

THE MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA — SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

Q&A: Barbara Seranella Committing Social Consciousness

Barbara Seranella recently won an Anthony Award for her short story, MISDIRECTION, and is being awarded the Dennis Lynds Award for Social Consciousness in Crime Fiction by MWA SoCal. She was interviewed by member Debbie Mitsch, a publicist and book-seller.

DM: Is there anything inherent in crime fiction that makes a social-conscience element more or less important to telling the story? Does the genre lend itself to dealing with social issues?

BS: The whole concept of crime and punishment, to seeing justice done, leads to views of right and wrong. And what is a social consciousness but a consensus of those individuals' moral codes?

DM: Does that mean dealing

with specific issues or just the value system of the characters?

BS: For the sake of the story, one issue at a time. One of the magic parts of writing is how these themes appear, not only in the main character's dilemma, but in sub-plots.

I choose to write about issues that have had the greatest impact on me: child abuse, rape, racism, and violence against women. Also, the ways our powers-that-be deal with the disease of drug addiction and alcoholism.

DM: What are the potential pitfalls?

BS: Addressing too many issues in one book and therefore not



giving any one of them the attention they demand.

DM: How do you avoid having your character become simply a mouthpiece for your own views? Is that desirable?

BS: Oh yes.

Lectures are boring and I try to keep the boring parts out of my books. When a character mounts a soapbox, it suggests an attitude of superiority. My characters, Munch, Asia, Ellen, assorted cops and questionable bad guys are all flawed in human ways and not one of them

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The President's Rap Sheet

I have lots of good news to report.

The Dennis Lynds Award will be presented to Barbara Seranella at the Orange County Sisters-in-Crime Holiday luncheon at the Claim Jumper Restaurant (18050 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA 92708), on Sun-

day, December 10, from 11:30 am to 2 pm. Cost is \$25, or \$20 for renewing Orange County SinC members. Remit checks to OC Sisters in Crime, P.O. Box 53132, Irvine, CA 92619.

On Sunday, December 17, SoCal MWA will hold its annual Holiday

Party at La Marina Inn (119 Culver Blvd., Playa Del Rey, CA 90293) from 7:00-10:00 pm. It will feature snacks, soft drinks, a cash bar, and entertainment, and is free to all SoCal MWA members, their families, and guests. You will be receiving a mailed invita-

tion in the next couple of weeks.

We have a full calendar of events planned for 2007. With rare exceptions, all of our meetings will be held on the last Sunday of each month—May's meeting will be on

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(Barbara Seranella Continued)

has the perfect answers. They follow their guts, and in Munch's case, strive to be scrupulously honest. Even when that honesty makes her acknowledge parts of her she'd rather didn't exist.

DM: What experiences from your own life have shaped yours and Munch's social conscience?

BS: Number one would have to be my years as a hard-core addict, biker-chick, and up-for-anything criminal. I was morally bankrupt and waiting to die. I was also a racist and a misogynist. I didn't like anybody. I went to jail, found God, and started staying sober. One of the conditions of my probation was that I live in a recovery house for several months. The other residents were mostly women and mostly of color. I had a lot of fun there. The longer I stayed sober, the more ridiculous the affectations of my former life became. I spent the next ten years learning to live in the straight world and choosing a code of ethics that felt right for me.

When I began writing, and getting feedback on my character's inner lives, I got another rude awakening of how far I still needed to go. Prejudice being a particularly insidious flaw. But what can we all do but keep trying our best?

DM: How have your books dealt with social issues?

BS: My first book was about Munch getting off dope and how it is possible for people to change. The second book dealt with bad parenting, specifically the dope addicts of the 60s and 70s. Also friendships with people who you've out grown. I've also dealt with rape, racism, loyalty, betrayal, revenge, the death of a loved one, and how some crimes can be forgiven while others cannot.

Surveying the Conferences

Not too many of you responded to our survey questions about conferences. So the results are woefully unscientific. That said, here's what 25 of you had to say.

What annual conferences have you attended?

