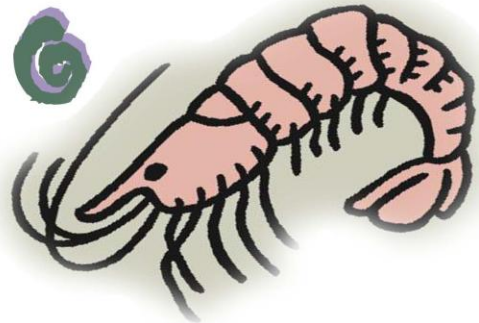


SEPT/OCT 2010

# THE MARCH OF CRIME

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER OF MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA

## Gumbo Party!



Bill Fitzhugh is hosting our chapter Gumbo Party in his home. It's members only plus one guest. He is cooking the eats and Craig Westerson is providing the homebrew. If you want anything harder, it's BYOB. Did we mention it's FREE!

Saturday, September 25  
6 pm

23062 SYLVAN Street  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367  
RSVP [rsvp@socalmwa.com](mailto:rsvp@socalmwa.com)

Bill needs help to set up. Volunteering?  
Email above.



## PRESIDENT'S Rap Sheet Naomi Hirahara ☠



I'm no expert on social networking, but I have strong opinions about it. Yes, I do post messages on Facebook, which then automatically go to my Twitter account. And I do maintain a Facebook fan page. But I agree with some more technologically-wired folks that all these virtual connections will only make face-to-face meetings even more valuable.

When I look at my own professional career, it's often been the face-to-face encounters that have opened certain doors for me. It enabled me to get a full-page review in the *Los Angeles Times* for my first book – the reviewer never got an ARC from my publisher, so I was able to place one in her hands at Left Coast Crime. Presentations in small venues led to more presentations with pay at larger venues. My recent interview on NPR was apparently spurred by my participation at this year's Left Coast Crime Los Angeles.

All of this networking occurred organically and were not necessarily calculated. That's the beauty of face-to-face – events and encounters can happen more randomly as you literally bump into people and learn more about them than their Facebook profiles allow you to. It's three-dimensional social networking.

Our SoCal MWA chapter activities enable you all to have those face-to-face exchanges. We will be having our annual gumbo party, organized and hosted by member Bill Fitzhugh, on Saturday, Sept 25, at 6 PM, at his home at 23062 Sylvan Street Woodland Hills, CA 91367. Members can bring one guest to this free event, but you must RSVP at [rsvp@socalmwa.com](mailto:rsvp@socalmwa.com) by Sept 15. The response has been enthusiastic, so please respond as soon as possible so that we can plan accordingly. And the next day will be the West Hollywood Book Fair. Our chapter again will be having an informational booth to let the public know more about our organization and to sell merchandise. If you would be willing to volunteer to work in our booth for an hour or so, please contact Evan Kilgore at [kilgore.evan@gmail.com](mailto:kilgore.evan@gmail.com).

Bouchercon will be on the West Coast this year in San Francisco from Oct 14 to 17. Take advantage of this close location and attend! Most of all chapter board members, including Deborah Turrell Atkinson from Hawaii, as well as our national board members, will be participating.

We'd like to get to know you not only virtually, but also actually. Allow us to by just showing up. Hope to see you soon!

## WRITE MIND

### “Rejection”

By Dennis Palumbo

At some point early on in a writer’s life, he or she has to come to terms with rejection. After twenty years as a screenwriter, and now as a novelist and columnist, I know I certainly have—I hate it.

Occasionally I’ll read about some writer who’s apparently so well-adjusted that he sees having his work rejected as just another event, one bead on a long string of similar beads; in other words, the rejection has no more (nor less) meaning than having his work accepted.

I confess, I can only stand back and admire such creatures. And wonder what planet they come from.

Because frankly, when I toiled in the screenwriting vineyards, I wanted people not only to accept what I wrote, but like it. A lot. Hell, I wanted them to *love* it. (Even while acknowledging the well-known truism that, at a certain level, they could never love it enough...)

