



SISTERS in CRIME  
**CROAK & DAGGER**  
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



# THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume V, Number 5—September 2009

## †Expert Testimony†

### From the Prez

Good news! We've started the count-down for Croak & Dagger's Annual Mystery Dinner, coming up in only 3 weeks!

It will be held from 6-9 p.m. on Tuesday, September 29, at Monroe's Restaurant, 6051 Osuna NE. This event is being subsidized by Croak & Dagger so that you can enjoy it at the low cost of \$14 for members, \$16 for non-members. This includes dinner from a custom menu of New Mexican and American entrees.

At "The Auction," you can play a character in a fascinating plot of mystery, double-dealing, bribery, blackmail and intrigue and be involved in the wheeling and dealing. Will you outbid the opposition, keep your dark secret quiet and unmask the murderer? Prizes will be awarded! First Person to Solve the Murder, Best Character Performance, Best Costume and Person who Accumulates the Most Wealth.

A week before "The Auction," mystery dinner guests will receive the front page of *Yesterday's News*—the antique dealers' magazine which will explain the background to the auction: the unfortunate death of Baroness Audry von Munchen and the relics found on her last archaeological expedition. You will receive descriptions of every guest attending the auction, plus details on your character. You might play a lord, a lady, the butler, a priest or even a spy!

We had several people sign up at the last meeting and you will have one more chance at the September 22 meeting. You can also sign up for this fun event by mailing your check payable to: Sisters in Crime (or Croak & Dagger) to P.O. Box 16597, Albuquerque, NM 87191-6597. Mark the check "Mystery Dinner" and indicate your name clearly. (We'd actually prefer this to give us more time to prepare.)

See you all there! ♦

—Cheri B. Stow

### **Don't Miss It!**

**Tuesday, September 22, at 7 p.m.**

"Autopsies as Puzzle Solving" will be Bob Gassaway's topic at the September meeting. As a sociologist, he has done observational research on the work of forensic pathologists at the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator. He has witnessed about three dozen autopsies.

"We've had a lot of autopsies in the news recently," Bob notes. "Every autopsy begins as a mystery for the pathologist, who must determine the cause and manner of death. If there are many injuries, the pathologist has to determine which one or ones actually caused death. In other cases, there is no obvious injury, yet a person is dead. How did that death occur?"

"New Mexico is unusual in having a statewide system for conducting autopsies in unexplained deaths. Generally this authority is limited to a city or a county. So New Mexico's system provides a useful way of monitoring certain aspects of public health."

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship and sensational speakers.

Our October speaker will be Western history writer Don Bullis, whose latest book is *Bloodville*. Don retired in 2002 after a career in New Mexico law enforcement that included stints as county sheriff's deputy and detective sergeant, town marshal, state organized crime commissioner, and criminal intelligence operational supervisor.

He was a small-town newspaper editor before he entered law enforcement and still writes a weekly column for the Rio Rancho Observer. He lives in Rio Rancho with his wife, Gloria Don, a sergeant with the NM Dept of Public Safety and also a Western history writer.

Don is also the author of *The Old West Trivia Book*, which lists many little-known facts about the American West, and *NM's Finest: Police Officers Killed in the Line of Duty*, about the circumstances surrounding the on-duty deaths of NM peace officers.

Find out more and read the first chapter of *Bloodville* on [www.donbullis.com](http://www.donbullis.com).

Meetings are held in the police briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Substation, 12700 Montgomery NE (1 block east of Tramway). Unless otherwise noted, programs are free and open to the public.

All Croak & Dagger members are invited to join our Yahoo discussion group, where we exchange information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows; share news about local and national mystery events; and participate in occasional online classes. Log on to C&D's web page ([www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com)) and click on the link to moderator Nancy Varian for further instructions. Join the discussion!



Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986. *The mission of Sisters in Crime shall be "to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry."*

*Our vision is: "Raising professionalism and achieving equity among crime writers."*

*And our motto is: "SinC into a good mystery!"*

**Check Out the Croak & Dagger Website for all your Croak & Dagger information needs.**

[www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com)

- Upcoming Programs
- 2008 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

### ***The Line Up***

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## Cross Your T's (where?) and Dot Your I's (don't forget!)

Certified Handwriting Analyst U'liana Sisombath (“call me ‘You-lee’”) was our speaker at the May general meeting of Croak & Dagger and captured everyone’s interest with her lively talk. Some highlights:

Graphoanalysts, U'liana explained, look first at the appearance (gestalt) of a person’s handwriting. Generally speaking, a straight-up-and-down style indicates a logical mind. Writing slanted to the left or right indicates emotion, but whether you’re left-handed or right-handed doesn’t matter, nor does the slant of the paper; most people just adjust it to their own comfort. Cursive writing is more “connective,” both literally and psychologically, than printing—which is why criminals tend to print, to hide something—although printing may just indicate a more “open” personality.

Analysis to detect forgery looks for patterns, or how a person forms letters. “Honest” writing is clear and consistent with a good baseline and open ovals. “Dishonest” writing is hesitant; dots and extraneous marks appear everywhere, and the pressure applied is uneven (as from tracing someone else’s signature).

