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Last month, Jessica invited SoCalMWA members to submit their experience with writing and keeping creative during the pandemic. With vaccinations happening and light at the end of this very long tunnel, we'll hopefully be back to some sort of normal soon. In the meantime, [keep sending them!](#)

Craig Faustus Buck

My wife Karina doesn't think the pandemic has affected my life very much. Granted I run no errands or do any Zoomless socializing, but I've spent the bulk of my professional life alone in my office writing, so in a way she's right. I've been pretty productive, especially after the first few months. Errands and social life used to be my primary means of procrastination, but not these days. As our non-writer friends go crazy, I have daily word counts to pursue. In this time of pandemic, the fact that we writers have a solitary preoccupation to fall back on is a stroke of luck. But to quote Thomas Jefferson, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it."

Sheila Lowe

For me, the hermit, the effects of Covid-19 have been small. I almost feel guilty writing that, but the fact is, I finished the book I was working on three months faster than normal—only to have my publisher disappoint me by saying it won't be released until end of next summer. It may not be smart, but my style when under great stress is to just keep working. My emotional health may suffer for it, but damn, I'm productive!





The President's Rap Sheet

Jessica Kaye

Happy New Year!

I know we all hope for a better 2021 than 2020 was. The song that keeps playing in my mind is 1921 from "Tommy" by The Who. The song's beginning lyrics are "Got a feeling '21 is gonna be a good year. Especially if you and me see it in together."

Copy editors, step away from your red pencils and just take in how meaningful that line is for us all.

After 10 months of being grounded, there is a vaccine and, with it, light at the end of the tunnel. For most of us, vaccination is still months away but for first responders, including the medical teams who have been at the front lines of the Covid-19 battle, the initial inoculation has begun to be administered.

I'm content to wait my turn, which is near the back of the line, according to the calculations I've seen. We've stayed vigilant and careful in my household, so it makes sense for those with a greater need to get the shot before we do.

As for the business of mystery writing in 2021, do you think we will see the first flurry of Coronavirus novels being published? Would you read one? I think I would, based on the same criteria used to judge any book: is it a good story well told?

Speaking of pandemic writing, as promised in last month's newsletter, we did receive submissions about how to keep the writing flowing during Covid.

Observations by **Sheila Lowe**, **Mark Bruce**, and **Craig Faustus Buck** are included in this newsletter. Feel free to submit your own if you have thoughts you want to share. Email me at president@socalmwa.com.

The new year also brings our election results. Our 2021 Board of Directors includes new board members **Edward Arno**, **Ona Russell**, and **Nancy Cole Silverman**. A warm welcome to you.

Returning members include **Sarah Chen** and **Terri Nolan**, and I appreciate that you have re-elected me to serve as president for a second year.

Board members who were not on the ballot but are continuing on in their second year of their term are **Fred Andersen**, **Gay Toltl Kinman**, **August Norman**, **Travis Richardson**, and **Jennifer Younger**.

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The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

We made it! It's 2021 and we can finally put 2020 behind us.

Okay, so not entirely. We ring in the new year knowing that we've still got a somewhat rough road ahead. And while we don't have a hard deadline for when pandemic restrictions will end, a vaccine means we have a return to normalcy (whatever that means) at some point in the coming months.

I've been accused of being a Pollyanna at times and I suppose that's one of the things that gets me through life—but the truth is I had more ups and downs than usual in 2020, just like so many of you. The ups were great but the downs were pretty heavy. But my overriding feeling as I close out 2020 is gratitude.

After ten months of low or no productivity, I finished the year strong by “winning” NaNoWriMo and then writing a short story for an anthology. I also delved into the therapeutic benefits of writing fiction by free-write journaling then “harvesting” the emotions from real-life events to add authenticity and depth to my fiction. The benefits are two-fold: Free-writing helps me to work through some of life's traumatic events while also helping to push my writing to the next level.

The beginning of a new year always motivates me to re-set my life, but this year, the urge is particularly strong. I have oh, so many aspirations for healthier living and greater productivity in 2021. But we all know the success rate of New Year's resolutions. I've decided to focus on one or two goals a month, hoping to build some momentum as the year goes on.