On the other hand, having my work rejected was cause for *tsuris* of near-Biblical proportions—the familiar gnashing of teeth, rending of garments, etc. On one such occasion, a friend of mine looked at me and said, somewhat testily, “For God’s sake, don’t take it personally.”

“How *should* I take it?” I replied.

“Impersonally?”

That, in a nutshell, is the paradox of rejection. It isn’t intended as personal, but it’s impossible not to *experience* it that way.

Let me give you an example. Years ago, on staff at a popular sitcom, I joined the producers in a casting session, auditioning actresses for a guest shot on the show. After seeing about a dozen read, we chose one. Later, I happened to overhear a couple of the others walking away, dejected.

“I should have dressed differently,” one of them said. “I over-played that last part,” said another.

I’d heard similar laments from actors and actresses before, of course. “If only I’d done this, or that...” “If only I were thinner, prettier...” “If only, if only...”

What made it even more ironic in this case was the fact that we’d cast this particular actress because it was getting close to lunch-time and we were all hungry. As it turned out, all the actresses had been reasonably competent, so we just picked the next one who wasn’t taller than the show’s star and made tracks for the studio commissary.

Our agenda—in this case, hunger—could never have been known or predicted or prepared for by the others auditioning.

The same is true for writers. In my experience, not only is it a mystery why certain good scripts, stories and novels get rejected; often it’s a total mystery why they get *accepted*. I don’t have a writer patient who hasn’t been perplexed when something he or she considers a lesser work is

>>>*continued*

bought, while something they feel represents their best work is consistently rejected.

As my anecdote about the audition demonstrates, the agenda of the marketplace--the sometimes incomprehensible, ever-changing, and often-maddening needs of publishers, editors and agents--is out of your control. And not about you.

Therefore, their rejection of material you submit to them is not some injury personally directed at you.

However, as I said before, your *experience* of the rejection is personal. In fact, it can't be anything else.

So let yourself be angry, frustrated, even grief-stricken--after all, as a somewhat kinder friend of mine once remarked, when a painful thing happens, a period of mourning is appropriate.

But now the good news: Since you can't know (or control) the outcome of any story pitch or manuscript submission, you're free to just do your work. Rather than shaping your writing to please others, or in some effort to latch on to or anticipate the next trend, your best bet is to write about what excites and moves you, to make your growth as a writer the ultimate goal.

Darryl Hickman, a wonderful acting teacher, used to tell his students, "Keep giving them *you*, until you is what they want."

Not a bad piece of advice for writers, either. Stay true to yourself, and keep giving the marketplace your best until it takes it.

Remember, too, that rejection comes and goes, but so does acceptance. For a writer, over the long haul, it's mastery of your craft, wedded to the sheer love of doing it, that sustains.

And, finally, though the powers-that-be can accept or reject your work, you can do something they *can't*: write. The plain fact is, you are the sun, and the industry is the moon. It only shines by reflected light.

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*Formerly a Hollywood screenwriter (My Favorite Year; Welcome Back, Kotter, etc.), Dennis Palumbo is now a licensed psychotherapist in private practice. His mystery fiction has appeared in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The Strand, Written By and elsewhere, and is collected in From Crime to Crime (Tallfellow Press). His new novel, Mirror Image (Poisoned Pen Press), is the first in a series featuring psychologist Daniel Rinaldi, a trauma expert who consults with the Pittsburgh Police. Info at [www.dennispalumbo.com](http://www.dennispalumbo.com).*

## BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

By James Scott Bell

The May/June 2010 issue of *Writer's Digest* has a sidebar from YA editor Anica Morse Rissi, wherein she gives nine things you can do to elevate your manuscript before submission.

I thought the list was good. Not only for getting a manuscript ready to submit to agents or editors, but also if you're considering self-publishing. So I'm going to give you the tips with my own comments attached.

### 1. Revise, revise, revise.

As the author of a whole book on the revision process, I'm not going to quibble with this one. You can, however, become "revision obsessed" and spend way too long on a project. In my book I give a process for getting over that, but you can just as well come up with one of your own, so long as you eventually send your work out. Not too soon, but not too late, either.