U'liana clearly laid out some basic tenets of handwriting analysis, as well as some more esoteric tricks—er, techniques. For example, remember when you learned cursive writing using lined paper? Visualize the lines and the word “dog” written on them. The top of the ‘d’ is above the line; the shape of this part of a letter is determined by emotion. The bottom of the ‘g’ falls below the line and is connected to the subconscious. As you may imagine, the ‘o’ and loops of the other letters reflect common, middle-of-the road traits.

Handwriting captures personality for the moment the words are written, U'liana stressed, and cannot be used to predict the future or psychoanalyze anyone. However, it can reveal the some personality strengths and weaknesses, fears and attitudes. The ways people write the letter “e” can reveal hundreds of different traits. Double loops can mean secretiveness, but also simply discretion. You can change your writing, but you can’t change your life; if you’re intelligent, sloppy writing will still show that (phew!).

Nor can you fake the subconscious. For example, where you put the crossbar in a lower-case “t” can reveal how confident you are in yourself—low on the letter means less self-confidence (beware of people whose crossbars go off the line altogether!). Generally speaking, practicing on your own to try to change your handwriting, like raising the “t” bar, is a bad idea; you’re literally messing with your own head! However, a certified instructor can help with anything from deciding whether to rent your spare room to that weird guy with the striking handwriting, to teaching your ADD son to focus and approve his ability to concentrate.

U'liana did reveal one trick that usually works: If you forget to dot your “i”s, you may be forgetful about other things, but if you practice dotting them by going back over what you’ve written and putting in the dots, your memory may improve. ♦

—Linda Triegel ([ljt23@earthlink.net](mailto:ljt23@earthlink.net))

*Based in Albuquerque, U'liana Sisombath runs her own business, A Write Transformation, while working her “day job” as a software analyst. A member of the Coalition of Handwriting Analysts International (CHAI), she has given seminars on such topics as an introduction to handwriting analysis as well as how to navigate the dating scene using handwriting analysis as a tool. U'liana Sisombath can be reached at [Uliana\\_de@yahoo.com](mailto:Uliana_de@yahoo.com).*

# WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW?

by

Mindy Starns Clark

*This article first appeared on [noveljourney.blogspot.com](http://noveljourney.blogspot.com) last winter and has been reprinted in a variety of places since. Author Mindy Starns Clark is an active member of the Delaware Valley Chapter of Sisters in Crime. *Shadows of Lancaster County* was her 12th book from Harvest House Publishers.*

The old adage “write what you know” has always bugged me. I mean, really, how much do most of us “know”? In the past eight years, I have written about murder, the NSA, cryptology, espionage, money laundering, art theft, Napoleonic history, the INS, explosives, poisons, and much more. Given that I’m neither incarcerated nor under an FBI watch, you can safely assume that I’m not living a dangerous double life. Instead, like most writers, I depend on diligent research—not to mention a good bit of imagination—to write about topics far outside my own realm of experience. Despite a lack of firsthand knowledge, a writer with curiosity who is willing to go on a relentless search for answers can produce accurate, realistic and compelling storytelling. Write what you know, yes, but also what you *want* to know and are willing to learn.

Several years ago, I decided that I wanted to know more about the Amish. I live not far from Lancaster County, yet these quiet neighbors of mine were an enigma to me. I wanted an excuse to delve deeper, to learn more about their religion and lifestyle, to find out if they were a cult, as some claimed, or an earnest group of Christians. I also wondered why I always saw so many physically handicapped Amish people, far more than statistics would bear. Finally, after the Amish school shooting tragedy, I wanted to understand how they were able to forgive such an atrocity so fully, so quickly.

Thus, when I pitched a series of stand-alone gothic mysteries to my publisher, each with its own exotic locale, I included as one of those locales “Amish country.” My editors loved the concept of gothic mysteries in varied locations and sent me to work first on *Whispers of the Bayou*, which focused on Cajuns and was set in Louisiana, and then on *Shadows of Lancaster County*, which focused on the Amish and was set in Pennsylvania.

As it turned out, getting an insider’s view of Amish life was among the most difficult research I have ever done, much harder than learning to build a pipe bomb or poison someone with an indigenous plant. There were plenty of books about the Amish from which I would pull my facts, but what I most wanted was to talk to Amish people, heart to heart, and hear straight from them what their lives were really like.

In the past, I have done some fairly nervy things for the sake of research, such as crawling into a hidden sapphire mine or floating down an alligator-infested bayou. It has all been worth it, as the best research is done by actually getting out into something and seeing it, smelling it, *feeling* it. That’s how I work, but in this case there was something about the Amish that kept me at arm’s length. I chatted with many a *kapped* maiden who seemed friendly and receptive, but as soon my questions moved from idle chatter to book research, they politely found ways to end our conversations and move along.

I couldn’t really blame them; the Amish of Lancaster County often feel like animals in a zoo, observed, photographed, studied ad nauseam. From what I have read, not only do they not like all of this attention, they are completely baffled by it. They don’t get what it is that we Fancy folk find so fascinating about their Plain lifestyle. I’m not sure I do either, I just knew that if I was going to write a good and accurate book, not to mention depict a lead character who was genuinely Amish, I needed to get inside an Amish person’s head.

