

September 2019



The  
MARCH

of CRIME

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**The beloved event returns!**

## ANNUAL SOCALMWA GUMBO PARTY

Saturday, September 28, 6 p.m.



**Hosted by Bill and Kendall Fitzhugh**

The annual **SoCalMWA Gumbo Party**, graciously hosted once again by Master Chef **Bill Fitzhugh** and his fabulous wife Kendall, will be held Saturday, September 28, starting at 6 p.m. Join us in Woodland Hills (Los Angeles) for great food, great company, and Craig Westerson's famous home-brewed ale.

This is perhaps our most popular of the year—and it's absolutely free for members! So come and enjoy a night under the stars with our SoCalMWA community. **Feel like volunteering? We could use help with setup and takedown. When you RSVP, let us know if you're available for either time period.**

Wine and soft drinks will be available; feel free to BYOB.

**[RSVP here for the address and additional details.](#)**

Members and plus-ones only, please.

We hope to see you there!



## The President's Rap Sheet

*Glen Erik Hamilton*

I have less than five days to go until my manuscript is due to the publisher, so I considered limiting this month's Rap Sheet to a haiku: *Rewrites twist the pen / deeper, red on its tip may / be more than mere ink*

But then a related topic occurred to me: Manuscript burnout. Or what we might call the writer's version of snow blindness. Having spent so many concentrated hours working on a book that you develop trouble seeing the forest of the story for the trees of sentence structure, and vice versa. It's a similar predicament to rehearsing a comedy play; those of you who've been involved with theater may be familiar. After saying your lines ten or fifty or a hundred times, you forget that they're jokes. Certainly nobody in the crew is amused, because they've heard the same gags over and over too.

The rehearsal problem solves itself once the cast finally gains an audience and (ideally! hopefully!) starts receiving the energy of laughter, reminding everyone that Hey, this is funny. With a novel, the author is forced to wait until their work is in the hands of beta readers or the agent or the editor. It can be a long tense silence before you hear their first reactions and are reminded that Hey, this is thrilling. Ideally. Hopefully.

Writing is a slow process, and that process doesn't always benefit from intense extended scrutiny. As happy as I am with this manuscript, I'm delighted that I'll have a chance to step back from it and work on something different before rewrite notes come back. Leveraging the long turnaround time to my advantage for once.

And I'll be free just in time for a busy season for SoCal! We'll hold our extremely popular Gumbo Party on Saturday September 28, hosted once again by the amazing Bill and Kendall Fitzhugh. Check your emails; we are already taking RSVPs. Then on Saturday October 26, we're partnering with Sisters in Crime LA for a special event: Detective Ninette Toosbuy presenting a 2-hour seminar on police interrogation techniques. More details on that soon via email and next month's newsletter.

As mentioned last month: Several of our board members will be moving on after this year, and others will be trading responsibilities to try new things. We've had a great response so far and are close to a full roster, but like any volunteer organization we can always use extra support. If you've considered getting involved with MWA or just have ideas to contribute, drop me a line.

All Best,  
Glen

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The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Today, September 1, I posed a very important question on Facebook: Is it fall yet? I was rudely informed that we still have three weeks of summer before fall is here.

Boo. I'm done with summer, even if it's not done with me.

But remember when I told you about the Summer of Holly? I'm *sure* you're wondering how that worked out. Well, friends, I'm here to tell you it was magnificent, though not in the way you might expect a summer vacation might be. I worked my heiny off. In June, I made a commitment to myself to get up every day at 5 a.m. to get my writing work done and that's exactly what I did. I have a complete outline and synopsis of an 80,000 word novel, plus half of a first draft written to show for it.

Don't worry, I won't pull any muscles patting myself on the back. I know there's still many more early mornings ahead of me before this book is finished. But to have made so much progress in only two months is exhilarating and motivating.

I'm back, baby.

