



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume X, Number 2 – March 2014

†Expert Testimony†

It isn't just publishing that is in transition. The career of writer is morphing from that of artist/craftsperson to that of businessperson/merchandiser whose product is words. Several articles in this month's *SinC Links* discuss author's income potential and ways to boost it.

Several articles analyze writer's income using various data streams and methods of calculation. There was the Digital Book World/Writers Digest author survey, which was self selected--not a random sample. A useful indication, but that is about all. Then there was indie author Hugh Howey with his Author Earnings Report, which used a one-day snapshot of Amazon sales and then used assumptions to get to yearly income. Not exactly IRS data and a different day or different assumptions or (horrors) using several randomly selected days would have given possibly quite different results, according to two experts in data analytics, Dana Beth Weinberg of Digital Book World and Sunita, an author and a quantitatively oriented political scientist (in her day job).

1. Publishing is a segmented market. Only a very small percentage of authors are in a position to support themselves with their writing, no matter which publishing route they've chosen.

Both Weinberg and Sunita suggest not giving up your day job. Weinberg suggests some lessons from examining successes.

Authors and publishers face a hard market and it's not easy to sell a lot of books.

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, March 25th, at 7 p.m.

At the March meeting of the Croak & Dagger Chapter of Sisters in Crime, our speaker will be **Christine Barber** of Santa Fe.

Christine is an award-winning journalist who's been a reporter, editor, and columnist for more than 15 years. In 2008, she received the first Hillerman Award for an unpublished mystery novel, *The Replacement Child*, for which she was named a *New York Times* Notable Author. Her subsequent mystery novels are *The Bone Fire* (2010), which received a New Mexico Book Award, and *When the Devil Doesn't Show* (2013). She is currently coauthoring a memoir with a New Mexico woman who escaped from a serial killer who was committed 60 murders.

2. Publishers don't have a lock on the answers and the contributions they make to author sales and income are in question.
 3. Self-publishing is making it easier than ever before for more authors to make at least some money, but very few make a lot.

Even being well-known or an award winning author with a substantial body of work is not a guarantee of a living wage. Robert McCrum, writing in *The Observer*, interviewed several British authors who are struggling to make ends meet.

So what can a writer do? According to Lee Child, it's having a strong brand. This is important because it has a direct impact of profitability. The Codex Group, which polls thousands of readers to determine their preferences and purchasing behavior, says that consumers are willing to pay a 66 percent premium for a book by a favorite author in ebook format. Child carries a higher percentage of readers with him from book to book than any other best-selling writer. Child emphasized three key factors in Jack Reacher's success-- consistency (series is better than stand-alone), authenticity (culling believable, authentic details from a larger pool of merely accurate ones), and uniqueness.

Codex Group suggests two tools for a new author to break through. The first is through price promotion. The second is through community participation on lists such as Goodreads. An author needs a great cover that communicates at thumb scale. The short description is your value proposition and it is extremely important. The third is social interaction. Remind your friends and fans to review your book. Put the Goodreads badge on your website. Build your list of friends with give away contests of 2-4 Advanced Reader

Copies and community participation by reviewing and discussing he works of others.

Welcome to the brave new world of book promotion. --Jan Bray (ohbray@nmia.com)

Looking Forward to Our April and May Speakers:

April 22nd--Jen Brown of the Agora Crisis Center at UNM, which provides trained listeners for times when family and friends can't help. Compassionate, non-judgemental, peer counselors help callers figure out options. Support is available by online chat or telephone. Agora has three certified ASIST trainers who can offer suicide intervention training throughout New Mexico. She'll speak about suicides and their symptoms. She'll also answer questions on what other types of crisis calls Agora receives, or what times of year have the highest volumes of calls.

May 27th--**Judith Van Gieson** is the author of a children's book, a collection of poetry and short stories, and thirteen mystery novels in two series, including the Neil Hamel mysteries, featuring a female Albuquerque lawyer and sleuth, and the Claire Reynier series, which features an archivist and librarian at the Center for Southwest Research at University of New Mexico. Judith lives in Albuquerque, where she owns and operates the publishing company, ABQ Press.

Examining Amazon's Role in Publishing (from SinC Links, March 2014)

Borders is long gone, Barnes & Noble is on the ropes, and total sales at U.S. bookstores have fallen 22% over the past five years. Is every book lover's nightmare coming true? Is the publishing industry somehow being destroyed by a combination of Amazon, price cutting and a wave of Netflix watching, iPhone gaming and tweeting?