To that end, I began taking tours of Amish farms, going on buggy rides, and seeking out many of the Amish “experiences” that are for sale in Lancaster County—all in the hopes of understanding the Amish experience, of rubbing elbows with real live Amish folks who might be willing to talk. Everywhere I went, though I met many Amish people who were warm and friendly, they were also

clearly uncomfortable with my persistence. When I finally asked a self-acclaimed “Amish expert” and tour guide if he had any idea how I could arrange a sit-down meeting with an Amish person who was willing to answer some questions, he held out an open palm, winked, and told me that anything could be had for a price.

Startled, I changed the subject and soon left. Driving away, the shock of that moment continued to pound in my ears. Everyone knows that an entire industry has been built up around the Amish, an industry that often borders on exploitation. Paying this man to set up an interview felt wrong somehow, especially given that the money would surely stay with him and not trickle down to whatever Amish person he roped into meeting with me. Here I had been seeking an inroad into the Amish mind, when all along I should have understood that what most Amish people wanted was simply to be left alone!

Confused, I began to question my project. A part of me wanted to scrap the whole thing, but then I thought of those original questions that had first sparked my interest: my confusion over the high number of Amish handicapped, my curiosity at their religion and their ability to forgive so easily. From my reading, I had already learned some startling facts about Amish DNA, genetic research, and a physical peculiarity that plagued them known as the “Founder Effect”.

I decided to form my plot around those original questions—ones I had had as an outsider looking in. I would also make my main character a regular person just like me, one who had had interactions with the Amish community but had never been Amish herself. Instead of using unethical means to get an insider’s view, I would depend on more standard, second-hand methods of research (such as books and documentaries) and use my outsider status to my advantage.

As it turned out, the changes I made led to a stronger plot, one that respectfully addresses the Amish faith, their genetics, and their forgiveness. Through the eyes of my non-Amish heroine, I feel like I was able to avoid exploiting anyone while still creating a heart-pounding story of cutting-edge genetics, Amish forgiveness, and a young woman grappling with a tragedy in her Lancaster County past.

Considering the struggle I went through with research, I don’t know that I’ll ever write another Amish book again. But I’m glad I wrote this one, if for no other reason than I got my questions answered; I learned what I wanted to know. After that experience, I also created a new, extended version of my adage: Write what you know, and write what you *want* to know and are willing to learn. But if your pursuit of knowledge leads you to places you don’t want to go, then don’t go there. Instead, rethink your plot and make changes accordingly. In the end, not only will your story will be better for it, but you’ll likely sleep better, too.

### ***A coda to the above article:***

What is it about us writers that won’t let us leave stones unturned? I was happy enough with my Amish novel and readily moved on to writing a Louisiana-based mystery after that, *Under the Cajun Moon*, which is just coming out now.

But the Amish thing wouldn’t let go of me, not completely. I had more stories to tell in their world, more things I wanted to understand. Then I got an “entrée” I had never dreamed of.

It happened about six months ago, while visiting a quilt shop. There, I noticed a rack of fiction that included my own *Shadows of Lancaster County*. Heart pounding, I nonchalantly asked the Amish checkout person if she ever read any of the fiction that they sold in their store. When she that she did, that in fact she loved to read, I told her that I was the writer of one the books she had for sale and I wondered if she had read it and, if so, if I had gotten my facts straight about the Amish.

When I pointed out which book was mine, her face lit up, she clapped her hands together, and she exclaimed, “Oh! I was buried in that thing! It was crazy *gut!*”

Now, from a non-Amish person, I would have taken those words as a compliment, but with her I wasn’t so sure. Buried? Crazy? Embarrassed at my ignorance, I asked her to elaborate.

“Oh, I couldn’t put it down,” she enthused. “It was nuts how much that book kept me reading.”



Big whew. Long story short, that one lovely Amish lady's appreciation of my novel provided a door that quickly swung wide open. By handling the first book with accuracy and respect, I was able to establish a dialogue within the Amish world, one that I didn't have to pay some middle man to arrange for me. Once inside, I was able to learn, firsthand, everything I wanted to know about the Amish and then some.

Fast forward to now. This morning, I just turned in my next project, a small nonfiction book that will be released in January called *A Pocket Guide to Amish Life*. Now that it's in, I'll immediately begin writing my next novel, *Secrets of Harmony Grove*, which will be—you guessed it—a new mystery stand-alone that returns to the Amish of Lancaster County.

The biggest lesson I've learned in all of this? Let's try that adage again:

Write what you know, and write what you *want* to know and are willing to learn. But if your pursuit of knowledge leads you to places you don't want to go, then don't go there. Instead, rethink your plot and make changes accordingly. In the end, not only will your story will be better for it, but you'll likely sleep better, too. And who knows, maybe your reward for putting integrity over research will pay off in the end, in ways you never could have imagined. ♦

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## NOOSE NEWS

Judith van Gieson writes, "I've been expanding my publishing company, ABQ Press, and have two first mystery novels coming out in August, both by Albuquerque writers, although neither one is set in Albuquerque."

*Yellow* by Stephen Scott, set in West Virginia, is about an Episcopal priest who abandons his ministry in order to pursue his brother's murderer. His weapon of revenge is a yellow Volkswagen.

