



The
MARCH

of CRIME

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SoCalMWA Luncheon

ATF: On the Cutting Edge of Tough Crime Scenes

With

ATF AGENT MEREDITH DAVIS

Sunday, March 20 at Noon

**HOW DO YOU LIFT FINGERPRINTS FROM A SHARD OF PIZZA
CRUST FOUND IN THE RUBBLE OF AN EXPLOSION?**

**HOW DO YOU ID A TERRORIST FROM THE BURNT SHRAPNEL
OF HIS CRIME?**

Bring your questions for the world's most advanced experts
on smuggling, arms trade, money laundering and
explosive-related crimes.

Tam O'Shanter Restaurant
2980 Los Feliz Blvd, Los Angeles
Noon - 2:30pm
(Doors open at 11:30)

Valet or street parking available

You'll place your food order at the Tam. No need to preorder.
The menu choices will include their famous Prime Rib, plus
vegetarian and gluten-free options.

[RESERVE YOUR PLACE AT THIS EVENT](#)

Save the Date!

[Visit the 2016
Crime Calendar](#)



The President's Rap Sheet

Craig Faustus Buck

I'm leaving for Left Coast Crime tomorrow, as of this writing, and I've got a lot of prep to do, so I'll keep this rap short and newsy.

By the time you read this, we will have had our first event in which our Arizona chapter members will have a chance to mingle with a lot of our California members, and maybe even some from Nevada if they're not too busy caucusing. The Left Coast Crime SoCalMWA Happy Hour will have brought us all together in Phoenix with a chance to create some new friendships and do plenty of networking. This should form the groundwork for a highly successful chapter presence at the Tucson Festival of Books on the 12th-13th of this month. If you are going to Tucson (non-chapter MWA members included) and have not yet set up a signing, contact our TFOB coordinator [Fred Andersen](#).

On March 20, we're having another fabulous Tam O'Shanter luncheon, this time with ATF Special Agent Meredith Davis. I believe she'll be talking about cutting edge forensics techniques to make sense of bombing and arson crime scenes and identify the perpetrators. But I'm not sure because she's involved in an ongoing ATF operation so communicating with me is not at the top of her priority list. She did mention something about harvesting DNA from a blown up pizza crust.

ATF will also be at our August 28 joint meeting with SinC OC in Irvine, but the program will be completely different. Assuming the case will be at trial by then, they will be presenting a murder-for-hire case they've cracked in San Diego. A little local color.

Of course the LA Times Festival of Books is coming up April 9-10. If you haven't yet claimed a signing slot in our booth there, contact our indefatigable chapter Secretary and LATFOB coordinator [Terri Nolan](#).

And finally, a number of you have inquired about how to upload your book covers to the revolving display of our website's home page. You can do this by logging into the Members Only area and clicking on "Add or Update your Member Listing." If you don't have the password, [send me an email](#).

Craig

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Secretary: Terri Nolan

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The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Like Craig, I'm busy prepping for Left Coast Crime in between editing this month's issue. I'm particularly looking forward to attending the SoCalMWA Happy Hour on Friday and the Lefty Award Banquet, where I'll be cheering for our many members who are up for awards this year.

This month's issue features [introductions to SoCalMWA's 2016 Board](#). I'd like to thank them all for their service to our chapter and continuing SoCalMWA's tradition of providing valuable information and opportunities to our members.

Have you considered participating in MWA's new critique program? At \$100 for a 25-page critique, it's an excellent value, but what can you expect? Lisa King [contributed an article](#) about her experience with the program that might help you decide.

We've also got articles from Gregory Von Dare ([Hollow Points](#)), Elaine Ash ([Feather Editing](#)) and Andrew Neiderman ([The Versatile Novelist](#)). Thanks for your contributions to this month's issue.

Holly

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

Editor: [Holly West](#)

March Contributors:
 Gregory Von Dare
 Elaine Ash
 Lisa King
 Andrew Neiderman

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

Contact us at:
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FRESH BLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new and returning members:

Steven Jay Schwartz
 Dustin Stevens
 Ronald C. Tierney



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Yahoo! Group

Email
SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Meet SoCalMWA's 2016 Board of Directors



Craig Faustus Buck
President

Author/screenwriter Craig Faustus Buck's debut noir mystery novel, *GO DOWN HARD*, was published by Brash Books in 2015 and was First Runner Up for the Claymore Award. His short stories have been nominated or won numerous awards, including the Anthony and the Macavity. He wrote an Oscar-nominated short film and co-authored two #1 NYT nonfiction best-sellers. He is President of Mystery Writers of America SoCal and a Director at Large of Sisters in Crime LA. Find out more at CraigFaustusBuck.com.