Definitely not, though you might come away with that ridiculously pessimistic view from some recent coverage trashing Amazon's role in the industry. Actually, book sales have risen strongly since

But the true numbers are hard to nail down. Stick with me while we try to tease out the truth from imperfect market research (and I'll be dealing only with the mainstream book market, not textbooks or religious books).

First of all, an increasing portion of sales has moved online, both for print books and, obviously, for ebooks, which are only sold that way. Including both online and physical sales, U.S. publishers had revenues of \$15 billion in 2012, the most recently reported annual figure from the Association of American Publishers. That's up 14% from 2008 – not bad. Dig a little deeper and you'll see that, within the total, ebook sales rose from \$68 million to \$3 billion, what's technically known as a gazillion percent increase. Absent ebooks, total print book sales did shrink about 8%.

That's enough right there to disprove the pessimists and ebook critics. It also certainly ought to embarrass the *New Yorker*, which last week published its third--and most off-base yet--profile of Amazon and its impact on the book market. Trotting out many of the same anecdotes Ken Auletta used in his 2010 *New Yorker* article, writer George Packer cites innumerable unnamed agents and publishers who worry Amazon doesn't really care about books as they do. By encouraging low-priced, self-published ebooks, in the end, quality literature will be destroyed, Packer and his sources fear.

"These trends point toward what the literary agent called 'the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer,'" Packer writes. "A few brand names at the top, a mass of unwashed titles down below, the middle hollowed out: The book business in the age of Amazon mirrors the widening inequality of the broader economy."

Overlooked and de-emphasized in these attacks on ebooks are the many ways big publishers have worked hard to destroy literature without Amazon's help. To wit: overpaying huge advances for worthless books written by celebrities. Dumping vast quantities of best sellers in Walmarts and Costcos, where they're sold at half price. Favoring the megachains for decades as they squeezed out the independent stores the publishers now champion against Amazon.

But like the Hollywood studios that resisted the VCR, which later saved them, publishers are being saved by the ebook. Ebooks made up 17% of sales at News Corp's Harper Collins unit over the holidays, up from 14% last year and nothing five years ago. Ebooks hit 33% of sales at Lagardere's Hachette Book Group and 23% at CBS's Simon and Schuster.

Jeff Bezos has been saying for years that Amazon Kindle owners buy more books than they did before they owned the ereader. It makes sense, given that many people read more quickly on an ereader and the device's wireless connection lets customers buy a new ebook as soon as they've finished the last one.

And about all those other distractions on iPhones and iPads and Galaxy Tabs--surely people would be reading far less if they couldn't read ebooks on their devices.

Even the AAP numbers seriously underestimate the contribution of ebooks, because they don't include the fast-growing, self-published ebook phenomenon. Big publishers obviously don't have any sales data on self-publishers and Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other sellers don't disclose aggregate data about self-published sales, so there's little to go on.

The *New York Times* added special ebook sections to its famed best seller lists but ebooks published exclusively by one vendor (cough, Amazon, cough) "will be tracked at a future date." Since Amazon is the reigning king of the self-published ebook, that makes the *Times* lists pretty useless for this exercise.

Checking the Amazon best-seller lists provides an alternate view of reality. Self-publishing star author Hugh Howey recently grabbed a snapshot of the 7,000 best sellers in Amazon's most popular

fiction genres (mystery/thriller, scifi/fantasy and romance). And his results, for that one particular day, showed 35% of the titles were self-published and another 18% were by a single author with no publisher listed.

Of course, Amazon's Kindle is the most popular ebook format and its self-publishing program is by far the largest of its kind as well, so it's unlikely its best-seller lists provide a complete picture of what's going on in the entire market. But it's still the single largest seller of books in the country, so it can't be dismissed either. Even with considerably smaller self-publishing sales at Barnes & Noble and Kobo, the niche (which, yes, does feature a fair amount of low-quality "literature," as to be expected from amateur authors) is adding substantial sales to the industry's annual total.

Publishers may whine and moan and convince their journalist pals to write attacks on Amazon. But for the reading public, it just keeps getting better.

OBITUARY: AIMEE SALCEDO THURLO, 1951-2014

(Editor's Note: Aimee and David Thurlo spoke to a general meeting of C&D in 2008.)