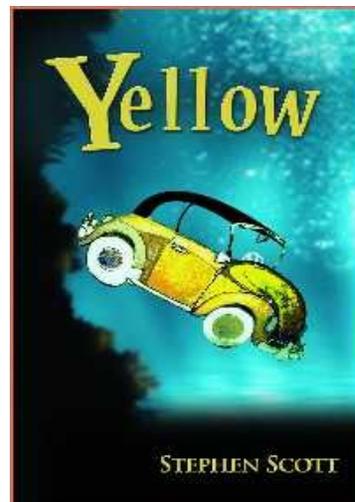
In *The House at the Edge of the Sea*, Billy, a loner whose attempts at sociability always go awry, eventually finds the love of his life—an abandoned house at the edge of the sea. But the two women who have entered his world soon send him back to his singular existence.

Stephen Scott was raised on the northwest frontier of India and educated (more or less) in England. Then he began his checkered career—selling encyclopedias, building 50-foot metal trees for London exhibitions, poaching water plants from an absent Scottish laird to sell. Lured abroad by cheap airfares to the US, he was persuaded to overstay his visa by a designing woman. He married her and settled in New Mexico, where he writes in a tower on the Rio Grande (somewhere west of Brigadoon).

*Tomato Boy*, the first of a mystery series set in rural Calvin County, Tennessee, features lawyer Bob McGregor, who thinks he has settled into lawyer's heaven, free from the stresses of urban practice, but he soon learns that an upcoming election is taken very seriously in Calvin County.

Gary McKee is a former lawyer who practiced in Albuquerque and in Tennessee and now divides his time between those two regions. He developed the Bob McGregor Mystery series while co-authoring and editing legal manuals for county officials.

Learn more about both authors and their books at [www.abqpress.com](http://www.abqpress.com).



## **Rob's Random Shots**

### **September Case File Number One**

*The Dark Horse* by Craig Johnson, Viking, New York, 2009 (HC)

Life for a reviewer doesn't get much better than this: As I was finishing this novel, the second one I wanted to review arrived from Amazon (see below).

Craig Johnson is one of the finest mystery writers working today and a friend of mine. So I'm going to brag on him a little. *The Dark Horse* is his fifth novel featuring Absaroka County, Wyoming Sheriff Walt Longmire. His fourth, last year's *Another Man's Moccasins*, in June won the Spur Award for Best Novel of the West in 2008. It also won Novel of the Year from the Mountain and Plains Independent Booksellers Association. *Moccasins* had been my favorite Longmire, but I love *Dark Horse* just as much, if not more.

The major plot centers around Mary Barsad of neighboring Campbell County, who's admitted shooting her husband in the head six times after he burned down their barn with all her horses in it. Their house is thought to have caught fire from sparks from the barn. Open-and-shut case. Mary is withdrawn, uncommunicative, and sent to the Absaroka County jail before trial because Walt has a female deputy, Vic Moretti, to meet state custody requirements.

Despite her initial admission, Walt doesn't believe she's guilty and the plot takes off from there. Many subplots intertwine—the on-again/off-again romance between Walt and Vic, the recovery and departure of Walt's daughter Cady, a coming election that Walt can't seem to summon enthusiasm for. Then he hits on a plan to go undercover in the little town of Absalom, where the murder occurs.

We've never seen Walt in this situation, without his stalwart supporting cast. And Craig doesn't let all this unfold in a straight line. In every chapter, he backs up the narrative to points that occurred two and three weeks prior,

juggling two timelines. You've seen this is a device all the time now in TV cop shows, but television narrative features multiple viewpoints. In both these timelines, we're inside Walt's head, privy to the insights and clever observations he's become known for. The earlier timeline gradually closes in on the undercover operation and Craig ratchets up the stakes for Walt and Mary and the tension mounts.

I admit I didn't see the major break in the case coming until Walt did. Two identity revelations took me by surprise. But everything in this case is well-foreshadowed. Craig Johnson plays fair with the reader, just as the classic writers of the 1930s did. And, as always, Craig's books offer an education on the West, small town America, and a myriad of handy tips, everything from how to handle yourself in a bar fight to how to calm a skittish horse.

Enjoy this book. It'll be a whole year until Walt No. 6. I wonder what awards *The Dark Horse* will win between now and then . . . ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

#### **Key:**

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

### **September Case File Number Two**

*The Silent Spirit* by Margaret Coel, Berkeley Prime Crime, 2009, 322 pp (HC)

Wait no longer, Wind River series fans. After a one-novel stand-alone last year and seeing Father John banished to a sabbatical in Rome in 2007's excellent *The Girl With Braided Hair*, he and Arapaho lawyer Vicky Holden are back again, working on a murder that may have something to do with the silent movie classic *The Covered Wagon*.

I love historical mysteries as much as I enjoy the unfulfilled yearnings of Coel's pair of mismatched sleuths. And this novel delivers so

seamlessly that I found myself Googling some *Covered Wagon* cast members, sure that they were real people. Some of you will recall my review of *Wife of Moon*, which featured the photographs (and subjects) of Edward Curtis. Margaret Coel cut her literary teeth a couple decades ago with her critically acclaimed biography of Chief Left Hand, so she's no stranger at weaving historical tapestries.

Kiki Wallowingbull is an ex-con and recovering druggie who becomes obsessed with the fate of his great-grandfather, who never returned from Los Angeles after the premiere of *The Covered Wagon* more than 85 years ago. Screen star Tim McCoy recruited more than 500 Arapaho, Cheyenne, and other Indians to play extras in what was the most expensive, longest-running, top-grossing film of its day. After months of location shooting in Nevada, some 50 of the movie's Indians were again hired to go to Los Angeles and perform live outside Grauman's Chinese Theater. Charlie Wallowingbull never returned to the Wind River Reservation.