Sue Ann Jaffarian
Vice President

Sue Ann Jaffarian is the author of three critically acclaimed mystery series: The Odelia Grey series, the Ghost of Granny Apples series, and the Madison Rose Vampire Mysteries. She also writes the Winnie Wilde romance series under the pen name of Meg Chambers, as well as short stories. In addition to writing, Sue Ann is a full-time paralegal living in Los Angeles. Kirkus has said of Sue Ann, "Like Stuart Kaminsky, Jaffarian juggles her franchises deftly, giving each a unique voice and appeal."



Eric Beetner
Treasurer

Eric Beetner is the author of more than a dozen novels including *RUMRUNNERS*, *THE DEVIL DOESN'T WANT ME*, *DIG TWO GRAVES*, *WHITE HOT PISTOL* and *THE YEAR I DIED SEVEN TIMES*. He is co-author (with JB Kohl) of *ONE TOO MANY BLOWS TO THE HEAD*, *BORROWED TROUBLE* and *OVER THEIR HEADS* and co-wrote *THE BACKLIST* with author Frank Zafiro. He lives in Los Angeles where he co-hosts the Noir At The Bar reading series. For more visit ericbeetner.com.

Terri Nolan
Secretary

Terri Nolan has been a member of MWA for nine years and considers service to be important: "I believe in giving back to the organizations from which I receive so much." This year marks her 4th on the board. She is the author of three thrillers and a short story featuring investigative journalist Birdie Keane. The critically acclaimed and award nominated trilogy includes the novels *BURDEN OF TRUTH*, *GLASS HOUSES* and *BLUE BIRD*. Terri lives in Orange County and is currently working on a non-fiction project with a co-author. Please visit her at www.terrinnolan.com.



Meet SoCalMWA's 2016 Board of Directors



Shannon Baker

Shannon Baker writes the upcoming Kate Fox mystery series. *STRIPPED BARE*, due for release September 2016 by Tor/Forge, features a sheriff in rural Nebraska and has been called *Longmire* meets *The Good Wife*. She also writes the Nora Abbott Mystery Series, a fast-paced mix of murder, environmental issues and Hopi Indians published by Midnight Ink. She writes from the Colorado Rockies to the Nebraska Sandhills, the peaks of Flagstaff and the deserts of Tucson. Baker was voted Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers' 2104 Writer of the Year. Visit Shannon-Baker.com.

Matt Coyle

Matt Coyle is the author of the Rick Cahill Crime Series. His debut novel, *YESTERDAY'S ECHO*, won the Anthony Award for Best First Novel, the San Diego Book Award for Best Mystery, and the Ben Franklin Silver Award for Best New Voice in Fiction. His second book, *NIGHT TREMORS*, is a Lefty Award finalist and a Book Reporter.com Favorite Book of the Year for 2015. The third Rick Cahill novel, *DARK FISSURES*, will be out this December. Matt lives in San Diego with his yellow Lab, Angus, where he is writing the fourth Rick Cahill novel. Visit mattcoylebooks.com.



Jessica Kaye

Jessica Kaye is an entertainment and publishing attorney, as well as a Grammy Award-winning audiobook producer. She serves on the boards of the Audio Publishers Association, The Victory Theatre Center in Burbank and the Southern California chapter of MWA. Jessica owns Big Happy Family, LLC, a digital distribution company for audiobooks (www.bighappyfamilyaudio.com). She is the creator and co-editor of the anthology *MEETING ACROSS THE RIVER* (Bloomsbury, 2005) and a contributor to *OCCUPIED EARTH* (Polis Books, 2015.)

Elizabeth Little

Elizabeth Little was born and raised in St. Louis and graduated from Harvard University. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, among other publications, and her nonfiction has been featured on *All Things Considered*, *The World*, and *Here and Now*. *DEAR DAUGHTER*, her debut novel, was a Los Angeles Times bestseller, a Macavity and Barry nominee and the winner of the Strand Critics Award for Best First Novel. Her second novel, *FOLLOW ME*, will be published by Viking in 2017. Elizabeth lives in Los Angeles. Visit elizabeth-little.com.



Meet SoCalMWA's 2016 Board of Directors

Paul D. Marks



Paul D. Marks is the author of the Shamus Award-winning mystery-thriller *WHITE HEAT*. His story, "Howling at the Moon" (EQMM 11/14), was short-listed for both the 2015 Anthony and Macavity Awards for Best Short Story, and came in #7 in Ellery Queen's Reader's Poll Award. Midwest Review calls *VORTEX*, Paul's new novella, "...a nonstop staccato action noir." He also co-edited the anthology *COAST TO COAST: MURDER FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA*, from Down and Out Books. His short story, "Deserted Cities of the Heart," will appear in Akashic Books' *ST. LOUIS NOIR* anthology and "Ghosts of Bunker Hill" will be in an upcoming issue of Ellery Queen. Visit PaulDMarks.com.