On the morning of February 28, 2014, Aimee passed away peacefully at home after a brief struggle with cancer and related complications. She was attended by her husband of 43 years, David. Aimee was 62 years old.

Aimee, the youngest of two daughters born to Armando and Silvia Salcedo, was born on June 1, 1951, in Havana, Cuba. At the age of 7, Aimee and her older sister Silvia fled the Castro regime with their parents and settled in Miami, Florida. Her mother died soon thereafter. After her father, an electrical engineer, remarried, Aimee became a boarder and student at Ursuline Academy in Arcadia, Missouri. Her quarters were just down the hall from a curtain that separated the young women from a cloistered area. This was an environment that would prove valuable to her future career as a published author.

Aimee entered the University of Albuquerque (now St. Pius X High School) in 1970. After a few months, she moved in with a roommate near the UNM campus, and her friend introduced her to David Thurlo, their next door neighbor. It was love at first sight, and after only a month, Aimee and David were married.

After David completed his degree, Aimee obtained her American citizenship and decided she wanted a career of her own. Aimee was inspired to write. She sat down with legal pad and pencil and began writing a romantic intrigue novel. She soon discovered David, now a teacher at APS, looking over her shoulder. With her permission, he jumped in and began editing her work.

After the book was completed, Aimee sent out a proposal, which was quickly rejected. Sixty rejections later, an offer came from a New York editor and the first book was sold. With David's editorial support, Aimee worked up two new book proposals, and with a track record now, they found a new publisher.

The next book that Aimee wrote and David edited made a national bestseller list. From that moment on, the two partners were never without a book contract. Led by Aimee, who usually wrote the first draft of each new project, the couple discovered that they could write with one voice, and their combined efforts resulted in books characterized by the unique stamp that defined their partnership in life and work.

Aimee was the lead author writing the first two drafts on all those novels where her name appears alone or first on the cover. These are the vast majority of the duo's works over the next thirty years. In addition to many romantic suspense novels, including 36 for Harlequin, the Thurlos have written three

successful mystery series, each featuring a very different primary investigator. The 'cozy' Sister Agatha mysteries are solved by an extern nun--which reflects back to Aimee's years as a student and boarder at Ursuline Academy. The Lee Nez series, which David wrote and Aimee edited, featured a partnership between a half-vampire New Mexico state policeman and a Hispanic female FBI agent. Their flagship series of 17 hardcover Ella Clah police procedurals, ending with a November 2013 title, *Ghost Medicine*, was set on the Navajo Reservation where David grew up. Ella Clah is a Special Investigator for the Navajo Police Department. With these novels, the Thurlos were more equal partners, relying on their complementary strengths.

Among Aimee's many accolades are the Romantic Times Career Achievement Award, a Willa Cather Award for Contemporary Fiction, and the New Mexico Book Award for Mystery and Suspense. She and her husband have also made Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Borders national bestseller lists. Their Lee Nez half-vampire series was optioned by a Hollywood production company as a feature film prospect.

Aimee's dedication and drive were so strong that, even when confined to bed, she and David worked on laptops side by side for over a month until she had to put it aside, rest, and allow her husband to take notes to finish the revisions. Her work will live on, however. Four books already completed will be published in the next two years, including the above, plus *Undercover Warrior* and the second story in the Charlie Henry series, ironically named *Grave Consequences*, which David wrote and Aimee edited.

Aimee's life was not all work. She was an enthusiastic animal lover and, over the years she kept a bull snake, mice, many domestic rats (including two rescues) and two horses, one of them a BLM mustang. Aimee took dressage and hunter jumper training from a Corrales trainer and rode for many years along the ditch banks, bosque, and her own arena. Though she suffered from asthma, she found and raised two American Staffordshire Terriers, Clouseau and Chloe, an injured puppy at the shelter who was about to be put down. Chloe watched over Aimee for thirteen years. Aimee also found a German shepherd-cross puppy living under a tumbleweed near the FAA radar facility, and despite her wheezing, kept the animal. Marcy lived ten more years and was the most loyal dog anyone could imagine. At one time, Aimee owned five dogs, mostly poodles adopted from the Roswell Humane Society, her favorite charity. Just a week prior to her death, her latest rescue, a large standard poodle named Gabriel from South Carolina, succumbed to stomach cancer. Aimee and her office companion were inseparable. The dog was by her side until the day before he died. Her two remaining poodles, Marlowe and Ella, now keep David company.