Father John helps Kiki on the first leg of his Los Angeles journey to seek the truth. The young man wants to do something to repay his grandfather Andrew, who raised him. He chooses to seek the fate of Andrew's father Charlie. We next see Kiki after his return to the reservation when Father John finds his beaten and frozen body at a known drug hangout. Was he killed by his former associates or does his death have something to do with his trip to California?

While Father John plays phone tag with his superior in Denver, who may want to remove him from the St Francis Mission, Vicky Holden gets an anonymous call from a man who claims to have killed Kiki in self-defense. She tries to juggle an important tribal water rights issue with personal and professional difficulties with Adam Lone Eagle, her legal partner, and at first resists even visiting Father John after his return from Rome. Fans of the series will agonize over the emotional pains of these characters just as I have for the previous 13 novels in this best-selling series.

Father John pursues a lead on the reservation, while Vicky visits her daughter in Los Angeles. Tying up threads of an 85-year-old tapestry proves to be dangerous but ultimately satisfying. I hope you enjoy *Silent Spirit* as much as I did. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

***Yellow*** by Stephen Scott, ABQ Press, 2009, 242 pages (TP).

The title of this first mystery from Albuquerque resident Stephen Scott does not refer to its hero's deficiencies in the bravado department, although Richard Catesby isn't exactly PI material either. He starts chasing bad guys when his younger brother and his fiancée disappear (along with their yellow VW Bug) in the hills of West Virginia—a locale that would give any pursuer after evil pause, and particularly an Episcopal priest, which is what Richard is.

Richard heads for the hills, where he encounters an unhelpful, apparently lazy backwoods sheriff, cool on the trail of whatever happened to Willy and April. A persistent deputy, however, is suspicious of Richard's sudden change of heart about pursuing the case and pursues it himself on the side to confirm that Richard has decided to find and punish the villain in his own way, which is a dilly.

Richard is also gay, and his partner Stan is an at-first unwilling partner in vigilantism, but when an eager third partner, a woman Richard meets at the gym, comes on board, all three combine resources to bring about a satisfactory conclusion. The characters are all well drawn, even the gloomy Stan, and the dialogue lively.

*Yellow* starts with the ending, but only enough is given away to make a reader wonder what it's all about and keep reading to find out—which makes this the best prologue I've read in a while. I'm not sure why Scott made Richard a priest instead of, say, a sporting goods salesman, since he quits his job early on to pursue his brother's presumed killer, and there's not much reflection of Richard's spiritual side except in debates with Stan about the morality

of his crusade. I'm also not sure why Smith tells this story in the present tense, which is hard to keep up consistently and falters occasionally.

Still, these are minor quibbles, and *Yellow* is overall an entertaining page-turner. Look for the author, who has a new non-mystery in the stores as well, at signings. And check out the other offerings from ABQPress (see p 6).♦

—Linda Triegel ([ljt23@earthlink.net](mailto:ljt23@earthlink.net))

***For the Death of Me*** by Quintin Jardine, Headline Book Publishing, 2005, 309 pp (HC).

Oz Blackstone is a Scottish movie star, but if you're thinking right now of Sean Connery, forget it. Oz is described in *For the Death of Me* as looking more like Keanu Reeves, and I can't imagine Connery, out of 007 uniform at least, getting into the kind of trouble Blackstone does (their personal lives may be another matter, but what do I know).

*For the Death of Me* is one of the more recent entries in the series (but the only one available from the Erna Ferguson library), and I'm going to have to backtrack to catch up with the characters' convoluted relationships. Suffice it to say they involve ex-spouses, assorted lovers, and wayward siblings.

It takes a while into *For the Death of Me* before there's any international thriller sort of action, but a mystery introduces itself near the start with the appearance of a character everyone thought dead (presumably killed of in a previous book in the series) and whom no one is especially glad to see among the resurrected, including Oz's ex-wife, since it's her ex-husband (told you relationships were convoluted). I won't attempt to explain that except that this complication helps (as best he can) sort out another family complication later on in the story, which is where the action gets international (Singapore) and thrilling, including murder, blackmail, and organized crime.

In between these complications a comparatively common family episode—Oz's father has a heart attack—is described beautifully, showing the close-knit family ties that helps keep Oz grounded. Jardine's writing

is fast and funny (which doesn't seem very Scottish, but it's fun to read), and he's also skilled at drawing solid characters and close relationships. You can't help liking Oz, even when he's behaving badly. You can even like his and his brother-in-law's exes, who... oh, never mind. ♦

—Linda Triegel ([ljt23@earthlink.net](mailto:ljt23@earthlink.net))

“If Mr. Witherspoon won't join us for breakfast, I think at least we should offer him a glass of elderberry wine.”

“We make it ourselves.”

—Martha and Abby Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesselring.



## Sisters in Crime **Guppies**

SinC guppies come from across the United States and Canada. They have different occupations and avocations, but they share a passion for writing mysteries and a common goal of getting published.

