

June 2018



The  
MARCH

of CRIME

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**SUNDAY, JUNE 10  
7 P.M.**

Featuring readings by  
SoCalMWA members:

**Lisa Brackmann  
Phoef Sutton  
Thomas Perry  
Lida Sideris**

Start your summer off with a bang!

Join fellow SoCalMWA\* members and others for an evening of booze (optional) and crime fiction (mandatory) on Sunday, June 10 at the Mandrake in Culver City.

\*Event not sponsored by SoCalMWA



## The President's Rap Sheet

Glen Erik Hamilton

We are cat-sitting. For the past few weeks, our small house has played host to three extra felines. Combined with our own cat and another tiny animal that might be a dog or a pygmy white-tailed deer, we're not sure which, that totals five. Five agile young critters prowling the counters, dashing under the beds, leaping off the armoires, terrorizing the knickknacks. The remaining knickknacks, I should say.

The biggest adjustment, however, has been less tangible. No matter where you are in the house or what you're doing, there is always something moving, just at the very corner of your eye. Perpetual peripheral distraction.

On deadline recently, I was reminded of the tunnel vision required to write at a decent rate of speed. For me, finding that groove takes a lot of prep work. Putting the cell phone out of reach. Turning off the web browsers, turning on instrumental music. And even with all that, my brain wanders off in random directions. Compiling a BuzzFeed-style list of my Top 10 Toppings for Waffles, for example. Mmmm, waffles...

Where was I? Right, distractions. It became easier over time to ignore the constant motion of the animals. And the more I wrote, the easier it became to re-find that blessed groove every day.

I can hear many of you saying *Duh, Genius* right now. How many famous authors and lauded instructors advise us to write every day? Through four books and other projects, I've ducked and dodged that daily practice.

Until now. My goal for Book Five is to produce at least one page per day, cats and cell phones be damned. I'm announcing it here not just to keep myself accountable, but to invite you to join me in this experiment and to support one another. I'll be posting on Twitter and Instagram (*not* finsta; [see page 7](#)) under the hashtag #dailypage, and would love to hear about your progress and insights.

Distractions are perpetual. But they can be made peripheral.

After our usual busy spring with the Edgars and LATFoB, our chapter has a respite in early summer. But we are already gearing up for joint events with Sisters in Crime Orange County and at the San Diego Festival of Books in August, as well as Bouchercon in September, in St. Petersburg, Florida. Oh, the humidity. If you'd like to lend a hand with the preparations, reach out to one of the board members. We love accomplices.

Glen

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## The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Last month I mentioned I was in the process of editing a short story anthology. This month, I have a challenge for you, based on my experience with this project.

Before I tell you what it is, I know there are SoCalMWA members with far more expertise than I have. After all, that's one of the reasons I'm a member of this group—to benefit from the collective wisdom of so many fantastic writers. Please read my challenge with that in mind.

Maybe “challenge” isn't the right word. “Reminder” might be a better one.

Here's what I want you to do: The next time you're editing/revising a project, take a virtual pair of scissors and start cutting words wherever you can do it without sacrificing the story (plot and voice, mainly). Cut extraneous words, modify sentences to make them more economical, and be ruthless about what's expendable.

This might sound like cutting words for the sake of cutting, and I suppose in some ways, it is. But here's what I've learned both from my own writing and from editing other's writing: Most stories/novels will benefit from a chop of at least one hundred words or more per every five thousand. Those numbers are arbitrary but it's a rough guide that's worked for me. I call it a word count pass and it's best done when you think the draft is ready for submission.

You might be saying “But wait, she's giving me homework over summer vacation?” Hey—nobody ever said this job was easy. Get to work!

Holly

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

Editor: [Holly West](#)

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:  
[themarchofcrime@gmail.com](mailto:themarchofcrime@gmail.com)

### Join our SoCalMWA Yahoo! Group

Email [SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) to join  
(members only)

# FRESHBLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new and returning members:

Laura Brennan  
James Aubrey Jensen  
Ken Kristensen  
Winnie M. Li  
Attica Locke  
Judith Mathison  
Nancy Tardy  
Norm Thoeming



## OVER the TRANSOM

**Paul Levine's** BUM DEAL will be available from Thomas & Mercer in trade paperback, ebook, and audio on June 12. In the thirteenth and final installment of the Jake Lassiter series, the linebacker-turned-lawyer, battling symptoms of traumatic brain injury, switches sides and prosecutes a surgeon accused of killing his wife. "Fascinating, fully developed characters and smart, well-paced dialogue keep the pages turning." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

*NY Times* bestseller **Jonathan Maberry** has just sold a series to Netflix. *V-Wars*, based on his series of shared-world anthologies and comics, will star Ian Somerhalder (*Lost*, *Vampire Diaries*) and goes straight to series for a ten-episode first season. The story deals with a genetic disorder that turns a portion of the human population into vampires, and the resulting culture clash between them and humans. Maberry is a resident of Del Mar, California; and the books are published by IDW, based in San Diego. Shooting begins in July for an anticipated release on Netflix in spring of 2019.