### 2. Start with conflict and tension.

The conflict or tension does not have to be "big." It can really be any sort of disturbance to the Lead's ordinary world. A strange phone call, a letter, a knock on the door at midnight, a cop driving up to the curb in front of the house. Anything that is not simply "happy people in Happy Land."

### 3. Don't start with backstory.

An obvious corollary to #2. Backstory is best when it is delayed, although little sprinkles can be added to the first pages for depth. Just make the action primary up front.

### 4. Give the readers something to wonder about.

Mystery, unanswered questions, portents, threats. All good at the beginning and, indeed, throughout—so long as you are prepared to give satisfactory answers (unless you write for *Lost*, of course, then you can just keep on raising questions).

### 5. Avoid explaining too much, too soon.

A corollary to #4. My rule for the opening is *act first, explain later*. Readers do not need to know everything you do about the setting and characters at the start. They will wait a long time if there's something dynamic and disturbing going on at the beginning. >>>>*continued*

&gt;&gt;&gt;

**6. Make sure your story has plot arc and emotional arc.**

This is another way of saying that you need to give us the stakes inside the character, as well as outside. One way to do this is via internal conflict, which is the battle between two strong but opposing desires in the character. In *High Noon*, the town marshal must battle his desire to do his duty as a lawman versus his desire to keep his new Quaker bride (the producers raise the stakes nicely by having the Quaker bride look exactly like Grace Kelly).

**7. Read your dialogue out loud.**

This is a great practice. You hear it differently than you read it. An alternative (my own preference) is to have Word read it back to me in speech mode. Either way, you'll catch things to change every time.

**8. Use adjectives, adverbs and dialogue tags sparingly.**

As far as adverbs, do a search for LY words and kill as many of those pests as you can. For dialogue tags, use *said* and *asked* as your defaults, and only when needed to figure out who's speaking. Resist the urge to use things like *he growled* or *he expostulated*.

**9. Make sure your details matter.**

All details, and I mean every one in your manuscript, should do "double duty." Not just describe, but describe in a way that sets the tone you desire. Details can characterize, foreshadow and carry motifs. In other words, don't waste them.

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*James Scott Bell (www.jamesscottbell.com) serves on the board of SoCal MWA and is the author most recently of The Art of War for Writers (Writer's Digest Books)*

## Your Editor Speaks—Jeri Westerson ☞



What are our big concerns as writers? Getting published. Staying published. Having two books out there with a third on the way in Oct, I'd like to say that it's getting easier but that isn't the case. It's still a numbers game and we are in a recession. How many books get sold determines whether that next contract will be in your mailbox. I've just signed with MLR Press to publish my first gay mystery series under the pen name Haley Walsh (say hello to Haley!). I'm also working on another medieval mystery series to compliment the one already out there. These are my strategies. What are *you* doing to get and stay published? In this issue we have three articles on the matter. Dennis Palumbo reminds us that we all get rejections and how to take it. Jackie Houchin gives us tips on interviewing people for articles in print and on blogs. James Scott Bell tells us how to brush up that manuscript before we submit. And then, of course, there are networking opportunities like Bouchercon coming up in San Francisco this Oct. I hope I'll see many of you there. I won't be wearing a helmet, though, just so you know. It's hard to drink a cocktail that way. Email me, if you like, at [themarchofcrime@gmail.com](mailto:themarchofcrime@gmail.com).

### Double Your Pleasure

John Betancourt and Rob Reginald have started editing a series of Double books (à la the old Ace Doubles) for Wildside Press. These are still POD, but we're attracting quite a few name authors. Total wordage for each trade paperback volume is 70,000, but the halves don't have to be equal in size. The two sections are bound upside down to each other, and have two distinct covers. They can be authored by the same individual, or by two writers. The halves need to be compatible with each other--i.e., similar genres. We can handle any fiction genre, unlike the old Ace books. For example, one side of a volume could consist of a novella, and other of a story collection. <http://www.wildsidepress.com/>

### West Hollywood Book Fair

An eclectic bunch of MWA members will be featured on panels and "in conversation" on the Mystery & Suspense Pavilion stage at this year's West Hollywood Book Fair, set for Sunday, Sept 26, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm in West Hollywood Park. They include William Link, Denise Hamilton, Christopher Rice, Cara Black, Naomi Hirahara, Gary Phillips, Wendy Hornsby, Gar Haywood, Susan Kandel, Les Klinger, Michael Mallory, Aileen Baron, Tim Hallinan, Robert S. Levinson, Thomas Perry, and Ken Kuhlken. Details at [www.westhollywoodbookfair.org/](http://www.westhollywoodbookfair.org/).