Travis Richardson

Travis Richardson has been a finalist for the Macavity short story award in 2014 and 2015 as well as the Anthony short story award in 2014. His novella, *LOST IN CLOVER*, was listed in *Spinetingler Magazine's* Best Crime Fiction of 2012. His second novella, *KEEPING THE RECORD*, came out in 2014. He has published stories in crime fiction publications such as *Thuglit*, *Shotgun Honey*, *Flash Fiction Offensive* and *All Due Respect*. He used to edit the SINC/LA newsletter, *Ransom Notes*, and reviewed Anton Chekhov short stories at www.chekhovshorts.com. He lives with his wife and daughter. Find out more at www.tsrichardson.com.



James Ziskin



James (Jim) Ziskin is the author of the Anthony and Lefty-nominated *Ellie Stone* mysteries. He studied Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania then worked in New York as director of NYU's Casa Italiana. Jim moved to Los Angeles in 1998 and spent sixteen years running large international operations in the subtitling and visual effects fields. His international experience includes two years working and studying in France, extensive time in Italy, and nearly four years in India. He speaks Italian and French. Jim currently lives in the Hollywood Hills. He's represented by William Reiss of John Hawkins and Associates.

OVER the TRANSOM

Member News

Leslie S. Klinger and Laura Caldwell are co-editing ANATOMY OF INNOCENCE for Liveright Publishing/W.W. Norton, due out in Feb. 2017. The anthology collects experiences of persons who were wrongly accused of crimes, wrongly convicted, and wrongly incarcerated, only to eventually achieve exoneration and release. The experiences are retold by accomplished mystery/thriller writers such as **Jan Burke, Gary Phillips**, Sara Paretsky, Lee Child, Laurie R. King and a dozen more.

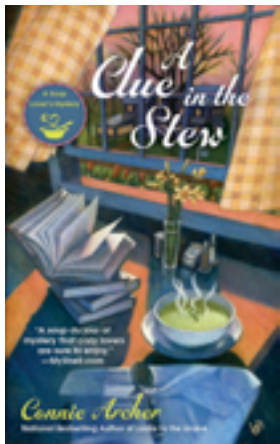
S.W. Lauden's stand alone novella, CROSSWISE, was published by Down & Out Books on Feb. 29. The action focuses on a disgraced NYPD cop named Tommy Ruzzo who chases his drug-addict girlfriend to her hometown of Seatown, Florida. She leaves Ruzzo high and dry just before he's named Head of Security at Precious Acres, a beachfront retirement community populated by wisecracking New Yorkers. The bodies pile up as Ruzzo uncovers a dangerous trail of clues that brings everybody in his new world under suspicion.



Shirley Fousseau Murphy's latest Joe Grey mystery, CAT SHOUT FOR JOY, was released on February 27.

Tammy Kaehler's fourth Kate Reilly Racing Mystery, RED FLAGS, will be released by Poisoned Pen Press on April 5 in hardcover, trade paperback, large print, ebook and audio formats.

Gay Tolt Kinman's short story, "Miller's Murder," is the fifth in the Stand-Down series, all on Kindle. Char, an Afghanistan vet who lost her legs there, is working in a P.I. agency and helps find out the real motive for the murder of a fertility clinic's office manager.



Paul D. Marks' "Drinks with Reads" (Mystery Playground) photo and article went live on February 26th. Check out the "Green Fairy, absinthe," as featured in his novella VORTEX. <http://www.mysteryplayground.net/p/summer-drinks-with-reads-series.html>

A CLUE IN THE STEW, the fifth book in **Connie Archer's** Soup Lover's series, will be published on April 5: The village of Snowflake, Vermont is buzzing with excitement. Hilary Stone, the famous author of Murder Comes Calling, is planning a visit. Even the discovery of the body of an unidentified woman strangled in the woods hasn't dampened the spirits of Snowflake's avid mystery fans -- that is, until the villagers learn the murder mimics the popular novel. Could the killer be a deranged fan hoping for attention? Or is a copycat killer on the loose?

OVER the TRANSOM



Ellen Byron's debut novel, *PLANTATION SHUDDERS*, is nominated for an Agatha Best First Novel Award.

Nathan Walpow's new collection, *PUSH COMES TO SHOVE*, is out in print and e-book versions. It's got seven stories, a novella, and a Lee-Child-penned foreword. The novella is *PUSH*, the expansion of "Push Comes to Shove" (also included), which was selected for the Best American Mystery Stories series. Also included: the Amazon chart-topping "Daughters," the precursor to Walpow's Logan novellas; "A Good Day's Work," which has been optioned for a movie; and a couple of speculative fiction tales.