This month, I was happy to publish **Ellen Byron's** [piece on outlining](#) since her process is similar to mine. I raise my fist and shout "OUTLINERS UNITE!" Because I agree, the process of discovery is still there when you outline, it just happens in a different place. Having tried my hand at "pantsing" only to fail miserably, I'm a passionate outliner and proud of it.

Likewise, **Tom Sawyer's** final installment in [cinematic techniques in storytelling](#) gave me a new way to think about endings. We all strive to give our stories the best, most impactful endings possible, but leaving our readers with something to ponder, or, perhaps, making them gasp, is sometimes an elusive trick.

Who said this writing thing was easy? Not me. (I feel like I've written that here before. I do tend to repeat myself).

So, even though it *feels* like summer is over, it turns out I have three more weeks of the Summer of Holly. I'm gonna make them count. Hope you make yours count, too.

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@yahoo.com](mailto:SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoo.com) to join  
(members only)

# FRESHBLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new members



## Bonnie Ebsen Jackson

Raised on a small horse ranch thirty minutes from Hollywood, Bonnie Ebsen Jackson spent twenty years as a working actress before retiring to be a horse professional. In the process, she edited two equestrian magazines, for which she wrote award-winning articles. These days, she splits her time between fiction writing and offering equine-assisted therapy sessions on her ranch near Prescott, Arizona. Her debut novel, *SHE RAN AWAY*, is a women's fiction/thriller set in the Southwest, with elements of cozy—as cozy as it can get crossing a high desert in the moonlight with a rattler hissing at you.



## Patricia Smith

Patricia Smith was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She's been writing books ever since she first learned how, so she's currently living her dream come true. She's a huge mental health advocate since she's overcome her own issues with depression, eating disorders, and addiction. She wants to be an inspiration to young girls who have a dream, especially young black girls. Her debut novel, *REMEMBER*, will be released on October 8, 2019.

## 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).

## OVER the TRANSOM

**D.P. Lyle's** *SKIN IN THE GAME*, the first in the Cain/Harper thriller series, will be released on October 8. [See scheduled launch events here.](#)

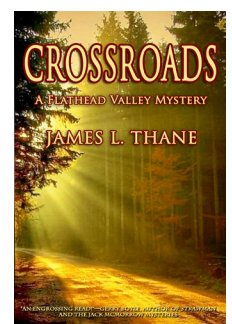
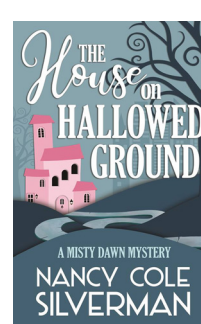
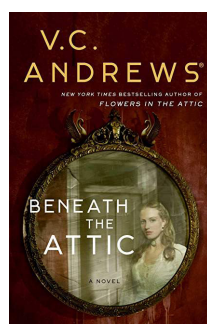
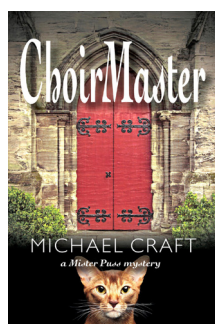
**Michael Craft** returns with the second installment of his Mister Puss mystery series, *CHOIRMASTER* (Questover Press, October), in which a gay architect helps solve a murder with clues from a wisecracking Abyssinian cat. *Kirkus* calls it “compellingly odd ... A satisfying mystery, pleasantly told.”

**Andrew Neiderman**, who is in his thirty-second year of writing V.C. Andrews, announced the publication of three novels that develop the story of how *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC* started, the story of the first Corrine and her children and her relationship with Garland Foxworth. All three are developed in what Neiderman calls the “Attic novels,” *BENEATH THE ATTIC* (AUGUST), *OUT OF THE ATTIC* (FEBRUARY) and *SHADOWS OF FOXWORTH* (JUNE). Neiderman has written the stage play of *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC* and is in development with a major Broadway producer. His most well known novel is *THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE*.

