a panel of CIA operatives. Gayle is cofounder (with David Morrell) of ITW, which orchestrates ThrillerFest. Her new spy novel, *The Book of Spies*, will be published in spring 2010.

D.P. Lyle has a new blog called The Writer's Forensics Blog. <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com>

Sheila Lowe was interviewed on the KCBS 5:00 news recently, regarding the Clark Rockefeller case. Although her case file was requested by a L.A. Grand Jury a couple of months ago, since she was not retained in the case and was just asked by various media outlets for her opinions on some handwriting that was involved, she's okay talking about it. Her 30 minute interview on Dateline NBC last Sunday was cut down to about 30 seconds (maybe less).

The September 13th salon at **Gary Phillips'** house will be from 3-5pm, light food, beer and non-alcoholic drinks. \$5 to cover cost of refreshments. More info to come.

In addition to her booksigning, **Eva Batonne** taught a Reading workshop at The Mystery Bookstore in Westwood. There was a reading from *TECHNO NOIR*, a collection of short mystery stories edited by Batonne and Jeff Marks, and a reading from *RESURRECTION DIVA*, Batonne's Joan Lambert novel. Eva is running a

promotion: Go to the Mystery Bookstore on Broxton in Westwood and buy either book, *TECHNO NOIR* or *RESURRECTION DIVA*, for the chance to win any one of a bevy of prizes, including lunch with the author at your favorite restaurant.

Black Dahlia Murder Discussed in OC

By **Jeri Westerson**

The Black Dahlia. The very words inspire feelings of dread, mystery, intrigue. The Orange County's Sisters in Crime joined forces with the southern California chapter of Mystery Writers of America at their May meeting in Irvine to present a discussion of the murder that made headlines in 1950s Los Angeles.



Steve Hodel gives his Powerpoint presentation.

Author and former LAPD officer Steve Hodel wrote *BLACK DAHLIA AVENGER*, contending that it was his *father* who was the infamous Black Dahlia killer, and he had the proof! It all started when he recognized his father's handwriting on a taunting note written by the Black Dahlia

murderer. Hodel then embarked on a surprising and grisly discovery of long buried files to investigate this decades-old crime. He discovered that the LAPD was just about to arrest his father for the murder. But were there others? Was the Black Dahlia a serial killer? Most certainly.

Adding to the intense discussion was author and forensics expert D.P. Lyle, M.D. During the Powerpoint presentation of photos of Dahlia victim Elizabeth Short, Hodel posed various questions to Lyle and the good doctor made a few interesting observations on his own, making for quite a remarkable hour that could have happily gone on longer.



Doug Lyle discusses.

The OC SinC and MWA chapter provided a free lunch (yes, folks, those still exist!) and the room was filled to capacity for this also free event.

Writer's Café at the Epicenter

By Eric Stone



Baseball is probably the most written about sport. So it makes perfect sense that the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes (<http://www.rcquakes.com>), a Los Angeles Angels minor league team, recently hosted an event for writers called "Writers Café" at their ballpark The Epicenter. (Where else would Quakes play? Their mascot is, of course, Tremor.)

Fans of reading and baseball took themselves out to the ballgame on June 19th, ate hot dogs, drank beer, watched the action on the field and hobnobbed with a crowd of

writers whose books were on sale by Debbie Mitsch's Midnight Ink in the right field pavilion. Among the scribblers in attendance were MWA SoCal members: Naomi Hirahara, Gary Phillips, Jeri Westerson, Sue Ann Jaffarian, Linda O. Johnston, Eric Stone, Evan Kilgore, Alan Cook, Jeff Sherrat and Kent Braithwaite, as well as other local authors: Charles Fleming, Diana Wagman, Jim McConnell, Jean Ardell and Jerry Miles.

The Quakes won the game 2-0, over the Lake Elsinore Storm. Books were sold and signed. And a good time was had by all.

There are some mysteries written with a baseball theme. Here's a few:

Murderers' Row: Baseball Mysteries, Otto Penzler, editor. – A great anthology of short stories by such luminaries as Elmore Leonard and Lawrence Sanders.