Sarah M. Chen has a 50-word story in the March issue of *Blink Ink*. The theme for this issue #23 is "Mystery Train" and Sarah's story is entitled "Solo." This is a quarterly print-only themed publication that accepts 50-word stories. Find them at blink-ink.org. Additionally, Sarah's short story, "A Summer Drive," will be in *Crime Factory*, issue #18. This is a noir magazine based in Melbourne, Australia. It will be available in late March.



Phyllis Humphrey's latest novel, *DEAD MEN'S TALES*, is due March 21st, and is the second book in her Olivia Grant Cozy Mystery Series. She hopes it does as well as the first, *DEAD IN THE WATER*, which was released October 6th, 2015, from Gemma Halliday Publishing. She also hopes that it is as funny as that one was, too.

S.K. Rizzolo's fourth historical mystery set in Regency England, *ON A DESERT SHORE*, is a new release from Poisoned Pen Press. A father's ambition to transplant a child of mixed blood and create an English dynasty will lead to terrible deeds.

D.P. Lyle, MD's updated 2nd Edition of *FORENSICS FOR DUMMIES* is [now available](#).

Craig Faustus Buck's short story "Blank Shot," a cold war tale of amnesia, intrigue and suspense in pre-Wall Berlin, will be featured in Darkhouse Books' anthology *BLACK COFFEE*, due out March 15. His short story "Shrink Rapture," a twisted tale of love, paranoia and murder is in *Pulp Modern* #10, published March 1.



E. J. McGill's new crime/suspense/mystery novel is now available in e-book format from Amazon.com. Set mostly in Tucson, *FRAIL CHILDREN OF DUST* was inspired by a local abduction that is still unsolved. Molly Talbot McKinney, author/publisher Moon Cactus Books, wrote, "(McGill) has a way of latching on to the reader's attention and not letting go... plot was clever and intricate (and) tension at the end was great."

Member APPEARANCES

Sometimes a real-life crime and cover-up falls on a fiction writer's doorstep. That was the case for **Barry Lancet** in his third Jim Brodie book, **PACIFIC BURN**. Lancet will talk about the “nuclear mafia's” cover-up in Japan's triple disaster of 2011—the earthquake/giant tsunami/nuclear power plant meltdown—at two Los Angeles Public Libraries: the Calabasas Branch, 200 Civic Center Way, Calabasas, CA 91302, at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 5 and the Little Tokyo Branch, 203 S. Los Angeles St, Los Angeles, CA 90012, at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 12. <http://barrylancet.com/appearances.php>.

Right: SoCalMWA's **Debbie Mitsch** with Barry at the February meeting of Sisters in Crime Orange County. Photo by Pat H. Broeske.

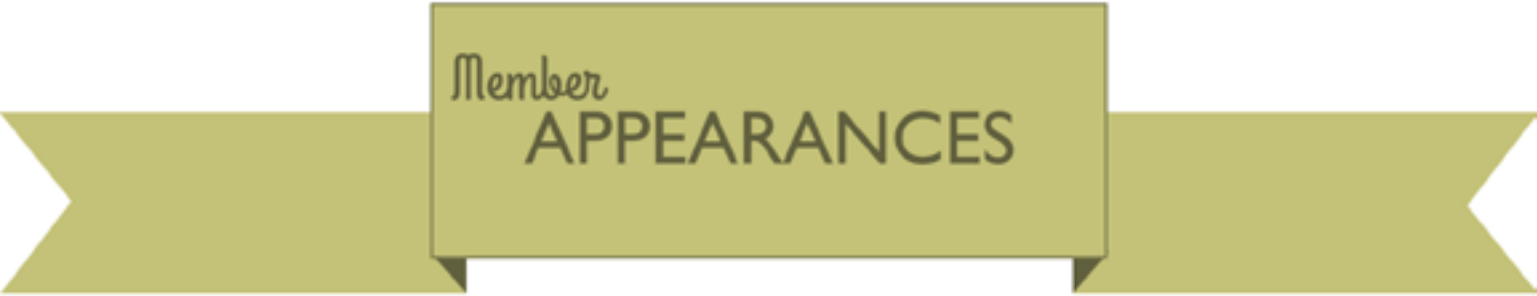


Jeri Westerson continues her book tour for her 8th Crispin Guest Medieval Noir Mystery, **THE SILENCE OF STONES**. Saturday, March 5, 4 pm — Laurel Bookstore, 1423 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612 (510) 452-9232 Mead, cheeses, presentation, and prizes. Then on Sunday, March 6, 3 pm — Belmont Library 1110 Alameda de las Pulgas, Belmont, CA 94002. She'll be giving her talk “Westminster Abbey, the Coronation Chair, and Medieval Murder.” Books for sale. Mead, cheeses, presentation, and prizes.