*THE HOUSE ON HALLOWED GROUND*, A Misty Dawn Mystery, by **Nancy Cole Silverman** (Henery Press) debuts Tuesday, September 10. A former Hollywood psychic to the stars must convince a recalcitrant spirit guide to join with her to help a young Hollywood starlet accused of murder.

*CROSSROADS*, the fourth novel by **James L. Thane**, will be published by Moonshine Cove on December 2. While his previous novels have been set in Phoenix, *CROSSROADS* is set in Montana's Flathead Valley and features a lawyer-turned-novelist named Dave Matthews who finds himself defending a client accused of murder against the backdrop of a raging battle over the control of national forest lands.

**Daniel C. Lorti**, author of *THE MISSING FACTOR* and *THE BUSINESS END*, is now represented by Loiacono Literary Agency for his latest novel, *THE MULLIGAN*. For more info, visit [danielclorti.com](http://danielclorti.com).



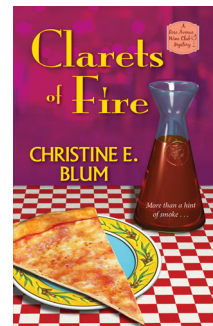
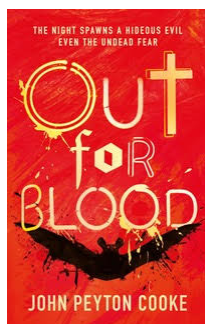
## OVER the TRANSOM

**John Peyton Cooke** has two publications out in October. His 1991 novel *OUT FOR BLOOD* will be reprinted by Valancourt Books, and a new short story, “Electric Pink,” will appear in the cross-genre anthology *PINK TRIANGLE RHAPSODY* from Lycan Valley Press.

Thomas & Mercer is set to launch *WHAT SHE NEVER SAID*, the second novel in **Catharine Riggs’s** Santa Barbara Suspense series, on September 10. The present-day thriller delves into a series of unusual deaths in a wealthy retirement community, raising doubts and revealing old secrets. *Publisher’s Weekly* says, “Riggs keeps the tension high to the dramatic climax.” For more information visit [catharineriggs.com](http://catharineriggs.com).

*FATAL CAJUN FESTIVAL*, the fifth book in **Ellen Byron’s** Agatha and Lefty Award-winning Cajun Country Mystery series, officially releases on September 10.

*CLARETS OF FIRE*, the fourth book in the Rose Avenue Wine Club Mysteries by **Christine E. Blum**, releases on September 24: Halsey and the ladies of the Rose Avenue Wine Club are celebrating Penelope and Malcolm’s new winery. They’re partnering with a cherished neighborhood eatery, Rico’s Pizza, which will be serving the winery’s young clarets. But as the gals enjoy the bouquet a different scent intrudes—smoke. The nearby pizza parlor is going up in flames. They rush to the scene, to find Halsey’s dog Bardot pulling a body from the burning building. But she’s not in time. It’s up to Halsey to smoke out the arsonist—before somebody else gets scorched . . .



## Member APPEARANCES



September 27-28: **Tori Eldridge**, debut author of *THE NINJA DAUGHTER* (out November 5) and former actress on television, film, and theater, teaches workshops on “Believable Dialogue: An Actor’s Approach to Embodying Characters and Dynamic Readings: How to Perform Your Own Work and Not Put Your Audience to Sleep” at the Central Coast Writers Conference in San Luis Obispo. For information, visit [centralcoastwritersconference.com](http://centralcoastwritersconference.com).

**D.P. Lyle** will appear at the following locations to celebrate the release of his new novel, *SKIN IN THE GAME*:  
 Sunday, October 6, 3 p.m.: Launch Party at Mystery Ink Bookstore, 8907 Warner Ave., #135, Huntington Beach, CA.  
 Sunday, October 13, 3 p.m.: Book signing at Book Carnival, 348 S. Tustin St., Orange, CA.  
 Tuesday, October 22, 7 p.m.: Reading at Lit Up! OC, Bardot Bars & Coffee, 662 El Camino Real, Tustin, CA.