Here's a link to the Amazon pages listing Baseball – Mysteries & Thrillers:

<http://www.amazon.com/s?ie=UTF8&keywords=Baseball&rh=n%3A18%2Ck%3ABaseball&page=1>

And finally, a bit of BSP. My first book was a true crime / sports biography of Ralph "Blackie" Schwamb, major league ballplayer in the 1940s, gangster in the off-season, murderer and possibly the greatest prison baseball player of all time. <http://ericstone.com/wrong.php>

Fresh Blood

Affiliate

Jeffrey C. Reese, writing as Ann Jeffries (Scottsdale, AZ)

Active

Shilpa Agarwal (Los Angeles, CA)
Deborah Coonts (Las Vegas, NV)
Charlie Huston (Los Angeles, CA)
Lenny Kleinfeld (Los Angeles, CA)
Connie M. Dial (Torrance, CA)



JojoMonster Graphics

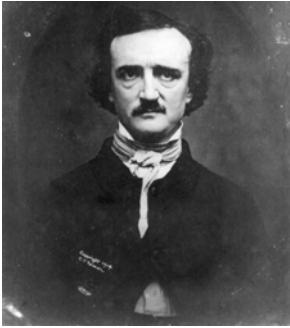
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YOUR EDITOR SPEAKS JERI WESTERSON



A writer's work is never done. So another manuscript is written. It's off to the agent for a little polish, a little pep talk, and then off to the editor. And then it's those lazy days of summer, right? Sit back, let the publisher and publicists do their jobs

and watch the royalties roll in.

Yes, we are dreamers.

We all know this is simply not the case. We hit the ground running, and it's a constant treadmill of going to events, scheduling book signings, writing articles and short stories to get your name constantly in the public's eye. Blogs, YouTube trailers, Facebook, Myspace, Yourspace, Twitter until we forget what the heck we're supposed to be doing in the first place. Oh yeah. Write a great mystery.

And there *are* great mysteries to be had. I'm reading boxloads of them right now. There is no end to the ways we murder and maim our victims. No end to the traumas we put our

protagonists through. New twists, new angles of plot. We are clever. We must be. Gotta stay in print. Gotta get the name out there.

One good way to reach many eyes from Arizona to Hawaii is writing an article for this very newsletter! Talk to me at the Gumbo Party or email me at themarchofcrime@gmail.com.

Save the Date

Put these SoCal MWA dates and times on your calendar.

**Saturday, August 15, 6pm—It's gumbo time!
Fitzhughs' Gumbo Party, San Fernando Valley
Contact: Bill Fitzhugh, bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com**

**Sunday, September 13, 2 PM, Salon at Gary Phillips' Pad
Contact: Gary Phillips, gdogg855@aol.com**

**Sunday, Oct 4, 10am – 6pm—West Hollywood Book Fair
<http://www.westhollywoodbookfair.org/>
Contact: Bill Fitzhugh, bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com**

**Sunday, October 25, 1:30pm
Crime of Our Times: Financial Fraud with Brian E. Klein,
Assistant U.S. Attorney
Beverly Hills Library 444 N. Rexford Dr. Beverly Hills
It's free!
Contact: Les Klinger, mail@leslieklinger.com**

**Saturday, November 7, 11am—2pm
Charlie Huston interviewed by the Mystery Bookstore's
Bobby McCue
Location to be announced. Contact: Naomi Hirahara,
bachi@naomihirahara.com**

December—Holiday Party, More details to come.

The Crime Calendar

July 8-11: ThrillerFest 2009, New York, NY, www.thrillerwriters.org/thrillerfest

July 16-19: Book Passages, Corte Madera, CA <http://www.bookpassage.com/>

July 31-August 2: PulpFest 2009, Columbus, OH, <http://www.pulpfest.com>

August 14-16: Killer Nashville 2009, Nashville, TN, www.killerNashville.com

October 8 – 11: Wordstock , Portland, OR
http://www.wordstockfestival.com/#/page_id=110/

October 15-18: Bouchercon 2009 Indianapolis; www.bouchercon2009.com

November 13-15: New England Crimebake, Dedham, MA, GOH: Sue Grafton, www.crimebake.org



Writing (and Reviewing) Crime

Story and Photos By Jackie Houchin

Along with everyone that attended the CCWC, I was impressed by the four “tracks” of workshops available.