On March 4th **Sheila Lowe** will be featured in the Read Across America program at her alma mater, Anaheim High School. Her publisher, Suspense Publishing, is donating to the AHS library the electronic version of **POISON PEN**, the first book in her Forensic Handwriting Mysteries, for AHS's 3,000 students.

On March 22nd, **Connie Archer**, **George Fong** and **Sheila Lowe** will be sharing their second panel at a Palos Verdes Presbyterian Church event.

Glen Erik Hamilton will launch his new book, **HARD COLD WINTER**, sequel to the Edgar-nominated **PAST CRIMES**, at Flintridge Books on March 8 at 7pm, leading a panel with crime writers Robert Rotstein, Henry Turner, and Gwendolyn Womack. Glen will also appear with Craig Faustus Buck and James W. Ziskin at the Friends of the Huntington Library luncheon on March 10. For other SoCal and Seattle appearances, see glenerikhamilton.com.



Member
APPEARANCES

Join **Jan Burke** and **DP Lyle** for Crime & Science Radio. Upcoming schedule:

2-27-16 and 3-12-16 Crime and Science Radio: Follow the Money: Catching Cheaters, Frauds and Con Artists — An Interview with Securities Fraud Investigator Richard B. York—Part 1 and 2

3-26-16: Crime and Science Radio: Research, Education, and the Future of Forensic Science: an Interview with Dr. Katherine A. Roberts, Director of the CSULA Graduate Program in Criminalistic

4-9-16: Crime and Science Radio: Building a Better Law Enforcement: An Interview with Chief Scott LaChasse, Burbank Police Department

4-23-16: Crime and Science Radio: Things That Go Boom in the Night: An Interview with Weapons and Explosives Expert and Author John Gilstrap

Mike Befeler will be on the Mystery: Malice and Mayhem panel at Literary Orange at the Irvine Marriott on Saturday, April 2.

Gay Tolt Kinman will be the speaker at the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Lit Mingle at the Hastings Branch library on Saturday, March 5. She'll present an interactive workshop on how to write a mystery for children and teens.

Event Alert

2016 Las Vegas Writer's Conference

Hosted by Henderson Writer's Group

April 28-30, 2016

Sam's Town Hotel and Gambling Hall

Writing Workshops

Pitch Opportunities to Agents & Editors

Keynote by Noted Writing Coach Larry Brooks

More info:

LasVegasWritersConference.com

Note: this conference is not affiliated with SoCalMWA



Hollow Points

Gregory Von Dore

Far and Away

Almost every firearm is equipped with integral “sights.” Usually, a front and rear sight. By aligning these two markers, the gun should hit what it’s aimed at, shaky hands and hangovers excepted. As the range and accuracy of rifles increased dramatically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a new factor became apparent—the naked eye of a hunter or soldier could only see up to a certain distance. Beyond that, who knew? A missed shot at long range could injure a comrade in wartime or wound rather than cleanly kill a game animal on the hunt.

To hit a target at the extreme ranges made possible by smokeless powder, a new kind of sight was needed, an optical sight. Based on the refracting telescope, the telescopic sight (or scope) not only lets you see farther, it also has a precision aiming guide, the reticle. Today, there are a variety of optical sights that are effective at short or long distances. A small number of scopes even have zoom lenses.



This military scope can zoom from 4.5 to 14 power.

A modern scope will have, at least, an “objective” lens at the front (the bigger the better), a connecting tube that contains the aiming reticle plus other optics and a small lens called the “ocular,” or eyepiece, at the back. Scopes come with rubber or plastic caps which snap over the front and back lenses to protect them from scratches and keep them free from dust. The scope is supplied with a variety of mounts, all of which seek to make the optical axis of the scope parallel to and just above the bore of the rifle. The scope presents a magnified image that is right-side up and correct left to right. The same equipment that is used to clean and care for camera lenses can be used to maintain a telescopic sight: soft cloth, lens paper, lens cleaner and anti-static brushes. Scopes are classified by how many times they magnify and the width of the objective lens—4 x 50mm, for example.

It’s that tube in the middle of the scope where the magic happens. Once you have focused, you have an idea of the distance to target and you can make your adjustments to the point of impact. Remember that a bullet falls toward the earth as it moves forward and over long distances this can become pronounced. The “elevation” knob on the scope allows you to raise the aiming point, compensating for bullet drop. If wind is a factor, then use the “windage” adjustment (left/right) to compensate. There is an audible click for each increment on the scope’s knobs, and adjustments are often called two clicks or four clicks, and so on. Once adjustments are complete, the shooter simply puts the crosshairs on the desired target and fires. No guesswork involved. It’s typical for a hunter to align their scope at a target range, to “dial it in,” so that a minimum of adjustments are needed in the field.

The Versatile Novelist - Is it Possible?