## CHAPTER NEWS & TRANSOM NOTES ☠☠☠

**Dennis Palumbo** will be signing at the following locations: Sept 11, 3:00 pm, The Mystery Bookstore 1036-C Broxton Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90024, 310-209-0415 or 800-821-9017; Sept 14 7:00 pm, "Pen On Fire" Speaker Series, Scape Gallery 2859 E. Coast Highway, Corona del Mar, CA 92625 INFO:

[penonfire@earthlink.net](mailto:penonfire@earthlink.net); Sept 26, 10:00 am, Mystery and Suspense Pavillion West Hollywood Book Fair, West Hollywood Park, 647 No. San Vicente Blvd, Los Angeles, CA Contact:

[westhollywoodbookfair@gmail.com](mailto:westhollywoodbookfair@gmail.com); Oct 1, 7:00 pm Vroman's Bookstore 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91101 626-449-5320; Oct 15-17 Panels/Book signing Bouchercon 2010 (Mystery/Crime Conference) Hyatt Regency San Francisco 5 Embarcadero Center, San Francisco, CA 94111 888-421-1442 ☠☠☠

**Aileen Baron** will be signing THE SCORPION'S BITE at the following locations: Sept 2, at Mysterious Galaxy in San Diego at 2:00 pm; Sept 12, Booksigning at Book 'Em in South Pasadena 4:30 pm, Sept 26; Thriller panel at West Hollywood Book Fair at 4:30 pm; Oct 14-17, Bouchercon, San Francisco; Oct 29-31, Magna cum Murder, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. ☠☠☠

**Donis Casey** will be giving a "How to Commit Murder" Workshop Oct 15, 1:00 to 2:00 pm at the 16th Annual Women Writing the West Conference: A Write Retreat: Reconnect, Reinspire, Rejuvenate, and Relax at the Rancho. Rancho de los Caballeros, Wickenburg, Arizona. [www.womenwritingthewest.org](http://www.womenwritingthewest.org) or contact Marcia Melton at [melton.marcia@gmail.com](mailto:melton.marcia@gmail.com) 480-244-9393 ☠☠☠

Poisoned Pen Press will be publishing **Tammy G. Kaehler's** debut mystery DEAD MAN'S SWITCH, in Aug 2011. ☠☠☠ **Stephen Jay Schwartz's** second book in his Hayden Glass series, BEAT, comes out Sept 28 in both hardcover and trade paperback. This is the sequel to BOULEVARD, which was just nominated for the T. Jefferson Parker Mystery Award, to be announced at the SCIBA dinner in Sept. He'll be at the following locations: Book Launch at the Mystery Bookstore in Westwood on Thursday, Sept 30, at 7:00 pm; another signing party at Book Soup in West Hollywood on Saturday, Oct 2, at 4:00 pm; and a Northern California launch the night before Bouchercon on Oct 13, at 7:00 pm, in San Francisco at the Beat Museum in North Beach.