I chose the “Learning the Craft” track because it fit what I mostly write or am interested in. No, I haven’t written any crime fiction since the junior detective series I wrote for my grandchildren ten years ago. But I do *review* mystery and thriller books, so I wanted to learn from the professionals what makes a terrific, best-selling novel.



Author, Jerrilyn Farmer used her book, “Perfect Sax” to illustrate plotting. Her spellbinding reconstruction of the murder, the victim, the suspects, the false leads, red herrings, and convoluted plot twists was worth the price of the conference. “Your characters’ actions and reactions must be logical and believable.” “Don’t include too many clues to the real villain.” “Your sleuth *must* face off with the criminal.”

Author, Gayle Lynds, revealed *Nine Secrets for Writing a Thriller: Conflict – a strong protagonist/antagonist connection. High Stakes – for “the group” not just the hero. Multiple Viewpoints – each major character has “his own novel” for a “sense of sprawl.” Menace. An “all is lost” moment. A satisfying and cathartic ending.*



In her afternoon You Too Can Plot workshop, Gayle Lynds explained the differences between mystery and thriller then drilled us on the importance of the villain. “Your antagonist is critical, he drives the plot. He must be a worthy opponent for your hero - a clash of titans.” She explained how the roles of the hero and villain gradually reverse. “If you get stuck, ask yourself what the villain is doing.”



Gary Phillips and Bill Fitzhugh brought writing samples to be read aloud. “Narrators and view point characters should have a Voice,” they noted. “You can tell a story in terse language, but it won’t sing.”

Okay, now I see what needs to be included in a good mystery or thriller. Bring on the ARCs!

Photos of the California Crime Writers Conference



Keynote Robert Crais above. Upper right: Raffle baskets galore. One of the visual highlights of the conference was the beautifully wrapped baskets created by Gayle Bartos-Pool, a member of MWA. Proceeds from the raffle benefited both non-profit organizations. Right: Keynote speaker and best-selling novelist Laurie King is at the head of the table.



Above: Queen of the baskets--Gayle Bartos-Pool single-handed created the beautiful raffle baskets. Thanks to the publishers and authors who donated their books. Upper right: Workshop leader and UCLA Extension instructor John Morgan Wilson thoroughly covered rewriting. Lower right: Participants in creativity coach Maureen Serra’s workshop are more than happy to participate, in spite of the early hour.



Left: Ghostwriter Julie McCarron and agent Claire Gerus give tips on writing the best non-fiction book proposal. In attendance was the co-writer of McCarron’s latest book, Mary Jo Buttafucio.

Even More Photos from CCWC



Above: Montrose Search and Rescue Team. Right: CCWC co-chairs Jane DiLucchio, Naomi Hirahara, and Susan Beery celebrate after the end of the conference.



Top left: Faculty members Robin Burcell, left, and Jerrilyn Farmer wowed their respective audiences.



Bottom Left: P.I. Corey Friedman, who was a consultant on the WB's TV series, "Veronica Mars," shares his expertise on detecting.

Photos by: Jane DiLucchio, Lori Wolf, and Jackie Houchin.

Transom Notes

Joan Del Monte's third mystery, *MUD BLOOD; Murder in the Sacramento Delta*, is a finalist for an Eric Hoffer National Book award. The book has previously garnered the Editor's Choice award from iUniverse. She'll be touring San Francisco and East Bay book stores and libraries during June and July. On July 26th she will at the 37th Annual Courtland Pear Fair and East Bay book stores.

Producer Brad Wyman and No Net Films, Inc. has optioned *TOO BIG TO MISS*, the first book in **Sue Ann Jaffarian's** Odelia Grey mystery series.

Elizabeth Gunn's second Tucson thriller, *NEW RIVER BLUES*, came off the press in hard cover from Severn House in May. Trade paper edition of the first book of the series, *COOL IN TUCSON*, is still available from Amazon and Clues Unlimited in Tucson.

Ona Russell was named a finalist for *THE NATURAL SELECTION* in three 2009 book award contests: The 78th Commonwealth Club California Book Awards, fiction category; The San Diego Book Awards, mystery category; and The Next Generation Indie Awards, historical fiction category.