Guest Spotlight by **Andrew Neiderman**

There is, and I fear always will be, a driving need for publishers and retailers to pigeon hole you for marketing purposes. For example, if you've successfully first published as a romance writer, there is real resistance to your writing a science fiction novel or a procedural detective tale.

I ran into this early in my career after I had published what was more known as terror novels, including one that was made into a feature film. In the midst of all this, I somehow sold two novels to Harlequin's Worldwide imprint and was immediately questioned as to the wisdom of writing romantic suspense. The books did well worldwide, but the pressure to get me back to "my genre" was intense. After all, readers will be waiting for the Bogey Man and be disappointed.

However, I was brave enough back then to jump formats as well. I had been teaching high school English for over a dozen years when I also began to write plays. I published a number of them in Scholastic Magazine and a collection for Contemporary Drama Service. Teaching the greats like Miller, Williams and of course, Shakespeare, drove home the art form.

After having taught film study for nearly twenty years, I began to write film scripts, which was a clear divergence from novels, especially when creating dialogue and descriptions of settings and characters. But the biggest leap of genre I have made was when I, a writer of terror in the world of King and Koontz, was asked to complete the works of V.C. Andrews and then carry the style, the characters and plots forward for a worldwide audience with readers so dedicated that they formed role playing clubs and helped develop a huge Facebook page.

What underscores all this and I hope gives publishers and retailers a pause in thinking is that no matter the format, first and foremost is a good story with complex enough characters to capture and fascinate readers. Can all novelists do this? Can a dramatist write a novel? Can it be interchangeable? Is a writer simply a writer or must he or she be a terror writer, a romance writer, a writer of fantasy?

I began my publishing career with poems and was excited to receive five dollars for one. I worked with political candidates, writing their speeches and radio advertisements. I exploited my experiences and wrote articles for a national political journal, *Campaign Insight*. In short, I couldn't resist the written word wherever I could find it, publish it, and explore it.

What every writer must face is the challenge from publishers, retailers, producers, etc. to label you as one thing and one thing only. You must find the strength to counter with "I'm a story teller, a lover of the written word, and if my dialogue belongs in a film and my descriptions are poetry, please don't punish me with a quick rejection." After all, how would you market Homer, Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe and a slew of other writers who dared write poems as well as prose?



Andrew Neiderman is the author of 46 published novels, the most well-known being *THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE*, which is now running successfully as a stage play in Holland and in development as a stage musical. His newest novel is *THE INCIDENT* (Severn House, March, 2016).

Do Your Own Feather Edit

Guest Spotlight by **Elaine Ash**

Do your own whaaat? Feather edit. It's the term I use for going into a novel manuscript and adding or changing less than 100 words. A feather edit adds new clarity and smoothness to the read in terms of plot and characters. Technically, I suppose it should be called "The Plot and Characters Reminder Edit," but that title just doesn't have a special ring to it. The most memorable feather edit I've done was for [Frank De Blase](#), the highly colorful, poetic, and largely unsung author of the [Frankie Valentine series](#), published by [Down & Out Books](#). I've had the pleasure of consulting on both Valentine manuscripts.

Some writers, De Blase included, structure their stories so the main character is continually running into new people. These new people provide plot twists and clues as the story progresses—sometimes they appear again and sometimes they don't. All told, it's a lot of characters to remember, but makes for a variety of adventure. The danger in meeting character after character in a novel lies in overloading readers with names that drop in and drop out again, making it hard to remember them down the line. A certain amount of this is inevitable, but after a dozen or so, it's hard to remember everyone.

Example: Have you ever scratched your head when a character suddenly reappeared—let's call her Casey—and asked yourself, "Who was that, anyway?" Riffing pages, back you go, only to find that Casey was a patrol cop introduced ten chapters ago for a quick paragraph or two before disappearing from the scene. No wonder you don't remember who Casey is! With your memory refreshed, you can return to the story—but only if it's so riveting you can't tear your eyes away.

In general, when a reader gets pulled out of a story, it's an interruption, and all too often it's easy to get distracted, put the book down, and go off to do something else. In a worst case scenario, the reader never quite makes it back and the novel gets set aside.

Make no mistake, you never want readers interrupted so they have to hunt down who's who. Avoiding this is easy if small "reminders" are written in to prompt the reader's memory. *Voilà*, the Feather Edit. To do this edit yourself, you must revisit the manuscript, reading only for character intros and extros. Note when people are walking onto the page, disappearing, and then returning.