☠☠☠ **Tod Goldberg** is writing and directing a short film based on his story REMAINDERED, which was published in EQMM a few years back and was a Readers Choice Award finalist. The film is being produced in Kentucky using entirely local actors and crew...with the exception of Tod...and is being done through the auspices of the Riverpark Performing Arts Center in Owenboro, where the acclaimed (and Edgar-award winning) International Mystery Writers Festival is held each year. The movie will be screened on Saturday, Oct 16, at Bouchercon. You can find out more about it here

<http://leegoldberg.typepad.com/remaindered/>. ☠☠☠ **J. Larry Carroll** and co-writer David Carren's script, STRONG SUSPICION, has won the 2010 Act I: ION Television Movie Contest. As part of this distinction, the writers will receive a development deal with ION Television. More information is available on the New York Television Festival website. ☠☠☠

**Kris Neri** will be repeating her popular online 10-week mystery writing class through the Writers' Program of the UCLA Extension School, COMMITTING THE PERFECT CRIME: WRITING YOUR FIRST MYSTERY, starting Wednesday, Sept 29th. For more information, check [www.uclaextension.edu](http://www.uclaextension.edu). Kris's short story, "How to Create a Woman in Just 28 Days," will appear in the American Crime Writers' League anthology, MURDER HERE, MURDER THERE. ☠☠☠ Sisters in Crime Chapter Desert Sleuths latest anthology HOW NOT TO SURVIVE A VACATION was unveiled at their annual Write Now 2010! Conference. 18 humorous to noir crime stories are featured, including MWA SoCal members **Kris Neri** and **Deborah J Ledford**. ☠☠☠ **Elizabeth Gunn** reports that her third Sarah Burke novel, KISSING ARIZONA, will be published Oct 1 by Severn House. >>>continued



## CHAPTER NEWS &amp; TRANSOM NOTES continued

**Dick Lochte's** THE MORNING SHOW MURDERS, the first book in a comedy-thriller series featuring celebrity chef and morning show host Billy Blessing, written by Al Roker and Dick, arrives in Bantam paperback in Sept. Book two, THE MIDNIGHT SHOW MURDERS, is set for Delacorte hardcover publication in Nov. ☠☠☠**Michael R. Perry** wrote the story for "Paranormal Activity 2" which will be in theaters Oct 22. He also wrote three episodes of the NBC mystery miniseries "Persons Unknown", which shot in Mexico City; the series was created by Edgar-winner Christopher McQuarrie and will be released on DVD Sept 7. ☠☠☠**Melodie Johnson Howe** has been nominated for the Barry Award for her EQMM short story, "A Hollywood Ending." ☠☠☠**Wendy Hornsby's** THE PARAMOUR'S DAUGHTER, a Maggie MacGowen mystery (Perseverance Press), will be published in Sept All are welcome to the launch party on Sept 11, 1:00-3:00, at Apostrophe Books, 4712 E. 2nd Street in Long Beach. ☠☠☠**Thomas Sawyer's** session of his Writers University online course, STORYTELLING - How to Write Stories That Will Grab and Hold Your Audience begins on Sept 13. He'll be a presenter at the East of Eden Writers Conference in Salinas, CA, Sept 24-26, hosting workshops on both fiction and non-fiction topics. He'll be teaching, with literary agent Ken Sherman, an intensive Screenwriting Retreat at the Eugene International Film Festival in Eugene, OR, Oct 7-10. Appearing as a featured author at Men of Mystery in Irvine on Oct 30. ☠☠☠**Marie Loggia-Kee's** first book PHYSICAL EDUCATION was released under the name **Louisa Bacio** in June 2010. It's currently available as an e-book from Ravenous Romance. Also, just signed with the agent Saritza Hernandez with the Lori Perkins Agency. ☠☠☠**Jeri Westerson's** second Crispin Guest novel, SERPENT IN THE THORNS, will be available in trade paperback on Sept 28. Her third Crispin Guest novel, THE DEMON'S PARCHMENT, will be released Oct 12, just in time for Bouchercon. Come join her for the launch party at Vroman's Bookstore on Saturday, Oct 23 at 5:00 pm for medieval munchies, champagne, and sword-fighting knights! Jeri's book is a top mystery pick for Romantic Times Magazine Oct issue. She'll be touring in California and Arizona. Check website for dates and times. Also, writing as **Haley Walsh**, Jeri just signed with MLR Press for her first gay mystery series, the Skyler Foxe Mysteries, beginning with FOXE TAIL. See [www.skylerfoxemysteries.blogspot.com](http://www.skylerfoxemysteries.blogspot.com). ☠☠☠**Paul D. Marks'** story "Endless Vacation" has received an Honorable Mention in the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition. This is the second Honorable Mention for Paul's story, the first was in Glimmer Train. ☠☠☠**Joel Fox's** debut novel "Lincoln's Hand" was released Aug 1, he'll be signing as follows: Sept 4, 2:00 pm: Mystery Ink, 7176 Edinger Ave., Huntington Beach; Sept 19, 2:00 pm at Book 'Em, 1118 Mission St., S. Pasadena. ☠☠☠**Sue Ann Jaffarian, Pamela Samuels-Young, Gay Degani,** and moderator **Jackie Vick** will present "The Pros and Cons of Self-Publishing" at the Burbank Library, 300 N. Buena Vista Blvd., Burbank on Saturday, Sept 11, 2:00-4:00 pm. ☠☠☠A panel with **Harley Jane Kozak, Dorothy Howell, Kathryn Lilley, and Hannah Dennison** moderated by **Daryl Wood Gerber (Avery Aames)** will present "Murder, Mirth and Mayhem" at the San Dimas Public Library, 145 N. Walnut Ave., San Dimas, CA on Saturday, Sept 18, 3:00pm. ☠☠☠On Sunday Sept 12 at 2:00 pm **Sheila Lowe** will address Sisters in Crime/LA on the topic of handwriting analysis. Sheila is the author of the Claudia Rose mystery series. South Pasadena Library's Community Center, 1115 El Centro Blvd., S. Pasadena. \$5 fee for non-members. ☠☠☠On Oct 3 at 2:00 pm: **Sue Ann Jaffarian, Naomi Hirahara** and **Christa Faust** will present "Writing Across Multiple Genres" and **Aileen Baron** will read an excerpt from her latest release THE SCORPION'S BITE. South Pasadena Library's Community Center, 1115 El Centro Blvd., S. Pas. \$5 fee for non-members of SinC/LA. ☠☠☠**Laura Levine** and **Joanne Fluke** will be celebrating the release of their novella collection, GINGERBREAD COOKIE MURDER with champagne and gourmet munchies on Sunday, Sept 26 from 2:30 to 4:00 pm at Mysteries To Die For, 2940 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91362. (805) 374-0084. >>>continued