“Few professions offer as many opportunities for rejection as writing does. Only the strong survive the path to publication. The encouragement and support of other writers can be the difference between giving up too soon and getting in print.” (SinC Guppies)

Guppies is an online writer's support group, Subgroups represent cozies, noir, psychological and romantic suspense, and thrillers. The Mystery Analysis Group is a book discussion group aimed at discussing the craft, and the AgentQuest group can help with writing queries and synopses.

Interested in joining this online writer's support group? Check them out at [www.sinc-guppies.org](http://www.sinc-guppies.org).

## Your Reading List

Both the nominees and the winners of the 2009 Edgar and Agatha awards are good reading for mystery fans. Below are partial lists of the 2009 nominees (winners in **bold face**).

*2009 “Edgar” Award Nominees, presented by Mystery Writers of America:*



### **Best Novel**

*Missing* by Karin Alvtegen (Felony & Mayhem Press)

***Blue Heaven* by C.J. Box (St. Martin’s Minotaur)**

*Sins of the Assassin* by Robert Ferrigno (Simon & Schuster - Scribner)

*The Price of Blood* by Declan Hughes (HarperCollins - William Morrow)

*The Night Following* by Morag Joss (Random House - Delacorte Press)

*Curse of the Spellmans* by Lisa Lutz (Simon & Schuster)

### **Best First Novel By An American Author**

*The Kind One* by Tom Epperson (Five Star)

*Sweetsmoke* by David Fuller (Hyperion)

***The Foreigner* by Francie Lin (Picador)**

*Calumet City* by Charlie Newton (Simon & Schuster - Touchstone)

*A Cure for Night* by Justin Peacock (Random House - Doubleday)

### **Best Paperback Original**

*The Prince of Bagram Prison* by Alex Carr (Random House Trade)

*Money Shot* by Christa Faust (Hard Case Crime)

*Enemy Combatant* by Ed Gaffney (Random House - Dell)

***China Lake* by Meg Gardiner (New American Library - Obsidian Mysteries)**

*The Cold Spot* by Tom Piccirilli (Random House - Bantam)

### **Best Fact Crime**

*For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb and the Murder That Shocked Chicago* by Simon Baatz (HarperCollins)

***American Lightning: Terror, Mystery and the Birth of Hollywood, and the Crime of the Century* by Howard Blum (Crown Publishers)**

*Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba and Then Lost It to the Revolution* by T.J. English (HarperCollins - William Morrow)

*The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Hans van Meegeren* by Jonathan Lopez (Harcourt)

*The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* by Kate Summerscale (Walker & Company)

### **Best Critical/Biographical**

*African American Mystery Writers: A Historical and Thematic Study* by Frankie Y. Bailey (McFarland & Company)

*Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* by Leonard Cassuto (Columbia University Press)

*Scene of the Crime: The Importance of Place in Crime and Mystery Fiction* by David Geherin (McFarland & Company)

*The Rise of True Crime* by Jean Murley (Greenwood Publishing - Praeger)

***Edgar Allan Poe: An Illustrated Companion to his Tell-Tale Stories* by Dr. Harry Lee Poe (Metro Books)**

### **Best Television Episode Teleplay**

“Streetwise” - *Law & Order: SVU*, Teleplay by Paul Grellong (Wolf Films/NBC Universal)  
“Prayer of the Bone” - *Wire in the Blood*, Teleplay by Patrick Harbinson (BBC America)  
“Signature” - *Law & Order: SVU*, Teleplay by Judith McCreary (Wolf Films/NBC Universal)  
“You May Now Kill the Bride” - *CSI: Miami*, Teleplay by Barry O’Brien (CBS)  
“Burn Card” - *Law & Order*, Teleplay by Ed Zuckerman & David Wilcox (Wolf Films/NBC Universal)

### **Best Motion Picture Screen Play**

*The Bank Job*, Screenplay by Dick Clement & Ian La Frenais (Lionsgate)  
*Burn After Reading*, Screenplay by Joel Coen & Ethan Coen (Focus Features)  
***In Bruges*, Screenplay by Martin McDonagh (Focus Features)**  
*Tell No One*, Screenplay by Guillaume Canet & Phillippe Lefebvre, based on the book by Harlan Coben (Music Box Films)  
*Transsiberian*, Screenplay by Brad Anderson & Will Conroy (First Look International)

### **The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award**

*Sacrifice* by S.J. Bolton (St. Martin’s Minotaur)  
***The Killer’s Wife* by Bill Floyd (St. Martin’s Minotaur)**  
*Stalking Susan* by Julie Kramer (Random House - Doubleday)  
*A Song for You* by Betsy Thornton (St. Martin’s Minotaur)  
*The Fault Tree* by Louise Ure (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

### **2009 “Agatha” Award Nominees, presented by Malice Domestic.**



#### **Best Novel**

*Six Geese A-Slaying* by Donna Andrews (Minotaur Books)  
*A Royal Pain* by Rhys Bowen (Penguin Group)  
***The Cruellest Month* by Louise Penny (Minotaur Books)**  
*Buckingham Palace Gardens* by Anne Perry (Random House)  
*I Shall Not Want* by Julia Spencer-Fleming (Minotaur Books)

#### **Best First Novel**

*Through a Glass, Deadly* by Sarah Atwell (Berkley Trade)  
*The Diva Runs Out of Thyme* by Krista Davis (Penguin Group)  
*Pushing Up Daisies* by Rosemary Harris (Minotaur Books)  
***Death of a Cozy Writer* by G.M. Malliet (Midnight Ink)**  
*Paper, Scissors, Death* by Joanna Campbell Slan (Midnight Ink)

#### **Best Non-fiction**

*African American Mystery Writers: A Historical & Thematic Study* by Frankie Y. Bailey (McFarland & Co.)  
***How to Write Killer Historical Mysteries* by Kathy Lynn Emerson (Perseverance Press)**  
*Anthony Boucher: A Biobibliography* by Jeff Marks (McFarland & Co.)  
*Edgar Allan Poe: An Illustrated Companion to His Tell-Tale Stories* by Dr. Harry Lee Poe (Metro Books)  
*The Suspicions of Mr. Witcher, or The Murder at Road Hill House* by Kate Summerscale (Walker & Co.)