Jeri Westerson's medieval noir *VEIL OF LIES* was nominated for a 2009 Macavity Award (Sue Feder Historical Mystery). The Macavity Awards, voted on by readers of *Mystery Journal International*, will be announced at Bouchercon 2009, in Indianapolis in October.

Carol Costa had two new mystery novels released in June. *INVISIBLE FORCE*, a paranormal mystery published by Champagne Books and *THE MASTER PLAN*, the second in the Dana Sloan mystery series published by Avalon Books Also, her mystery play, *The Last Decent Crooks*, was published by Big Dog Play Publishing Company.

Dennis Palumbo's latest book, a collection of mystery short stories called *FROM CRIME TO CRIME* (Tallfellow Press), got a rave review from Jon Breen in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* a few issues ago. Currently, the stories are being developed by a noted Hollywood producer as a possible TV series. See one of Dennis' blogs at: www.huffingtonpost.com

Jan Burke's short story, "The Fallen," which appeared in the August, 2008 issue of *EQMM*, has been nominated for a Barry Award. The Barry Awards, voted on by readers of *Mystery News* and *Deadly Pleasures* magazines, will announced at Bouchercon 2009, which will be held in October in Indianapolis.

D.P. Lyle, signed a 2 book deal with Medallion. It's a new series starring forensic and criminal behavior expert Dub Walker and is set in the South. The first one is called *STRESS FRACTURE* and will be out April, 2010. The second will follow and is titled *HOT LIGHTS, COLD STEEL*.

Lisa Morton's book *A HALLOWE'EN ANTHOLOGY: LITERARY AND HISTORICAL WRITINGS OVER THE CENTURIES* just won the Bram Stoker Award for Nonfiction.

Leo Du Lac sold *MAIL ORDER BRIDE* to Sunstone Press.

Rhino Skin

By James Scott Bell

If you write for any length of time, especially professionally, you will come to know the inevitable slings and arrows of the writing life. It may come in the form of a rejection letter, a bad review, an angry reader e-mail, a personal jab from a family member, or any of a number of other places.

To survive, you need to develop Rhino skin. That outer coat allows you to feel the hits yet still get on with the important thing, the writing.

So how do you get Rhino skin?

1. Let rejection, or criticism, hurt for a day, no more

It's all right to take a hit and feel its full force. Don't try to hide the emotional impact. Give vent. Cry if you must. Hit a pillow. But let it all out in one day. Determine that when you wake up tomorrow, you'll take action. That leads us to #2.

2. Write

When my son fell off his two-wheeler the first time out, I didn't let him quit. I got him back on the bike and almost burst my lungs running with him. We repeated the process till he got it.

He did not like falling. But when he was back on the bike and peddling, he was not thinking about the fall. He was thinking about staying up for the next few feet.

Writing is like that. When you are down about your writing, write. Dennis Palumbo, in his book *Writing From the Inside Out*, says "Every hour you spend writing is an hour spent not fretting about your writing."

Make a daily quota the tonic for your ache.

What you'll find is wonderful: when your mind snaps back to the hurt, that wound won't be as deep as it once was. And the more you do this, the more the hurt begins to fade. You won't forget it, but it won't debilitate you.

3. Review your career path

And that's what you're on. Do not think of yourself as someone trying to sell a novel. You are a writer, and you are selling your professional self.

Wear SoCal MWA Pride!



Thanks to the work of board member Richard Brewer, the Southern California chapter of Mystery Writers of America finally has its own T-shirt! Our original logo was merged with our web site logo, designed by former SoCal MWA president James Lincoln Warren. The T-shirt, available in sizes small to XXX large, is being sold for

\$10 and will be available for purchase at our various events. The back of the T-shirt features the Raymond Chandler quote, "Trouble is my business."

Do you need to start another book? What will you do differently? What can you learn from the rejection or the critic that is of actual value to you? Learn that thing, and forget the rest.

4. Reward yourself

For a writing job finished, for a quota met, for a manuscript completed, heck, for just about anything, treat yourself to that indulgent dessert or movie night.