**CHAPTER NEWS & TRANSOM NOTES continued**

THE UNDERBELLY by **Gary Phillips**, part of PM Press' Outspoken Author series, is out now. Originally written three years ago as an online serial on FourStory.org, the expanded novella also includes an interview with Phillips by Denise Hamilton. ☠☠☠Everyone is invited to the launch of MURDER IN VEIN, the first book in **Sue Ann Jaffarian's** new vampire mystery series – Sept 18, 5:00 pm, at the Mystery Book Store in Westwood. In addition to tradepaper, MURDER IN VEIN will also be released in a limited hard cover edition, a first for both Sue Ann and her publisher, Midnight Ink. The hard cover edition will only be available through select mystery book stores and independent book stores. ☠☠☠At the recent RWA Conference **Robert L. Hecker's** as yet unpublished romantic/thriller RACHEL'S WAR received the 1st place award in the Post Regency WWII category for RWA's "2010 Romance Through the Ages" contest. ☠☠☠**Andrew Neiderman** writing as V.C. Andrews will publish DAUGHTER OF DARKNESS Oct 26, Pocket Books, the first V.C. Andrews novel in the world of a vampire. The book has already been sold to four book clubs and the UK. Andrew writes and has written the V.C. Andrews novels since 1987. Andrew's next thriller is GARDEN OF THE DEAD set for Nov 1 with Severn House. ☠☠☠**Maggie Sefton, Jenn McKinlay, Hannah Reed** and **Wendy Lyn Watson** will be taking on Texas at these locations: Sept 30, 7:00pm Barnes & Noble 2701 Parker Road, Round Rock, TX 78681; Oct 1, 6:30 pm Murder by the Book in Houston; Oct 2, 2:00 pm Barnes & Noble 15900 La Cantera Pkway, San Antonio, TX 78256; Oct 3, 2:00 pm Barnes & Noble 1612 S. University Drive, Fort Worth, 76107.