However you plan to proceed in 2021, I hope you are content. Peace of mind is hard won and if you manage to find it, hold on to it and nurture it.

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.

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Join the SoCalMWA Discussion Group

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FRESHBLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new members



Ellen Tremiti

Raised in rural New Jersey, Ellen is a screenwriter and author living in the City of Angels. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *The Fiction Pool*, *Bewildering Stories*, and others. Her previous two pilots were quarterfinalists in the Final Draft Big Break, PAGE Awards, and BlueCat screenplay competitions. In addition to her work as a script and story supervisor, she is currently writing freelance, TV pilots, and her first novel. She is a proud (new) member of the Mystery Writers of America and Women Who Submit.

OVER the TRANSOM

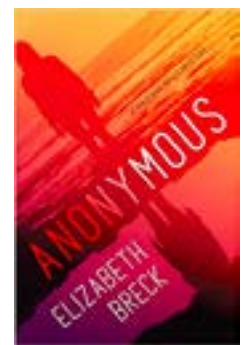
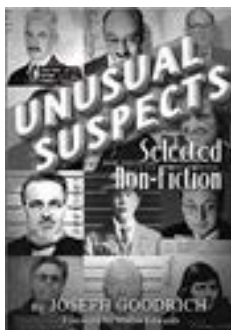
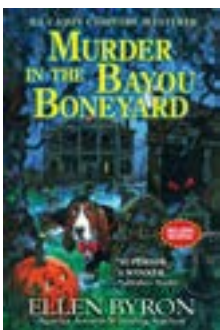
MURDER IN THE BAYOU BONEYARD, **Ellen Byron's** sixth Cajun Country Mystery, was chosen as one of *Suspense Magazine's* Best of 2020.

UNUSUAL SUSPECTS by Edgar Award-winning playwright-author Joseph Goodrich features the chapter AMNON KABATCHNIK: LIFE UPON THE WICKED STAGE, covering **Amnon Kabatchnik's** reference series BLOOD ON THE STAGE. Writes Goodrich: "Whatever the era, the mystery play offers—in Kabatchnik's words—'strong plots; driving, relentless forward movement; issues of life and death; and nerve-wracking, heart-pumping climaxes.' Such qualities will always find an audience and Kabatchnik has no doubt that 'a revitalization of the genre is waiting around the corner.'"

Paul D. Marks is pleased to announce that his novel THE BLUES DON'T CARE and COAST TO COAST: NOIR, the latest in the Coast to Coast crime anthology series he co-edits with Andrew McAleer, have both won "Best of 2020" *Suspense Magazine* Awards. He's very grateful to all the readers, fans, contributors and staff of *Suspense* for this honor. He's also pleased that Crime Fiction Lover has chosen Blues as one of the top five books of the year. And he wishes everyone a better 2021 than 2020 has been. That won't be hard, will it?

Donis Casey is pleased to announce that her twelfth novel and second Bianca Dangereuse Hollywood Mystery, VALENTINO WILL DIE (The Poisoned Pen Press/Sourcebooks, \$15.99) is scheduled for release in all formats on February 2. Who is trying to kill the world's greatest lover? As Rudolph Valentino lies dying, his dear friend and screen idol in her own right, Bianca LaBelle, promises him that she will find out who is responsible. One of his many lovers? A delusional fan? Or could it be a particularly vicious mobster? Publishers Weekly says "Lovers of old movies and Hollywood gossip will have fun."

New member **Elizabeth Breck** is a real-life private investigator, and her debut mystery/thriller, ANONYMOUS, was released on November 10, 2020 from Crooked Lane Books. *Publisher's Weekly* calls it "a captivating debut," and *Kirkus Reviews* wrote that it has a "brave heart that deserves a sequel." Ms. Breck has been making the rounds of podcasts such as true-crime podcast Crawlspace, and she enjoyed a live book-launch with Warwick's Bookstore. ANONYMOUS is an edge-of-your-seat thriller set against the coffee houses and surfer culture of San Diego; it is available wherever books are sold.