When I finish a manuscript I like to take a full day off and go on a literary goof. There are several used bookstores in L.A. I like, so I'll start there, browse the shelves, pick up that Cornell Woolrich I've been missing, or add to my collection of '50s paperback originals.

Then I'll go to a park and put out a chair and laze and read.

That night, I'll take my wife to one of our favorite places for dinner. You have to enjoy the journey.

5. Remind yourself

Two reminders to put inside your head.

The first is to remember that the greatest writers of all time have been slammed in print. Many examples of this have been collected in a wonderful little book, *Rotten Reviews* by Bill Henderson. Here are a couple of my favorites.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1892, said of Emily Dickenson, "An eccentric, dreamy,

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Rhino—continued from Page 6

half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village—or anywhere else—cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar. Oblivion lingers in the immediate neighborhood."

Nothing of Mr. Aldrich, to my knowledge, remains in print.

The eminent Clifton Fadiman, in *The New Yorker* no less, said of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* that it was "the final blowup of what was once a remarkable, if minor, talent."

When you get a bad review, remember you're in very good company.

And then remind yourself *constantly* that you are a writer, because you write. There are many more people who do not write yet feel perfectly at ease sniping at those who do. When such a snipe comes your way, remind yourself that you are the one putting yourself on the line, opening a vein, walking the tightrope, singing a solo under hot lights. You are part of a courageous bunch who are all about *doing*. Teddy Roosevelt's famous advice applies to writers:

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

Get in the arena. Go at your writing with all the devotion and love and enthusiasm you have. When the darts of rejection or criticism come your way, keep writing. You will stop them with Rhino skin, and keep right on charging ahead.

James Scott Bell is the author of several thrillers, including the Buchanan series --- Try Dying, Try Darkness, Try Fear (Hachette/Center Street). He has also written two of the most popular writing books on the market: Plot & Structure and Revision & Self-Editing (Writers Digest Books). His website is www.jamesscottbell.com

Forensics a Hit at CCWC

By Gayle Bartos-Pool

As a board member of Sisters in Crime/LA, I had the pleasure of setting up the Forensics Track for the first California Crime Writers Conference June 13 and 14, 2009. Since I attended only those sessions, I can only report on them, but they knocked my socks off.

T.J. Johnston, high-ranking NRA instructor in weapons and personal safety, started the Forensics Track with a bang by bringing in enough weaponry for a Bruce Willis movie. The highlight of his presentation was when he ignited a small canister of black powder that shot a three-foot column of flame up to the ceiling. He told us it won't explode or even smoke, and it didn't.

Dianne Emley, author of the Nan Vining thrillers, brought Detective Keith Gomez who gave a crash course in Homicide 101. Among his advice to mystery writers was that the only person who touches the murder victim is the coroner, so don't let the police officers in your stories rummage through the deceased's pockets. It ain't their territory.

Robin Burcell, a Criminal Investigator in Northern California as well as author of both police procedurals and her newest thriller series, told some inside stuff like the fact that rookie cops swagger and like to flash their badges, but the old-times usually say they're plumbers when asked what they do for a living.

Real life private detective J. Corey Friedman brought the house down with his stories of how he gets information out of unsuspecting people, and he showed how to dig up information about people on the Internet with merely a telephone number. He was reading off the names of one guy's wife and daughter and SS# after knowing only the man's name. And he did a card trick that astounded everybody. BINGO, anybody?

Patricia Smiley, author of the sensational Tucker Sinclair Mystery Series, brought two of the coolest guys: Anthony Manzella from the District Attorney's office and LAPD Detective Michael DePasquale. The gentlemen supplied more information than watching five years of *Law & Order* reruns. From Michael dropping terms like: "Hook 'em and Book 'em" (meaning slap on the handcuffs and take them downtown) to "Blue suits" (for cops), everybody learned the proper jargon. And we call them "suspects" on the West Coast. It's those East Coast cops who call them "perps."

DA Manzella had the best line of the day: He never calls a suspect "alleged" like the PC media insists on doing. He'll only take someone to trial if he has enough evidence. Then he calls them: "the defendant."