**Third Annual Minotaur Books/Mystery Writers of America  
First Crime Novel Competition**

The winner will be offered a publishing contract with an advance of \$10,000.

Manuscripts must be postmarked by 11/30/2010.

For guidelines and to request an entry form, visit

<http://www.mysterywriters.org/?q=Contests-Writers>

## Book Trailer Uploads

A possibly worthwhile tidbit for author members who might not know this: Amazon allows us -- free of charge -- to upload a book-trailer or other short video to our author page. What? You don't have an author page? Go get one! Contact Author Central at Amazon.

## Who's Reading What?

By Dan Kelly

### **PAMELA SAMUELS YOUNG (BUYING TIME)**

Reading: INNOCENT by Scott Turow

"I like the way the author got into the characters' minds... I felt like I could feel what they were thinking. Adventurous use of tenses, alternating 1<sup>st</sup> person present and 3<sup>rd</sup> person past."

### **GARY PHILLIPS (THE UNDERBELLY)**

Reading: BRONX KILL, graphic novel written by Peter Milligan, art by James Romberger

"A good twisted crime story about fathers and sons, and how the past determines your future."

### **SUSAN GOLDSTEIN (HOLLYWOOD FOREVER, due January 2011)**

Reading: THE DEEP BLUE ALIBI by Paul Levine

"I was going on vacation to Miami when I picked this up... what a fun book to read there, a great page turner. Paul beautifully captures the feel of Florida and see-saw world of lawyering."

### **CHRISTA FAUST (MONEY SHOT)**

Reading: COLD KISS by John Rector

"It's great, old-school noir."

### **JILL AMADIA (A MOMENT IN CRIME)**

Reading: WRITING FROM THE INSIDE OUT by Dennis Palumbo and Larry Gelbart

"It's like no other writing book, I really envy his clarity."

### **GILLIAN DOYLE**

Also Reading: WRITING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"Don't suppress your anger – use it!"

### **TYLER DILTS (A KING OF INFINITE SPACE)**

Reading: James Lee Burke, THE GLASS RAINBOW

"I'm such a big fan of James Lee Burke that I can't be trusted to offer any kind of objectivity!"

## SAVE THE DATE

**Saturday, November 7**

SoCal Mystery Writers of America Workshop: What's on the Horizon in the Publishing World for 2011?

- + How can we create our own e-books?
- + What is Amazon Encore?
- + Launch of new mystery line by a local small press

Exact time and location to be announced.

Please regularly check our web site, [www.socalmwa.com](http://www.socalmwa.com), for more information.



### California Crime Writers Conference

Pasadena Hilton Hotel

June 11-12, 2011

SoCal MWA and Sisters in Crime L.A.

Keep checking [www.ccwconference.org](http://www.ccwconference.org) for more details or "like" the Facebook Page, California Crime Writers Conference

<http://www.facebook.com/reqs.php#!/pages/California-Crime-Writers-Conference/131306096903504?ref=ts>

## 2011 Writers in Residence Application Now Available!

To download this call for applications as a .pdf, please visit  
[http://beachhouse.smgov.net/uploadedFiles/Call For Writers-Beach House 2010 Writers Residency.pdf](http://beachhouse.smgov.net/uploadedFiles/Call%20For%20Writers-Beach%20House%202010%20Writers%20Residency.pdf).  
 Applications must be received by 5:00 PM on Friday, Sept 24, 2010. Please email applications to  
[isanaomi.okuyama@smgov.net](mailto:isanaomi.okuyama@smgov.net)

The City of Santa Monica  
 Cultural Affairs Division  
 Attention: Writers Residency  
 PO Box 2200  
 Santa Monica, California 90407-2200

## SNAP SHOTS: My Tried (and Sometimes True) Interview Techniques

By Jackie Houchin

Last time, I wrote about where I got my ideas for the articles and profiles I write. I started out by getting the assignments from my editor.