Here are some sample "feather edits" suggested for COUGAR'S KISS, the second Frankie Valentine novel. On page thirteen of the manuscript, Detective Angelo Rossi is introduced: *Donovan's partner, Angelo Rossi, was standing next to the body, drinking a cup of coffee.*

Five pages later he returns, and De Blase had originally written it like this: *I spun around and looked up to Rossi.* But five pages can be a long time in a fast moving murder mystery, and readers deserved a little more help than a single last name for a character whose introduction was limited to one line. Simply adding "Detective" in front of Rossi's name would give readers a little extra help in recalling the character: *I spun around and looked up to Detective Rossi.* Yes, it's a small thing, but if readers can be saved from leafing back a few pages to see who Rossi is, it's worth it.

[Continued on page 16](#)

Critiquing the Critic

Guest Spotlight by **Lisa King**

After publishing two Jean Applequist mysteries—the first in 2012 and the second in 2014—I was totally blocked on book three. The year 2015 was a bad one: I undertook a problematic move and experienced a death in the family. Old-fashioned procrastination was also a factor.

It should have been easy. My main players were characters from the first two books. I had the plot laid out, and I had written about 40 opening pages and a couple of important later scenes, but couldn't get any further than that. Even after the dust cleared from the death and the move, I couldn't get going. Facebook beckoned. There was more unpacking to do. I had to binge-watch *Orange Is the New Black*. I needed to spend two days making turkey confit. You know the drill.

Then, in early November of last year, MWA offered a critique of the first 25 pages of a novel, screenplay, or short story for \$100. An established mystery writer would do the critiquing. I was intrigued. Perhaps this was the kick in the butt I needed to start writing again.

When I saw Julie Smith's name on the list of potential readers, I was sold. I've read nearly all her Skip Langdon mysteries and several entries from her other series. Her plots are tight, her dialog real and funny, her characters quirky and believable, her settings evocative. I would definitely listen to whatever she had to say about my work.

I polished the first 25 pages and sent them off. A month later, I had an 1,100-word critique in hand, plus a marked-up set of pages.

I couldn't have asked for a more thorough job. Smith clearly took her assignment seriously and read closely. She did some line editing, but she spent most of her efforts analyzing the work as a whole. She broke her comments into categories: writing, characters, pacing, plot, setting, and overall. Her tone was friendly and humorous, yet her points were erudite and well taken. I was delighted to learn that she really liked the writing.

She pointed out strong points, and her criticisms were right on. I immediately saw she was correct that certain characters weren't reacting naturally in a pivotal scene. With thoughtful rewriting it reads much better. A lot of her questions arose from the fact that she had read only 25 pages, but those questions helped me realize how I needed to shape the rest of the novel.

She liked my portrayal of a teenage character and surmised that I must have raised teens. Check. Three, in fact. She also liked that within the first 25 pages someone gets murdered, the protagonist is fired from her job, she acquires a dangerous stalker, and her relationship with her boyfriend is threatened. I'll clearly have to keep up the pace.

The process worked wonderfully for me, and because of the critique I have made good progress on the book. There was one slight disconnect: Because my story is humorous and features an amateur detective, Smith assumed it was aimed at the cozy market. She pointed out that my heroine might be a little too sexually rapacious for that audience. Well, of course she is. My work can be categorized as *Oversexed Amateur Detective Who Is Really Into Wine*.

I have one question: When (not if) I do finish it, how do I get Julie Smith to critique the whole book?

Lisa King is the author of *DEATH IN A WINE DARK SEA* and *VULTURE AU VIN*, both from The Permanent Press.

Hollow Points - [continued from pg 11](#)

The aiming device or reticle is a familiar sight to every movie fan. It comes in a variety of patterns, with the traditional “crosshairs” being the most popular. The aiming reticle can also display information pertaining to distance and bullet drop. The reticle is a very thin piece of glass with the pattern printed or etched on it in high resolution.

Along with modern telescopic sights come two new, related, items. First is the laser sight. Usually mounted below the barrel, a laser sight simply shines a thin laser beam in exact line with the bore of the gun’s barrel. So, out to 100 feet or so, it gives you a look at where your bullet will hit within an inch. Laser sights are fantastic in the dark, where you can’t really see well enough to aim, or indoors, but they are less effective in open daylight. Handguns benefit most from laser sights, since they are often used at close range and may be a critical defense weapon in the dark.

Another recent innovation is the Swedish Aimpoint, or “reflex” optical sight. Resembling a fat telescopic sight, the Aimpoint uses optical trickery to show a glowing red dot superimposed on the target when you look through it, but only when your eye is perfectly aligned with the barrel of the rifle or gun. The Aimpoint does not magnify, has a much larger field of view than a telescopic sight and the virtual dot can be adjusted for size and brightness.



Reflex sights show a virtual red dot on target.

This device is better suited to rifles since it adds more weight to a handgun than would be practical. However there are instances of Aimpoint sights and standard telescopic sights being mounted on revolvers—mostly big magnums. As a general rule, optical sights are not used with semi-automatic pistols, since the additional weight of the sight disrupts the travel of the slide as it ejects a spent cartridge and the slam-bang movement of the action could damage the precision alignment of the optics. You don’t expect to make a perfect shot at long distance with a handgun anyway.