Bouchercon 18, Left Coast Crime 15, Malice Domestic 11, Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave 8, Sleuthfest 7, Thrillerfest 7, Mayhem in the Midlands 6, Murder in the Grove 5, New England Crime Bake 5, Sisters in Crime (various locations) 2. Also: AZ Murder Goes..., BEA, Comic-Con, Magna Cum Murder, Murder in the Magic City, A Dark and Stormy Night, Men of Mystery, Eyecon, and others.

What conference/s do you plan to attend ?

Bouchercon 18, Left Coast Crime 10, Thrillerfest 7, Malice Domestic 6, Mayhem in the Midlands 3, BEA, Comic-Con, Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave, Magna Cum Murder, Murder in the Magic City, Sleuthfest 1 each.

Why do you attend a conference?

"Attending panels and events" beat out "Self-promotion" by one respondent, nine to eight, as the most important reason. "Socializing with people in the profession who aren't authors" came in third with five; "Socializing with authors" was fourth with three (although 15 respondents listed it as the second most important reason); and two of you, you know who you are, just wanted to "Escape from in front of your

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Sleuthiness: A Pair of Blogging Agents

Miss Snark (misssnark.com) is a literary agent in New York. From her "crapometer" to the "nitwit of the day," her blog is both useful and entertaining whether you have an agent or not.

She doesn't pull any punches.

Upcoming, is her periodic "Happy Hooker Crapometer" in which she "indulges her thirst for cruelty by inviting anyone to submit work for public critique."

Kristen Nelson (pubrants.blogspot.com), also deals with agents

and agenting. She has links to sites such as (agentquery.com), a comprehensive writer's site, and (sfwa.org/beware), where you can find an updated list of the "20 Worst [Literary] Agencies."

Patti Shinnors

Transom Notes

October: Arizona-based **Carol Costa** is the author of *A Deadly Hand*, the first in a series featuring Dana Sloan, investigative reporter, released by Avalon. She's also optioned film rights to *My Bargain With God*, the biography of psychic, Joyce Martin, to Craig Anderson Productions. **Bruce Hale's** *Key Lardo* is the latest in the Chet Gecko (yes, he's really a gecko whose favorite foods include Stinkbug pie, Pillbug Crunch bars and wolf-spider lasagna) juvenile mystery series (Harcourt, Inc.). brucehale.com. **Bonnie Hearn Hill** has not just one, but *three* thrillers released in her series featuring hearing-impaired newspaper reporter, Geri LaRue: *If It Bleeds*, *Cutline*, and *Off The Record* (Mira Books). bonniehearnhill.com

November: **Ken Kuhlken's** *The Do-Re-Mi* (Poisoned Pen Press), chronicles the history of Southern California in the 20th century via the Hickey Family. kenkuhlken.net. **Paul Levine's** short story, Solomon & Lord Drop Anchor, appears in *Miami Noir* (Akashic). **D.P. Lyle** – *Forensic Science for Writers*, Five hours of lectures on DVD with Doug Lyle and Jan Burke. dplylemd.com. **Kris Neri** announces that the *Forensic Science for Writers* is part of the Killer Fiction Workshop DVD lecture series. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to The Crime Lab Project, **Jan Burke's** fund-raising program to increase awareness of the under-funding of crime labs. The *Writing Killer Mysteries* DVD is available now. krisneri.com. **Joe Wambaugh's** first new novel in 10 years, *Hollywood Station* (Little, Brown & Co.) was released 11/28.

December: **Lynette Brasfield** – Look for this MWA SoCal board member's article on Orange County's influence on local mystery writers Barbara Seranella, T. Jefferson Parker, Theresa Schwegel and Taylor Smith in *Orange Coast Magazine*. lynettebrasfield.com. **Michael Mallory**, **Harley Jane Kozak** and **Nathan Walpow** were co-editors of *LANdmarked for Murder*, the latest Sisters in Crime Anthology, which was conceived by **Susan Kosar Beery** (Top Publications, Ltd.). Book signings by some of the authors are scheduled 12/2 at Mystery and Imagination in Glendale and 12/9 at Book 'em Mysteries in South Pasadena. michaelmallory.com. **T. Jefferson Parker's** book, *The Fallen*, won in the Mystery category of the 2006 Southern California Book Awards. tjeffersonparker.com, scbabooks.org/scbabookaward.html. *The Phantom's Phantom* by **Robert Reginald** is slated to be published in trade paperback by Wildside Press. millefleurs.tv/the_Phantom.html. **Theresa Schwegel** recorded a noir podcast for her book *Probable Cause* (St. Martin's Minotaur) on noircast.net. The book is scheduled for release 12/26. theresaschwegel.com. **PEN Center USA** announced winners and finalists in its 2006 Literary Awards competition. In addition to the competitive literary awards, Jane Smiley and Bob Shaye will receive awards for career achievement. Awards for freedom of expression go to Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada and on behalf of Iraqi journalists. The Literary Award Festival gala (LitFest) will be held at the Beverly Hills Hotel on 12/12. penusa.org