The public is invited to meet **Catharine Riggs** at book signings for *WHAT SHE NEVER SAID* on Sunday, September 22 from 3–5 p.m. at The Book Den in downtown Santa Barbara and on Thursday, September 26 from 5–7 at the Santa Barbara Public Library’s Faulkner Gallery. Thomas & Mercer has donated fifty copies of Riggs’ latest thriller to the library event and 100% of the gross proceeds will benefit The Friends of the Library. For more information visit [catharineriggs.com](http://catharineriggs.com).



**August Norman** will discuss his path to publication and sign his debut thriller, *COME AND GET ME: A Caitlin Bergman Novel*, as a guest speaker at the Southern California Writers’ Conference—Irvine, Saturday, September 21, 8 a.m. For more info, [augustnorman.com](http://augustnorman.com) or [writersconference.com](http://writersconference.com).

## Have Book - Will Travel

### Authors

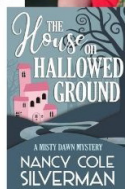
Ellen Byron

&

Nancy Cole Silverman  
 have teamed up for a fall  
 road show.

Mark Your Calendars!

Mysterious Ink, Huntington Beach:  
 Saturday, September 14, 3 p.m.  
 Book Carnival, Orange,  
 Sunday, September 29, 3 p.m.  
 Mysterious Galaxy, San Diego.  
 Saturday, October 26, 2 p.m.



Join **Ellen Byron** and **Nancy Cole Silverman** on Saturday, September 14 at 3 p.m. at Mystery Ink (8907 Warner Ave. #135, Huntington Beach) to celebrate the September 10 releases of their new mysteries *FATAL CAJUN FESTIVAL* (Crooked Lane Books) and *THE HOUSE ON HALLOWED GROUND* (Henery Press). There will be treats! Nancy and Ellen will also be speaking and signing at Book Carnival at 3 p.m. on Sunday, September 29 (348 Tustin Avenue, Orange). Finally, Ellen will be interviewed by Kellye Garrett about *FATAL CAJUN FESTIVAL* and her upcoming book, *HERE COMES THE BODY* (written as Maria DiRico) at New York City’s Book Culture (450 Columbus Avenue) on Tuesday, September 17, at 7 p.m.



## Member APPEARANCES

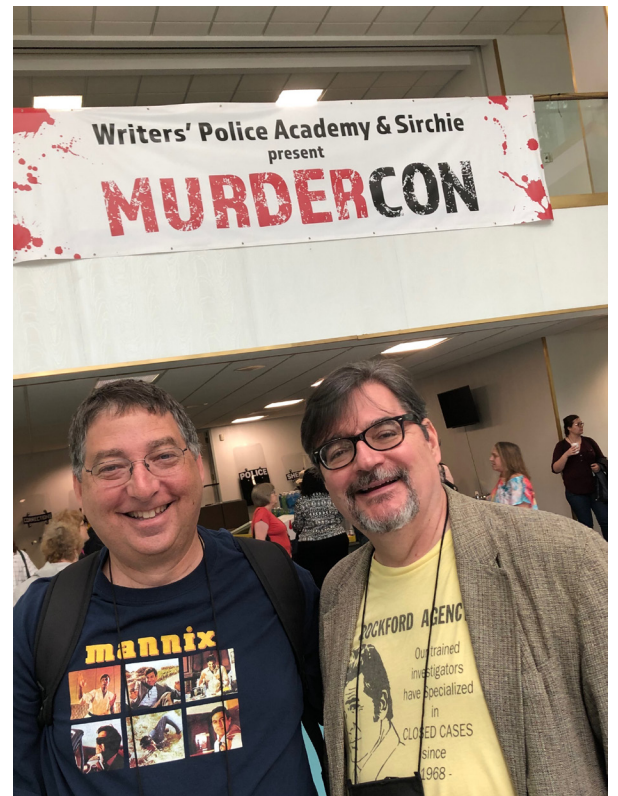
**Lee Goldberg** and **Phoef Sutton** attended the 2019 Writer's Police Academy MurderCon in Raleigh, North Carolina, where they learned everything they need to know to begin a killing spree and get away with it.