#### **Best Short Story:**

**“The Night Things Changed” by Dana Cameron, *olfsbane & Mistletoe* (Penguin Group)**  
“Killing Time” by Jane Cleland, *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine* - November 2008  
“Dangerous Crossing” by Carla Coupe, *Chesapeake Crimes 3* (Wildside Press)  
“Skull & Cross-Examinations” by Toni L.P. Kelner, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* - February 2008  
“A Nice Old Guy” by Nancy Pickard, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* - August 2008

## I Love a Mystery – *All About Agatha*

Here is some more trivia for the mystery lover, thanks to Maxine Hermann of the Delaware Valley chapter of SinC (these quizzes originally appeared in *Belles Lettres*, the newsletter of DVSinC).



1. What was the title of Agatha Christie's first book, published in 1920?

- A. *A Labour of Hercules*
- B. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*
- C. *A Stylish Affair in Essex*

2. What was the title of her last book (of 87)?

- A. *The Sleeping Car Murders*
- B. *Sleeping Murder*
- C. *Death on the Nile*

3. One of Christie's most famous creations was the little Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, who relied on his little \_\_\_\_\_ to help him solve crimes.

4. Poirot's last case was written during the early days of World War II, when Christie was afraid she'd be killed. The manuscript was locked away in a safe for years and only published in 1975. In it, Poirot:

- A. Gets married.
- B. Returns to Belgium
- C. Dies

5. Miss Jane Marple is known for comparing events with things that have happened in her village, the name of which is:

- A. St. Mary Mead
- B. Ashenden
- C. St. Ives

6. Four of the Miss Marple stories were made into films in the early 1960s. Christie found them awful but met and liked the actress who played Jane:

- A. Maggie Smith
- B. Margaret Rutherford
- C. Angela Lansbury

7. A tragic event in the life of an American actress inspired *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*, published in 1962. The actress was:

- A. Linda Darnell
- B. Jean Tierney
- C. Jean Arthur

8. Christie books often had different titles in England and the United States. What was the original title of *What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw?*

- A. *The Blue Train*
- B. *The 4:54 from Victoria*
- C. *The 4:50 from Paddington*

Sorry, no prizes! Answers are on page \_\_\_

## Conferences for 2010 – Plan Ahead!

It's never too soon to start planning your writers' conference attendance for the coming year! Below are some of the outstanding offers for 2010. For more information on these and other upcoming conferences, click on the link or check them out individually online or e-mail the contacts noted. (Listings from [www.blackravenpress.com/calendar](http://www.blackravenpress.com/calendar).)

### February 26-28

**Sleuthfest**, Boca Raton, FL. Presented by the Florida Chapter of MWA. Guests of Honor: David Morrell, Stephen Cannell. Information: [www.mwaflorida.org/sleuthfest](http://www.mwaflorida.org/sleuthfest).

### March 11-14

**Left Coast Crime—Booked in LA**, Los Angeles, CA. Guests of Honor: Jan Burke, Lee Child  
Toastmaster: Bill Fitzhugh. Information: [www.leftcoastcrime.org](http://www.leftcoastcrime.org).

### APRIL 30 - MAY 2

**Malice Domestic XXII**, Crystal Gateway Marriott, Arlington, Virginia. Dedicated to celebrating the traditional mystery in the tradition of Agatha Christie. Guest of Honor: Parnell Hall; Toastmaster: Rhys Bowen; Lifetime Achievement Honoree: Mary Higgins Clark. Contact: [www.malicedomestic.org](http://www.malicedomestic.org)

### May 20-23

**Crimefest**, Bristol, England. A convention for people who like to read an occasional crime novel as well as for die-hard fanatics. Featured guest author: Colin Dexter. Contact: [www.crimefest.com](http://www.crimefest.com).

### October 14-18

**2010 Bouchercon by the Bay**: San Francisco, CA. Toast Master: Eddie Muller; US Guest of honor: Laurie R. King; International Guest of Honor: Denise Mina; Distinguished Contribution to the Genre: Lee Child. Contact: [www.bcon2010.com](http://www.bcon2010.com)



### Nov 4-7

**NoirCon 2010**, Doubletree Hotel, Philadelphia, PA. Keynote Speaker: Charles Benoit; Awardees: Johnny Temple of Akashic Press; George Pelecanos. Contact: [www.noircon.com](http://www.noircon.com)

### November 13-15

**New England Crime Bake**, Dedham, MA. Eighth annual mystery conference for writers and readers, co-sponsored by Scarlet Letters (New England Sisters in Crime) and the Mystery Writers of America New England Chapter. Guest of Honor: Sue Grafton. Information: [www.crimebake.org](http://www.crimebake.org).