The Montrose Search and Rescue Team made a return engagement. These totally volunteer heroes (They earn a \$1 a year from the city) had some heart wrenching stories. The one that is still hard to shake was the story of the aftermath of the Metro Link train

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Forensics Continued from Page 7

that derailed. One of the team remembered seeing a cell phone lying next to a body, ringing every five minutes, for an hour. Since it was considered a crime scene, they couldn't answer the phone. That will haunt you.

Macavity Award winner Doug Lyle, MD, and Edgar winner Jan Burke brought their expertise to the conference with great insight into crime scene investigations. One thing Doug mentioned was the fact that a coroner doesn't have to be a doctor. Even an undertaker can have the job. Someone asked, "Does an undertaker have the knowledge to do an autopsy?" Doug said, "No. He's an undertaker." That's why Jan said it's always best to set your murder in a small town with no one trained to prove it was murder.

To round out the two-day conference, there is nothing better than getting tales from the dark side. Investigative journalist Matthew Randazzo V interviewed Kenny Gallo. "Kenji" sold drugs for the Medellin Cartel, ran a porno empire in L.A., then turned FBI informant on the Colombo Mafia Family. It doesn't get much better than that for inside information.

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and new information for me on plotting thrillers and other suspense stories, and some ideas can even be incorporated into other forms of mystery. As someone who hopes to ultimately add thrillers to her list of published work, I was enthralled!

Both talks were spiced with examples from published thrillers, including but not limited to Gayle's own books. I'm not going to list all 9 of Gayle's secrets from her first talk, but among my favorites was the Core Dramatic Question: determine what the villain wants, determine what the protagonist wants... and separate them by an "or."

My advice: if you ever have the opportunity to attend a workshop by Gayle Lynds--who was, not incidentally, one of the two founders of the International Thriller Writers--do it... and read her books, too!--Linda O. Johnston (*Linda O. Johnston is the author of the Kendra Ballantyne, Pet-Sitter Mysteries for Berkley Prime Crime, and also writes paranormal romance for Silhouette Nocturne.*)

I was thrilled to learn from reading Corey Friedman's bio that he had been a consultant on the television show Veronica Mars. As that had been a favorite show of mine, before its untimely demise, I was looking forward to hearing what he had to say. Mr. Friedman did not disappoint as he showed up to the room with several large gadgets, which can be used in investigations, and a great sense of humor.

Learning of some of the tricks that current technology can use in order to obtain information put even Veronica Mars to shame. I found it quite interesting to hear about "calling cards" that allow you to perform a voice polygraph test over the phone or to enter whatever phone number you would like to be displayed on a caller ID. While this type of technology has proven to be an asset to the field, Mr. Friedman proved how a quick wit and careful consideration and usage of words during questioning can also be essential in obtaining information.

I found Mr. Friedman to be extremely knowledgeable and

quite entertaining as he hosted a round of BINGO in which the entire room won. --Stacie Orsburn (*Stacie Orsburn is an aspiring author from Dallas, Texas, who attended her first writer's conference with hopes to attend many more.*)

So you got your book published. Congratulations! Now, prepare to meet your public via readings and interviews. Palms getting sweaty? You're not alone. Kim Dower, AKA Kim-from-L.A., a media services consultant, says that most folks would rather go to the dentist than speak in public. In her enlightening and practical session, Kim gave tips on how to *inform, influence, inspire* and remain calm. Here are a few.

Involve your audience. The luncheon keynote speech by Robert Crais exemplified this tip as he began by asking if anyone in the audience had received more than fifty rejection letters. More than a hundred? Crais revealed that he'd received a hundred and sixteen. Then he went about reading a few with dramatic flourish, getting big laughs, illustrating the following tip.

Insert self-deprecating humor. Tell a funny story about your own learning experience. Be human.

Develop a presentation arsenal. For example, Crais read rejection letters and funny fan emails. You might use handouts, bookmarks, or a slideshow. Anything that keeps the pressure off you having to carry the entire presentation.

Know your audience. Are you talking to crime writers or nurses? If you're being interviewed by the *Denver Post*, find out what the weather is in Denver that day or what teams are playing.

Prepare. Summarize your presentation on index cards so you can refer to them to keep on message. Be positive. People want answers and to be inspired, not problems. Be concise. Keep readings around five minutes. Avoid long answers. Do something that relaxes you beforehand: exercising, walking, or meditating. Examine

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the room. Is the seating adequate? Is the room hot or cold? Dress appropriately for the venue and audience. Neatness counts. Finally, practice, practice, practice—until it sounds natural.