OVER the TRANSOM

Gay Toltl Kinman's GREENWAY: Four mystery short stories set in Greenway, Agatha Christie's holiday home in Devon has just been released by Mysterious Women. The four stories have been published separately on Kindle. The narrator, a scriptwriter with an American film company, keeps running into bodies—and murderers.

Mark Bruce's short story, "Minerva James and the God of Strangers," will be included in the next anthology by Dandelion Revolution, "The Secrets We Keep." It's the seventh Minerva story accepted for publication since her debut in August 2019 in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*.

Mary Wickizer Burgess has sold CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE: A Gail Brevard Mystery #7 to John Betancourt at Wildside Press for Spring 2021 publication.

Holly West sold a short story, "Just to Watch Him Die," to the EVICTION OF HOPE anthology, edited by Colin Conway. Publication will be in May 2021.

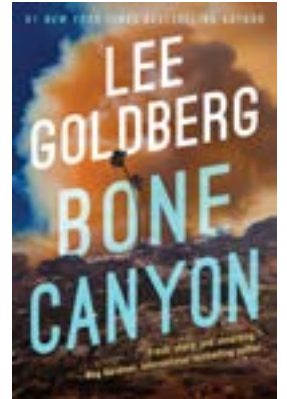
SoCalMWA Discussion Group

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Member APPEARANCES

Lee Goldberg's new novel BONE CANYON comes out in January and he'll be teaming up with **Matt Coyle** for a YouTube & Facebook Live event on 1/8 produced by Murder by the Book in Houston. Visit murderbooks.com for more details. Lee will also be doing YouTube/Facebook live events with *CrimeSpree Magazine* editor Jon Jordan on 1/7 for [Boswell Books](#) in Milwaukee and on 1/13 with author and publisher of Polis Books, Jason Pinter, and Barbara Peters of [Poisoned Pen](#) in Scottsdale.



Sheila Lowe will be participating in a discussion of what the handwritings of mystery authors reveal about them at the January 16 Zoom meeting of the American Handwriting Analysis, SoCal chapter. Erle Stanley Gardner and James Ellroy will be among the featured authors.



Bonnie MacBird, who writes traditional Sherlock Holmes novels for HarperCollins, has her adaptation of Conan Doyle's THE BLUE CARBUNCLE up as a live zoom production for The Sherlock Holmes Society of London's annual Holmes celebration on January 16. **Les Klinger** is the keynote speaker.

Virtual Book Launch! **Donis Casey** discusses [VALENTINO WILL DIE: a Facebook Live](#) virtual event with Barbara Peters at [Poisoned Pen Bookstore](#), January 30, at 4 p.m. MST. On February 4 at 11 a.m. EST, PatZi Gil will host Donis in a lively discussion at [Joy on Paper](#), a syndicated radio program for writers and those who dream of writing.

Prez Rap—[Continued from pg 2](#)

We say a fond farewell to those leaving the board: **Jennifer Berg**, **Rachel Howzell Hall**, and **Paul Marks**. I am grateful for the work you have done on behalf of SoCalMWA.

Thanks so very much to this year's nominating committee, Jennifer Berg and Travis Richardson, for their hard work on the slate and the election.

Until next month, stay safe and stay home whenever you can.

Jessica

Note from a Pandemic—[Continued from pg 1](#)

Mark Bruce

As a family law attorney, I found that my business did not suffer during the Covid-19 shutdown. Indeed, it seems like I have an increase of people needing an “emergency motion.” Yikes.

But the lockdown did allow me to finally arrange a writing space in my little desert residence. From time to time I would go out and ask Monsieur Coyote (who used to come to the chain link fence near my front door) or the many jackrabbits what they think of my latest plot twist. They usually told me I was on the right track and what the heck was I doing out here talking to the wildlife when writing needed to be done.

I am finally finishing my first Minerva James novel, something two years in the making after I won the 2018 Black Orchid Novella Award. So being a shut-in who has lots of legal work to do has inspired me!



The
LAST WORD

“Oscar Dulane hunched his broad shoulders.
‘Fortune smiled on me today. Tomorrow, who knows?’”

—Gary Phillips, MATTHEW HENSON AND THE ICE TEMPLE OF HARLEM