Other News and Announcements: **Christa Faust** has signed a contract for her new novel, *Money Shot*, which will make her the first woman to be published by Hard Case. christafaust.com. Well wishes to **Bill Fitzhugh**, who's recovering from a hit-and-run bicycle accident. Oh, and a pox on the creep who hit him and left him in the street with a badly broken ankle. Bill has been working on *The Exterminators*, long-awaited sequel to *Pest Control*. billfitzhugh.com. A warm welcome to veteran bestseller, **Charles Higham**, who is joining the MWA/SoCal Chapter. **Sue Ann Jaffarian** has started a blog: sueannjaffarian.blogspot.com, that got off to something of a controversial start. **Gayle Lynds' The Last Spymaster** received the Novel of the Year award from the Military Society Writers of America. Gayle's debut thriller, *Masquerade*, made number eight of *Publishers Weekly's* top 15 spy novels. **Cindy Pierre-Morton** got a naughty surprise when *Playboy* published what she terms a "tactfully erotic story" that she'd written ten years ago and only recently submitted. "Doing It To The Max" appears on page 78 of the August edition. *Jawbreaker*, co-authored by **Ralph Pezzullo** and CIA agent Gary Berntsen, has been optioned by Paramount, and director Oliver Stone has hired Ralph to write the

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(Conferences Continued)

computer to get drunk in public, wear funny hats and ride around on small tricycles.”

Other reasons, written in, include: “My publisher pays for everything and I get a chance to socialize with people on my publisher’s staff.” “I get a lot more writing done in a hotel room because there are no small children yelling, ‘mommy, help me get my jammies on!’” “Being on a panel.” “Meeting with my agent and editor.” “Going to nice dinner courtesy of my publisher.” “Eating fabulous meals in good restaurants.”

What is your favorite conference?

Bouchercon was the favorite with 12 votes. Here’s what some people had to say: “Most interesting and fun with the most interesting people in attendance.” “Met my most important contacts and

learned my most important lessons there.” “A wide variety of people from all parts of the publishing world.” “The best attended.” “The best for promoting my books.” “Bigger crowds, more of my writer, drinker, poker-playing pals.”

Left Coast Crime came in second with three votes. People liked it because it is smaller than Bouchercon, more manageable, more “easygoing and comfortable.”

Thrillerfest and “No favorite” tied with two each. There were a couple of interesting other responses. One respondent likes BEA the best because “I get to socialize with people who aren’t authors (and actually sell my book.)” And another likes Malice Domestic the best because, “Maybe it’s the funny hats. And I like women who aren’t afraid of mystery-solving cats and aren’t afraid to say it out loud.”

Kathryn Cheng

(President’s Rap Continued)

the 20th, and July and August will be dark per usual.

For information on January 28’s meeting, see the next page. In February, March and April we have in depth interviews with Charles Higham, Jacqueline Winspear and T. Jefferson Parker. May will feature an agents panel. And June will feature “How to Break into TV...but Why Would You Want to???” moderated by novelist/TV writer/executive producer Paul Levine.

Remember to send in your Board of Director’s ballots.

I will be stepping down as President of the chapter at the end of this year, to make way for fresh blood and a fresh start for the chapter, which, as you can see, is now going full steam ahead.