In summary, Kim said, "Remember, passion and energy are your keys. You are on a mission. If you believe and love what you're talking about, your fear goes away."

This author can add one more tip that helps calm sweaty palms: Talking to people about the work you love is *fun*. Enjoy it.--Dianne Emley (*Dianne Emley's latest Nan Vining thriller, The Deepest Cut, is currently out now, with the next in the series due to be released in February 2010.*)

Kindle-less and e-reader-less, I'm just starting to learn about electronic publishing, even though all of my novels are available as e-books. The "E-Publishing and Your Bottom Line" panel featured e-publisher Marci Baun, e-published pioneering author Marilyn Meredith, Poisoned Pen acquiring editor Annette Rogers, and Gary Phillips.

Some stuff I learned:

1) Formats. There are at least eight and more e-publishing formats out there--Adobe PDF, Microsoft Reader, HTML, Kindle (which bought mobipocket software), etc. Recently the Association of Digital Publishers have chosen a standard format--"epub"--and wants all their members to comply. Apparently epub has conversion issues but offers a lot of features. Like the battle between VHS and Betamax in the video age (remember way back then?), who knows which standard will catch on?

2) One million iPhone readers. There's a iPhone e-book reader application, Stanza, which has been downloaded at least one million times. We've been so fixated on the Kindle, but actually the iPhone may be more of a dominant force. Watching the popularity of the novels written and read on cell phones in Japan, I suspect that it is only a matter of time before this phenomenon catches on in the U.S.

3) Barnes & Noble and e-publishing. In spring of this year, B&N acquired e-book distributor and publisher Fictionwise.

So they are also posed to be a player (perhaps only minor) in e-publishing wars.

Specifically on the publishing front, Baun, the publisher of Wild Child Publishing and Freya's Bower, explained that while her companies don't offer advances, a great percentage of each sold book goes to the author. Poisoned Pen's Rogers also shared that the Arizona-based mystery small press was expanding into e-books. The Kindle also has an audio option, which I learned at Jonathan Kirsch and Les Klinger's contract workshop, will prove to have some thorny issues with audio books rights. (Right now Amazon has agreed to silence the audio feature on books whose publishers still retain audio rights.)--Naomi Hirahara (*Naomi Hirahara, who was a conference co-chair, is looking forward to the release of her fourth Mas Arai mystery, Blood Hina, in March 2010.*)

The California Crime Writers Conference was useful and instructive in several ways. The workshops I attended fell primarily in "The Science, The Experts" category. The information provided in these workshops by working professionals in the law enforcement field was invaluable. As I write about a homicide detective myself, the two panels featuring working homicide investigators were particularly useful, as was the panel with Doug Lyle and Jan Burke on forensics. Aside from technical investigatory details in these panels, I also learned a great deal about online book marketing and book contracts.

I found the conference to be well organized in terms of offering a variety learning opportunities for writers with different levels of experience, and it was a very good opportunity for networking.

Perhaps the most important thing I learned is that even with an MFA, ten years of teaching creating writing under my belt, and my published crime novel on the market, I will always have more to learn. --Tyler Dilts (*Tyler Dilts's debut mystery, Infinite Space, features a Long Beach-based detective.*)



It's a crime not to buy the new MWA T-shirts. Next time we meet, fork over the ten bucks. Don't be just another chalkline on the street.

MARCH OF CRIME



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Any opinions expressed herein are those of each author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Mystery Writers of America or the local chapter.

Next Meeting:

The Southern California chapter of the Mystery Writers of America invites you (and a guest) to **The Gumbo Party, Saturday, August 15, starting around six.** Place: the home of Bill and Kendall Fitzhugh. Where's that? Plug this into your Google map: **23062 Sylvan Street, Woodland Hills, CA 91367.** Dress is casual and cool. RSVP to: mail@billfitzhugh.com.

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LAST WORD

Debbie Mitsch with Midnight Ink on hand to sell books for the joint OC Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America Southern California chapter meeting at the Irvine Ranch Water District building.