Then I began seeing possibilities for my own stories everywhere i.e. in Starbucks, at bookstores, or on the street. I followed up on referrals from friends and information I found in newspapers, newsletters, or around my neighborhood. I let my curiosity lead me to hobbyists, collectors, and folks with unusual occupations.

So many people: so many interesting stories! Next I needed to pick their brains, pry out their deepest secrets, find out how and why they do what they do! I had to *interview* them. There are three main steps (or methods to my madness) in how I interview folks.

### Before the interview

I first decide why I want to interview the person, what I hope to learn, what kind of story I want to write. (A lot of this will depend on where I hope to place or sell the story.) Will it be informative, inspiring, promotional, or...simply someone I personally want to know more about. (Having my own News & Reviews website, helps with that last one.)

I contact the person (on the spot or by phone) and set up a time and date. I let them know who I am, who I write for, and the general topic I want to cover. Then I do a little research on the person or their specialty, occupation or craft. From my "research" I make a list of questions I want to ask.

I make sure I have a notebook, pens, MY CAMERA, and a tape recorder if it's going to be a fact-heavy interview. (Fresh or recharged batteries are a given, of course)>>>*continued*

### During the interview

I try to establish a conversational mood by commenting or complimenting (depending on where we meet) on our surroundings. I thank them for letting me interview them, tell them what I hope to write about, and collect some basic info (correct spelling of name, title if any, etc.).

Then I pick up my notebook and pen, turn on the recorder if using it, and dig right in with the first (and easiest) questions. I never stick strictly to my written questions. If something more interesting (or tantalizing) comes up in their answers, I will follow it like a vein of silver in a Colorado mine. And – confession-time here – sometimes I will ask a question I have no intention of using in my story, just because *I want to know*.

I mostly listen and add questions as promptings to keep them talking. I smile and encourage them with nods or soft, sympathetic sounds. I haven't mastered the "silence strategy" yet, but I'm told that if you can simply remain silent, your subject will begin to fill it with more info. It's usually too uncomfortable for me to do that. I take "off the record" seriously and will never write something I'm asked not to. That doesn't mean I don't want to *hear* it, however. Secret confessions sometimes help me to understand where the person is coming from. I'll take notes, and I *might* use the revelation to shade or slant the story, but not even that, if it is too sensitive.

If I get behind on my note taking, I ask them to repeat, slow down, or clarify what they said, *especially* if I plan to quote it in the story. (Quotes must be 100% accurate!) If they are showing me objects they've collected or made, I will ask if I can photograph them. Always at the end of the interview I will get several shots of them with something meaningful to the story. (Projects, pets, creations, gardens, workplace, etc.)

When the interview is winding down, I quickly look over my questions to see if I got everything I need, then I'll ask if they want to tell me anything I didn't ask about. (Great stuff sometimes comes out this way.)

I thank them, give them my card with contact info, and offer to send them a hard copy of the finished story (or the link, if it appears in an online magazine).

### After the Interview

I review my notes (it's easier to decipher my scribbling if I do this right away), underlining key words and looking for a really cool approach to the story. I also try to come up with a good strong opening statement – whether it's dramatic, provocative, humorous, or teasing. What I want is something that will suck in the reader. Wait, that's called a "hook" right?

I also look for facts that I might need clarified or explained. If I find any, I'll do a brief call-back by phone.

And, the rule is to never show the interviewee the piece before it is published. But on occasion, under *special* circumstances, I have been known to do that. (I'm such a softie!)

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**Jackie Houchin is a freelance writer, book reviewer, and theatre critic. She's a member of MWA, SinC, and CWC.**  
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### **NEXT MEETING**

**Saturday, November 7**

SoCal Mystery Writers of America Workshop:

**What's on the Horizon in the  
Publishing World for 2011?**

- + How can we create our own e-books?
- + What is Amazon Encore?
- + Launch of new mystery line by a local small press

Exact time and location to be announced.

Please regularly check our web site, [www.socalmwa.com](http://www.socalmwa.com), for more information.

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## **LAST WORD**



Aug speaker LAPD Sgt. Mike Sayre poses with our SoCal MWA mug and board member James Scott Bell's mug.