Next time, we’ll begin our survey of Cold War firearms and the rise of the assault rifle and come up over the horizon of present day technology.

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Gregory Von Dare comes from Chicago and was raised on crime, corruption and clout in the big city. He has written non-fiction books, magazine articles and radio scripts, as well as stories, plays and screenplays. He once worked as a pyro detonator and talent manager for Universal Studios Hollywood.

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Doing Your Own Feather Edit - [continued from page 13](#)

Now, let's talk about "the dead guy." *The dead man's name was Michael Francis Conway; it was printed in bold on his private investigator's license. The late Mike Conway was a private dick. And guys in this line of work seemed to be more susceptible to "accidents" and "suicides" and general cases of misadventure than the average Joe.*

As the story progresses, we find out that Conway's dead body had been retrieved from a bank of the Genesee River. But it isn't until page twenty-six that Conway gets another mention, and that's a long time for readers to remember quick details. The original text read: *I wasn't sure if anyone would answer when I called Conway's office. Obviously Conway wouldn't, but maybe he had a partner, an assistant, a secretary, anybody who could shed some light.*

Check out this small addition, which has been bolded to make it easy to spot, in the middle: *I wasn't sure if anyone would answer when I called Conway's office. Obviously Conway wouldn't, **now that he was drying off on a slab at the morgue after his swan dive into the river,** but maybe he had a partner, an assistant, a secretary, anybody who could shed some light.*

See how the story of Mr. Conway's death is quickly recapped in the added phrase? It's a quick prompt that helps the reader remember without intruding on the plot as it advances.

Another important-but-fleeting character is Mickey Miller: *Mickey Miller was a real Tijuana Bible-beater. He produced stag films, burlesque reels and blue movies like those you could see in the underbelly of major metropolitan tenderloins across the map.*

Many pages later Mickey reappears: *It was early evening when I set out to look for Mickey.* But will readers remember who he is exactly? Here's the quick feather-edit solution to make sure nobody is left scrambling, trying to remember: *It was early evening when I set out to look for Mickey, the blue movie broker.*

A do-it-yourself feather edit is a good idea if you have lots of characters appearing and reappearing in your story. It's easy to do—just make sure your edits are short, quick, and limited to one word, or a phrase, in length.

Elaine Ash edits crime writers; from established authors to emerging talent. Her own noir series, written under the pen name "Anonyous-9," has been praised by T. Jefferson Parker, Johnny Shaw, Sam Wiebe, and many more. Her various awards include Spinetinger Magazine's Best Short Story on the Web 2009 and two Readers' Choice Awards from the House of Crime and Mystery, Canada. Find out more at www.ashedits.wordpress.com. Email: ashedit@gmail.com.

True Crime Exhibition USC Doheny Library 2/18 - 5/31/2016

Sponsored by the Visions and Voices Program at USC and located in the First floor Treasure Room.

A collection of items, mostly from the USC Libraries, which pay tribute to the murky moral world of the private detective. Some items of note: The Falcon from *The Maltese Falcon*, a mug shot in the LAPD's Gangster Book (1930-1955), a letter from Eugene Francois Vidocq, and a 1935 fingerprinting kit.

Notice submitted by **Sharon Doyle**



LAPD's Gangster Book (1930-55). Photo by Sharon Doyle.

A green banner with a ribbon-like shape at the top and bottom. The word "Crime" is written in a cursive font, and "CALENDAR" is written in a bold, sans-serif font.

Crime
CALENDAR

Criminal Happenings in 2016

March 13 - [Tucson Festival of Books, Tucson, AZ](#)
March 20 - [SoCalMWA Luncheon with ATF Agent Meredith Davis, Los Angeles, CA](#)
April 9 - 10 - [Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, Los Angeles, CA](#)
April 28 - [The Edgars Banquet, New York, NY](#)
April 29 - May 1 - [Malice Domestic, Bethesda, MD](#)
July 5 - 9 - [Thrillerfest XI, New York, NY](#)
July 28 - 31 - [Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference, Corte Madera, CA](#)
September 15 - 18 - [Bouchercon, New Orleans, LA](#)
October 1 - [Gumbo & Homebrewed Ale Party, Los Angeles, CA](#)
December 17- [SoCalMWA Holiday Party, Los Angeles, CA](#)

A green banner with a ribbon-like shape at the top and bottom. The word "The" is written in a cursive font, and "LAST WORD" is written in a bold, sans-serif font.

The
LAST WORD

“In the end, she thought, we are who we are. And stuck with it.
And the more she thought about it, the less she thought that might be such a bad thing.”

--Suzanne Munshower, YOUNGER