**Lee Goldberg** and **Phoef Sutton** (with Heather Graham), checking for blood evidence.



**Lee Goldberg** learns how to dig up a dead body.



**Lee Goldberg** and **Phoef Sutton** arrive at Murdercon.



Orange County Sisters in Crime

6<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Ladies of Intrigue

A Remarkable Women Mystery Writers' Conference

**Sunday, November 10, 2019**

**Mesa Verde Country Club**

**8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

## Our 2019 Headliner



**Laurie R. King**

Panelists:

Others to be Announced



Barbara DeMarco-Barrett



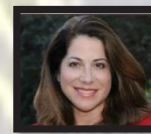
Rachel Howzell Hall



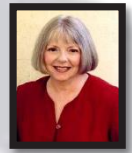
Mary Anna Evans



Kaira Rouda



Laurie Stevens



Betty Webb

Readers and mystery lovers alike will enjoy this day-long conference featuring female authors from the mystery-crime genre.



Hosted by Orange County Sisters in Crime (a non-profit organization)

Location: Mesa Verde Country Club, Costa Mesa, CA

Register at [www.ocsistersincrime.org](http://www.ocsistersincrime.org) or mail registration to:

O.C. Sisters in Crime, P.O. Box 53132, Irvine, CA 92618

For additional information: contact Debbie at Mystery Ink, (714) 743-6127

# The Organics of Outlining

by **Ellen Byron**

During a recent interview, I was asked, “Are you an organic writer or do you outline?”

My answer? “Yes.”

Writing organically—also known as “pantsing”—basically means letting your story develop naturally, flowing out of you without a predetermined plan of where it’s going. When I’m plotting, I’m doing the exact same thing—except in an outline rather than a manuscript. This makes my outline organic, hence my answer to that question.

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**“If what you’re creating comes from your heart and soul, it will be organic, no matter how you got there.”**

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Let me share why I outline. I’m a television writer by trade, and in the TV and film world, the Writers Guild script contract breaks down payment by percentages for specific tasks, one of which is the project outline. No project goes forward without one. Here’s how the process works, at least for a TV show. First, the writers’ room breaks a story. The writer or writers assigned to that story go off to write an outline, which then goes to the showrunner for notes, then the studio, and finally the network. You can’t begin to write the actual script until the powers-that-be have all signed off on the outline.

That’s the business side of outlining. Back to the concept of the process being organic. Here’s a quote from the legendary Elmore Leonard: “At the time I begin writing a novel, the last thing I want to do is follow a plot outline. To know too much at the start takes the pleasure out of discovering what the book is about.”

Here’s why I disagree with Mr. Leonard’s quote. He’s assuming one derives no pleasure from plotting out a story in advance. But I, like him, get enormous pleasure from discovering what my book is about—I’m just discovering it at a different point in the process than he is. What exactly is that process? I’ll break it down for you:

- 1) I come up with a “logline” —a few lines that spell out the basic story.
- 2) I develop a one-page synopsis that lays out the bones of the story. (One of my publishers must approve this before I can move on to the next step. A second publisher actually requires an outline.)
- 3) I keep brainstorming and adding notes to the synopsis, turning it into a notes document. If I think of dialogue for my characters, I throw that in, too.
- 4) I create a beat sheet where I brainstorm story beats and write them down in a line or two. I keep adding to the beat sheet until I turn it into what I call a “fluid outline,” where I lay out the story chapter by chapter, adding in the B-story and whatever runners I might have. My outline is usually about thirty-five pages, but it’s rough, full of unfinished sentences, snippets of dialogue, and even story points with question marks. I describe this document as a fluid outline because when I write the first draft, the chapter breaks often change and I constantly find new plot points.
- 5) I make a copy of the fluid outline and title it the “cutting outline.” As I write a first draft, I’ll cut each chapter section from the cutting outline and paste it on top of the chapter I’m working on. I’ll either use or dispose of the notes from this cut-and-paste section as I create an actual chapter. As my manuscript grows, my cutting outline shrinks, making it more manageable. But I always have the original fluid outline document, in case I need to refer to it—which I often do.

[continued on pg 12](#)

# Cinematic Techniques That Will Make You a Better Storyteller

by **Thomas B. Sawyer**

*Part three of a three-part series on writing more compelling fiction.*

## ENDINGS: Payoffs and Blowoffs

An ending is—an ending. But like a lot of the stuff of good storytelling, it's not that easy to pull it off so that your audience says a collective “Wow!” The zinger, the twist, the topper they didn't quite expect. You know the kind—those delicious finishes you've encountered in your favorite novels, stories, movies. As with memorable openings, satisfying, drop-dead endings can be elusive, difficult to create.

In the action genre, the end scene is often—and appropriately—described as the blowoff. How many times have we read novels where the last three or four pages were coda, where the whole thing wound itself down, rather than presenting anything new—anything unanticipated? Satisfying, maybe. Blah, more likely. A notable example was a rather pleasant Bette Midler vehicle, *Beaches*, (Scr. Mary Agnes Donoghue, from Iris Rainer Dart's novel, Dir. Garry Marshall) which seemed to have three or four endings. They'd play a “final” scene, at the conclusion of which the audience expected to see the end-credits. Instead, another scene was played, and then another. Looked at another way, I suppose it can be argued that they were giving us their own brand of surprise, but I'm not sure that that was the filmmakers' intent.

Again using action films as a model, think of it as the challenge of coming up with a blowoff that tops all of the story's earlier fireworks and razzle-dazzle sequences. A superb example of a film that accomplished this at the end of an already breathless, seamless, relentlessly paced story that was full of Big Moments (including the all-but-impossible-to-surpass railroad locomotive/prison bus collision), the finale of *The Fugitive* manages to leave the viewer exhausted and gratified.

But helicopters, explosions and shootouts atop tall buildings aren't a requirement. A much quieter though no less satisfying finish occurs in one of the best films ever made—the great, enduring *Casablanca*. Rick and Ilsa's final goodbye was—and still is—flawless, almost unsurpassable, speaking to all but the most cynical among us, about sacrifice and lost love. But the film couldn't end there. We had to see the plane taking off for Lisbon, as well as resolving Rick's having shot the German Officer, Major Strasser. And ironically, the final, unforgettable line of dialogue—“Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”—wasn't even in the script. It was tacked on during the editing process.

Going for this type of ending seems, on the face of it, to be an obvious goal. From page one, you've been trying to give them stuff they don't expect. But the most important one you're going to write is the one that resonates after the reader finishes your book. Sometimes it's big without being slam-bang—a moral, a comment about life, or the world. Often it's something small—smaller perhaps than the goal just achieved by your protagonist. A feelgood moment, or one that's eerily ironic. Or humorous. Or full of portent. Again, the key is that it should seem unexpected—yet satisfyingly inevitable.

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**“Think of it as the challenge of coming up with a blowoff that tops all of the story's earlier fireworks and razzle-dazzle sequences.”**

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## The Organics of Outlining, [continued from pg 10](#)

6) I write the draft. Believe me, no matter how many times I go over my outline, I always find beats that don't track or story points I'm missing. My longest outline—thirty-eight pages—just produced my shortest draft—54K words. But it's exciting to come up with fixes for the holes I stumble into. Sometimes I find entirely new subplots. And no matter what's missing, I've found that structurally, my finished book hews closely to the outline.