JLW

(Transom Notes Continued)

screenplay. Ralph is also writing the screen adaptation of **Steve Hodel’s** *The Black Dahlia Avenger*, with Steve serving as Executive Producer. **Gary Phillips** is co-editing *Darker Mask* (Tor), an anthology featuring “edgy prose superhero stories” by Walter Mosley, Reed Farrel Coleman, Naomi Hirahara and others. He’s also editing *Politics Noir* (Verso), and writing *The Haul*, a crime graphic novel for DC/Vertigo Comics. gdphilips.com. After appearing on her Bouchercon panel, **Ona Russell** visited New Orleans and spoke at the American Judges Association Annual Education Conference on literature and the law. Appalled by what she saw of the post-Katrina devastation, Ona noted, “the greatest mystery is why more was—and still has not—been done to help the victims.” onarussell.com. **JoAnn Senger’s** horror/vampire short, Pink Bathmat was recently published in *Night to Dawn* magazine. “Get Fit or Die Tryin’” comes next, in two parts. **Joe Wambaugh** is dish-ing with the Hollywood Division cops, looking for inspiration for his next novel. Meanwhile, he’s not doing too badly—his latest book, *Hollywood Station*, has been optioned for television by David E. Kelley (producer of Boston Legal). Joe even gets to co-write the pilot. **John Morgan Wilson** had an easy gig, appearing as himself in “Back Soon,” an independent film co-produced by MWA member, **Rodney Johnson**, and Rob Williams. John had two pithy lines as he signed copies of his latest, *Rhapsody in Blood*, in a scene filmed at Mystery & Imagination bookstore. John is back at Langley Productions for another season as supervising writer on Video Justice for Court TV. johnmorganwilson.com. Shamus winner **Edward Wright’s** *Red Sky Lament* was honored with the Crime Writers’ Association of Great Britain Ellis Peters Historical Mystery Award. The novel is the third in the John Ray Horn series.

JANUARY LUNCHEON RESERVATION FORM

SO I SOLD MY FIRST BOOK, NOW WHAT?

Sunday, January 28 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 by mail: \$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 Name _____

Guest(s) _____

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.

WHO'S TALKING?

At the January luncheon.

Moderator: Naomi Hirahara, is a writer and editor of books on the Japanese American experience, including mysteries and nonfiction. Her first novel, SUMMER OF THE BIG BACHI (Bantam, Delta Trade Paperback), was on *Publishers Weekly's* list of best books of 2004, as well as the best mystery list of the *Chicago Tribune*. It was nominated for a Macavity for best first novel. www.naomihirahara.com

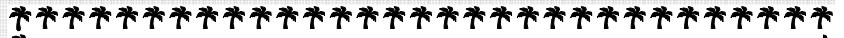
Panelists:

Lynette Brasfield is the author of NATURE LESSONS (St. Martin's Press), a Booksense selection which *Booklist* described as "a gripping first novel...part mystery, part dark family comedy, and part harsh political realism" and *Publishers' Weekly* praised as "thought-provoking...complex and intriguing." She is currently working on her second novel. www.lynettebrasfield.com

Randall Hicks is an adoption attorney, so being of little imagination, his protagonist, Toby Dillon, is an adoption attorney as

well—except Toby is younger and better looking. His debut novel THE BABY GAME (Wordslinger Press), won the 2006 Gumshoe Award for Best First Novel and was a finalist for the Anthony, Barry and Macavity. www.randall-hicks.com

Eric Stone's first two books came out in 2005. *The Living Room of the Dead* – a detective thriller set in Asia, loosely based on a true story of the Russian trade in prostitutes to Asia. And *Wrong Side of the Wall* - a true crime / sports biography. Eric worked for many years as a journalist in the U.S. and Asia, covering everything from economics to crime; politics to sex. www.ericstone.com



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To submit material for *The March of Crime*, email the editor at es@ericstone.com

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THE MARCH OF CRIME



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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

Sleuthfest—April 19-22, Miami Beach, FL www.mwa-florida.org/sleuthfest.htm

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

Thrillerfest—July 12-15, New York, NY,
www.thrillerfest.org

Bouchercon 38—Sept. 27-30, Anchorage, Alaska,
www.bouchercon2007.com

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