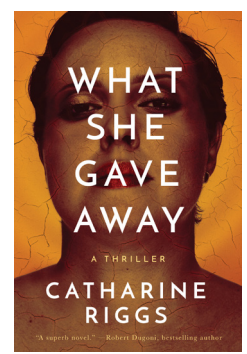
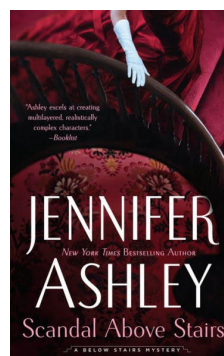
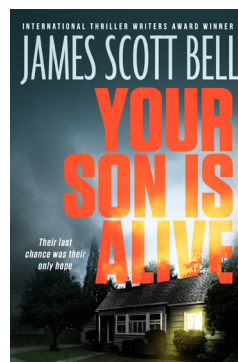
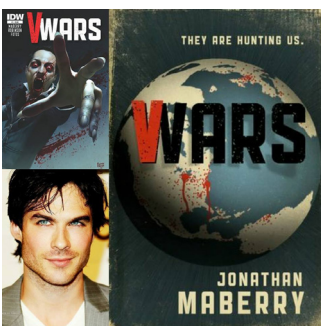
THE BUTCHER'S BILL, **Martin Roy Hill's** latest Linus Schag, NCIS, thriller, received the 2018 Clue Award for Best Thriller from the Chanticleer International Book Awards. THE BUTCHER'S BILL was earlier named the 2017 Best Suspense/Thriller novel by the Best Independent Book Awards.

**James Scott Bell's** thriller YOUR SON IS ALIVE was released by Compendium Press.

**Jennifer Ashley's** SCANDAL ABOVE STAIRS, the second book in her Below Stairs mysteries set in Victorian London and featuring Kat Holloway, a cook who solves crimes while concocting delicious meals for the aristocracy, will be released on July 3. [See page 5 for related appearances.](#)

**Paul D. Marks** is happy to announce that COAST TO COAST: PRIVATE EYES FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA, the anthology that he co-edited with Andrew McAleer, is nominated for an Anthony Award in the Best Anthology category. He thanks everyone who voted for it.

Thomas & Mercer launches **Catharine Riggs's** first work of psychological suspense on September 4, 2018. WHAT SHE GAVE AWAY features an outsider with a dark past and a bitter grudge who moves to a wealthy beach-side community only to find herself enmeshed in the secrets of her boss and his hapless wife. *NY Times* Bestselling author Robert Dugoni calls it "a superb novel from a unique writer with a distinctive voice. Honest, terrifyingly believable."



## Member APPEARANCES

**Jennifer Ashley** will sign *SCANDAL ABOVE STAIRS*, the second book in her Below Stairs mysteries series, at Poisoned Pen bookstore in Scottsdale, AZ, on Saturday, June 30 at 2 p.m. The books can be ordered ahead of time, or, if readers cannot attend but want a signed copy, they can request one from Poisoned Pen, and it will be shipped.

**Mike Befeler** will be presenting “You Can Start Writing at Any Age” and signing his most recent mystery novel, *DEATH OF A SCAM ARTIST* (ISBN 978-1-893035-38-6), at the Iacoboni Library, 4990, Lakewood, CA on Wednesday, June 13, at 6:30 p.m. The presentation relates humorous examples of writing at an older age and writing about older characters.

On June 3 at 2 p.m., **Sheila Lowe** (forensic handwriting examiner) will join **Lida Sideris** (attorney), **Nancy Cole Silverman** (radio personality), and Tony Piazza (film historian) in a panel at the Goleta Library. Their topic is “Using Your Own Life in Fiction.”

**Catharine Riggs** has been invited to be on the Thrillerfest panel, “ANTICIPATION, TWISTS OR NAIL BITTER? Creating Suspense” with Panel Master Sandra Brannan on July 14 from 10:30–11:20 a.m. Catharine also recently contributed a post to the *Women Writers, Women’s Books* blog about securing an agent called “[The Long and Winding Road to My Agent.](#)”

### TMOC Needs You!

TMOC is looking for articles (500–700 words) on subjects of interest to SoCalMWA members. This includes craft, marketing, and all aspects of publishing.

Content shouldn’t be overtly promotional, but rather instructional or informational.

Include a brief bio (100 words or less) and a headshot or cover image.

Send your questions and/or pitches to [themarchofcrime@gmail.com](mailto:themarchofcrime@gmail.com).



## Location, Location, Location

By **G.B. Pool**

In many novels and even short stories, location acts almost like a character. A great setting sets the stage for greater challenges whether it be physical places (Mt. Rushmore/*North by Northwest*), climatic as in climate (hurricanes/*Key Largo* or Herman Wouk's *DON'T STOP THE CARNIVAL*), or the local natives (from Tarzan's Africa to the characters on Hollywood Blvd.).