### March 24-27, 2011

**Left Coast Crime—The Big Chile**, La Fonda Hotel, Santa Fe, NM. Left Coast Crime comes to the City Different! Guests of Honor: Margaret Coel, Steve Havill; Toastmaster: Steve Brewer. Information: [www.leftcoastcrime.org/2011](http://www.leftcoastcrime.org/2011) or coordinator Pari Noskin Taichert's bog, [www.murderati.com](http://www.murderati.com). Sign up by March 14, 2010, for the best rate—and watch this space!

\*[Information from *Mystery News*. Check out [www.blackravenpress.com](http://www.blackravenpress.com) for more news, reviews, and information on authors and publishers.]

[Answers to quiz on page 13: 1-B, 2-B, 3-grey cells, 4-C, 5-A, 6-B, 7-B 8-C.]

## 2009 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, August 25, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, September 22, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, September 29 - *Mystery Dinner!*  
Tuesday, October 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, November 24, 7:00 p.m.  
*December meeting TBA*

### Meetings are free to the public.

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held every fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation, 12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE, one block east of Tramway.

(If the substation lot is full, there is more parking available just below the substation, accessed via a driveway below the substation on the right.)

Check our Web site, [www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com), for schedule changes.

## Summary of Findings

The *Nooseletter* is the internal organ of the Croak & Dagger chapter, Albuquerque, of Sisters in Crime (SinC). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and editors. ♦

## †Nooseletter Submissions†

*Croak & Dagger* friends are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, and essays on aspects of mystery writing *and* reading for publication consideration. Information on relevant conferences or events is also welcome. Especially let us know if you have published a new book or story, or have an upcoming local author event. (Unbridled enthusiasm for your own mystery book is encouraged here.)

**Length:** Articles should average 500 words, but short items are also welcome.

**Deadlines:** Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: Feb 15, April 15, June 15, Aug 15, Oct 15, and Dec 15.

**The Living and the Dead:** As a general policy, articles and information should focus on living authors rather than dead ones, but that's not set in concrete shoes. Articles about specific historical development of the crime-mystery writing genre, for example, would be welcome.

**Submissions:** Please submit via e-mail to [newsette@earthlink.net](mailto:newsette@earthlink.net), with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. ♦ —Linda Triage

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Still not a member  
of Sisters in Crime?

\$20/year brings mystery to your life! The Albuquerque *Croak & Dagger* chapter welcomes mystery fans who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship, and sensational speakers.

Benefits of membership in the *Croak & Dagger* chapter include a subscription to our *Nooseletter*, close contact with local mystery writers, and fun events with other mystery fans.

You do *not* have to be a member of the national organization to join us. Come hear our next program speaker and meet the gang. We promise to bring mayhem and murder into your life.

Contact our membership chair, at [contact@croak-and-dagger.com](mailto:contact@croak-and-dagger.com)

**Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime,  
Croak & Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, July 20, 2009**

Board members present: President Cheri Stow, Vice President Olin Bray, Secretary Fred Aiken, Membership Chair Jonathan Sacks, Website Technical Support Manager Susan Zates, and Nooseletter Editor Linda Triegel. The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m. Olin Bray hosted the meeting at his home. The meeting was called to order by President Cheri Stow at 7:10 PM. Cheri thanked Jonathan for hosting the board meeting at his home.

The Board, acting as a committee of the whole, discussed the details of the Mystery Dinner to be held on September 29. After discussion, the Board decided that the event will be held at Monroe's, located on Osuna Avenue NE between San Mateo and San Pedro. The Board concurred with Cheri's recommendation of "The Auction" mystery game. Monroe's printed a limited menu of our choosing from their normal dinner menu. Participants will choose their selection by circling the entrée on their menu and writing their name at the top. The wait-staff will then serve the meal to the guests. It will be necessary to have a folded name card to facilitate the serving process. It was agreed that the tables would be arranged in a "U" configuration. After much discussion, the prices of \$14.00 for members and \$16.00 for nonmembers were set.

Prizes will be award for three categories: Person who first solves the mystery by identifying the killer, Best Costume, and Best Acting. The Board excluded themselves from winning prizes. For the latter two categories, a second and third place winner will be chosen. All persons will receive a small gift for their participation. Details of the Mystery Dinner will be announced by Cheri at the July 28 meeting and will appear in the September Nooseletter.

Cheri reported the current balance in the treasury as \$1,964.15. This includes three recent renewals. Jonathan reported that membership is stable at 66 members.

The Board also discussed the October "Ghost Walk," to take place in Santa Fe. It became apparent as the discussion continued that further research needed to be done to better define this event. Cheri will email Rita with the questions generated by the Board. Cheri volunteered to check the Railrunner schedule to see if it is feasible for members to travel to Santa Fe and return to Albuquerque as a group.

Olin Bray announced that he will be Treasurer for the Left Coast Crime convention to be held at La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe in March 2011. The chair for the conference is Pari Noskin Taichert. Olin also said the 2010 conference will be held in Los Angeles; according to his information, the conference hotel is a short cab ride from the Amtrak Station.

The Board adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.

*—Respectfully submitted by Fred A. Aiken, Secretary*