I've noticed that outliners are often on the defensive in the pantsers-plotters debate. Sometimes I feel like I'm part of an underground group. When I defended outlining at a recent convention, I noticed a woman in the audience nodding vigorously. Then she glanced around, a nervous look on her face, and stopped. After the panel, another woman came up to me and whispered, "I outline, too," as if she was afraid of getting in trouble for this deep, dark secret.

Believe me, this is not a critique of pantsers. I wish I could sit down and write a marvelous mystery from whole cloth. I've tried – and failed. For now, I'll stick to my own organic outlining process for writing novels. The bottom line is, do what works for you. If what you're creating comes from your heart and soul, it will be organic, no matter how you got there.

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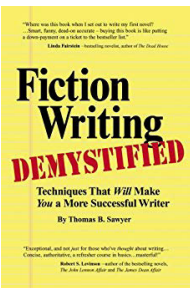
**Ellen Byron** is the Agatha Award-winning author of the Cajun Country Mysteries. The *USA Today* bestselling series has also won multiple Best Humorous Mystery Lefty awards from the Left Coast Crime conference. In 2020, she'll debut a second series, The Catering Hall Mysteries, under the pen name Maria DiRico.

## ENDINGS, [continued from pg 11](#)

By the time you reach the end of your story there should be that turn, that switchback that maybe even you weren't anticipating. I didn't find the closing lines for my novel, *THE SIXTEENTH MAN*, until after I had finished what I assumed was my final draft. As with so many of the discoveries we make while in process, that one hit at about 4:30 a.m., when it surprised the hell out of me, jolting me out of heavy sleep.

Always, when you devise your endings, your story's final moments, your curtain-line—try to surprise. I'm not talking off-the-wall, come-from-nowhere, nonsense endings. I mean an end-frame that's legitimate, organic to your story, that comes from deep within your construct, or your characters and causes the audience to, if not gasp, perhaps think about.

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Emmy and Edgar-nominated, **Tom Sawyer** was Head Writer, Showrunner, and Producer of the classic series, *Murder, She Wrote*, for which he wrote twenty-four episodes. He also wrote, directed, and produced the cult film-comedy *Alice Goodbody*, and was the co-librettist/lyricist of *Jack*, an opera about JFK. He's the Author of *FICTION WRITING DEMYSTIFIED* and his latest thriller is *A MAJOR PRODUCTION!*. Tom's memoir is *THE ADVENTURES OF THE REAL TOM SAWYER* and he's written a companion book called *9 BADASS SECRETS FOR PUTTING YOURSELF IN LUCK'S WAY*. More at [ThomasBSawyer.com](http://ThomasBSawyer.com).

A decorative banner with a central olive-green box containing the text "Crime CALENDAR". The word "Crime" is in a cursive font, and "CALENDAR" is in a bold, sans-serif font. The banner has ribbon-like ends on both sides.

Crime  
CALENDAR

September 21 – [Men of Mystery, Long Beach, CA](#)  
September 28 – [Annual SoCalMWA Gumbo Party, Los Angeles, CA](#)  
October 30 – [SinC Into Great Writing! Workshop 2019, Dallas, TX](#)  
October 31–Nov 3 – [Bouchercon, Dallas, TX](#)  
November 10 – [Ladies of Intrigue, Costa Mesa, CA](#)  
November 8–10 – [New England Crime Bake, Boston, MA](#)

A decorative banner with a central olive-green box containing the text "The LAST WORD". The word "The" is in a cursive font, and "LAST WORD" is in a bold, sans-serif font. The banner has ribbon-like ends on both sides.

The  
LAST WORD

“I would have liked to have the time alone with Cate to go over exactly what she knew about Pete Pompidou. To date, all I had was he was twenty-three, a freelance photographer, in love with my daughter, and liked burritos.”

—Nancy Cole Silverman, REASON TO DOUBT