For a short story, pick an easily understood setting because it needs less description; a dilapidated factory vs. a giant industrial firm making computer components for the military weapons used in... If you get too technical, you will lose your audience and use up your word limit.

Get most of your facts right about places you only visit on the Internet; some readers are finicky about accurate descriptions of locales. If in doubt, fictionalize your locale. All the research you do will change your perception of that area even though you won't use every bit of information that you discover. But your understanding of a region will color the entire story whether it is the incessant rain, blistering heat or rugged rocks.

Description of settings can educate the reader, but don't get too detailed. Too much description stops the action. Some settings act as a general background. A short description, such as the local pub, conjures up a picture in the reader's mind so you don't have to go into elaborate detail. Some word pictures set the era and mood like the longer descriptions used by Anne Perry in her description of Queen Victoria's England. The type of book and the mood you want to achieve should dictate the length of your descriptions.

Setting denotes the background of the character living there. A person living in a penthouse and running a huge corporation has a different outlook on life than does a guy living in a garage apartment working in a filling station. Whether you are describing a residence or a business, a character from one economic background will view the same setting through his or her own eyes. Where one person sees an efficient, profitable corporation, another will see it as a greedy, industrial monolith.

Setting also tells us how much time has passed (After two days a thick layer of dust covered every surface).

If your story gets bogged down with too much description and it starts sounding like that travel log, describe those locations through dialogue. "Run for your lives! The bridge is out!" says a lot in a few words. It will set the scene and add information from a particular character's POV, so you not only see the surroundings, but you know how that character feels about it. Different characters can view settings differently depending on his or her personal perspective. (A woman in love can smell the flowers in the park, while her friend who just lost her job can see the wad of gum on the sidewalk).

Use descriptions (sight, sound, smell) of locations to evoke an emotion, reaction, or establish mood. (A scummy swimming pool tells the reader the motel is seedy). Setting can also take the reader into another world. (EXAMPLE: Marilyn Meredith's Indian reservation, Sasser Hill's racetrack).

Remember "Chekov's Gun" story. Don't put something in a scene if it's not going to be used. "One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it." (Anton Chekov 1889.) This tactic was used constantly in *Murder, She Wrote*. The camera always zoomed in on the "clue" about eight minutes into the show. During the last seven

[continued on pg 7](#)

## May Tam Luncheon Wrap-Up: Tracy Webb

By **Glen Erik Hamilton**

At the May SoCalMWA Tam O'Shanter luncheon, members were treated to a detailed presentation by Tracy Webb, Director of External Affairs for the US Attorney's Office. Ms. Webb specializes in crimes related to technology, including internet predators, online social media and gaming, malware schemes designed to exploit children and the elderly, and human trafficking.

Ms. Webb shared some harrowing facts and stories, including the number of trafficking arrests in the past year within just a few blocks of the luncheon (seven, likely boosted by the proximity of a train station).



Tracy Webb,  
Director of External  
Affairs for the US  
Attorney's Office.

In particular, she noted that parents should be aware of “finsta” – fake Instagram – accounts, which allow children and teens to share photos away from the more public main accounts. While these accounts allow creating a smaller and ideally safer audience of known friends, they may also be exploited by predators looking to communicate in private with youngsters.

A similar danger lies in web browsers which allow for chats and video streaming without requiring more than a username. Young people may be blocked or monitored by parents on the more common messaging services, but these embedded features can be exploited and even falsified by sophisticated predators. One girl thought she was sharing video with a cute teenaged boy, but was in fact being stalked by a trafficking group who were able to disguise the camera feed.

In one case, a teenaged girl with dreams of supermodel success was convinced by what she believed was a Hollywood agent to sneak out of her home at night and board a plane in Illinois to Los Angeles. Fortunately, airline employees caught wind of the suspicious circumstances and radioed ahead. The girl was taken into protective custody by the FBI and the cell phone communications traced to a house where multiple girls were being held captive.

Needless to say, our members came away both shaken by these case histories and immensely grateful that Tracy Webb and her team are on point with the FBI and local authorities to help families protect themselves.

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### Location, Location, Location ([continued from pg 6](#))

minutes Jessica Fletcher would recall that “clue” and solve the case. You always knew that clue would reappear before the final credits rolled. The “clue” was part of the setting.

Treat your locations like a character. They have a lot to say.

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A former private detective and once a reporter for a small weekly newspaper, **Gayle Bartos-Pool** (G.B. Pool) writes the Johnny Casino Casebook Series, the Gin Caulfield P.I. Mysteries, **SECOND CHANCE** in the new Chance McCoy Detective series, and many more. Newly released is **ONLY IN HOLLYWOOD**, a collection of short stories. Website: [gbpool.com](http://gbpool.com).

Crime  
CALENDAR

More to Come!

July 10–14 – [Thrillerfest, New York, NY](#)

September 6–9 – [Bouchercon, St. Petersburg, FL](#)

November 4 – [Luncheon at the Tam, Los Angeles, CA](#)

The  
LAST WORD

“She might have been pretty in her youth, but youth had long since deserted her.”

—Sheila Lowe, WRITTEN OFF