Aimee was driven by her need to prove her worth and make her contribution to society, but she was very outgoing in public and made easy connections with those she met. She will be missed not only by those who knew her, but by the millions who fell in love with the characters in her books.

Aimee is survived by her beloved husband, David. A private remembrance will be held for close friends and family. For her many friends and readers, condolences and personal comments may be made on Facebook or through the website at www.aimeeanddavidthurlo.com.

The Golden Age of TV Mysteries

In my opinion, this is the Golden Age of Mystery programming on television and CBS is the leader of the pack with eleven shows in this genre. Of those:

The Mentalist is the story of Patrick Jane whose powers of observation are such that people think that he can read minds; Patrick

now works for the California Bureau of Investigation.

The newest show is *Intelligence*, concerning a former Delta Force soldier who has a computer chip inserted into his brain, allowing him to be on-line twenty-four/seven and solve crimes while fighting terrorists.

NCIS and its spinoff, *NCIS-Los Angeles*, show how US Navy criminal investigators solve crimes and murders within the Navy and Marine

Corps, as well as defend the homeland from foreign government threats and terrorists.

Person of Interest shows how a private group of volunteers obey a self-aware artificial intelligence computer to keep selected individuals safe from criminals and to fight public corruption.

Criminal Minds shows FBI profilers tracking down and bringing serial killers to justice.

Blue Bloods is a show featuring multiple generations of cops and lawyers defending the streets of New York against criminals.

Hawaii-50 is an updated version of the hit show of the sixties.

Forty-eight Hours documents the solution to real criminal cases.

PBS has four mystery shows that I watch:

Death in Paradise takes place on a fictional island in the British Caribbean and concerns a stiff upper-lipped British police investigator solving crimes.

Rosemary and Thyme is a cozy style show in which two women, one a former college horticulture professor and her partner a divorcee who worked for the British police, travel around the countryside solving murders and healing plants.

Sherlock is a modernized version of Sherlock Holmes.

MI-5 is a suspense thriller where that government organization protects England from foreign threats and terrorists.

My wife likes to watch *Bones* on Fox network to see a female forensic anthropologist analyze complete or partial skeletons to solve the murders. This show is also syndicated with rerun episodes appearing on other channels.

She also likes to watch on Fox a show called *Cold Case Files* that depict detectives reopening cases that had not been solved by the original investigators.

I don't watch ABC, NBC or cable, but I know they all have shows that fall into our mystery genres. ABC has *Castle* and *Agents of*

Shield (based upon the Marvel comic series of the same name. NBC has *Law and Order Special Victims Unit*, *Chicago PD*, and *Grimm*. Fox has *Sleepy Hollow* and the *Following*. Cable and satellite channels have has a lot of shows, including reruns of some of classic shows from year past.

I encourage those who watch these network and cable shows to share with us what you're watching. --Fred A. Aiken, FAAiken@aol.com

Reviews

The Cuckoo's Calling by Robert Galbraith, Sphere, 2013 (read in the Kindle edition)

The above rather coy tag line is all the original edition of this first-time crime writer's debut novel revealed, but by now everyone knows that the actual author was J.K. Rowling. It must be tough breaking away from what you're most famous for, not just because of high "what's next" expectations, but because people being what they are, their resentment at having something put over on them can lead to skepticism, even contempt—and a not-so-well-concealed desire to see a successful celebrity fall on her face.

Forget all that, and just take *The Cuckoo's Calling* as the entertaining read it is, with principal characters you really like. The writing is smooth and as professional as you'd expect, and while the plot may not be strikingly original, it's solid, and the usual suspects are interesting too. The murderer revealed at the end was a surprise to me (admittedly, I didn't have a favorite anyway and was willing to just go along for the ride). The London setting is brightly visual as well as aural and almost tactile (yes, it rains a lot).

The protagonist is Cormoran Strike, a struggling private detective (they don't seem to call them PI's in England). He's struggling not only with his lack of money and clients, but with having broken up with his longtime girlfriend and, not incidentally, with being the son of a pop star. People keep saying, "I know

you, you're Jonny Rokeby's son." That can get tiresome.

Strike is a big, burly, wounded ex-soldier and couldn't care less what anyone thinks of him. When he starts sleeping in his office because he can't bring himself to tell anyone about the breakup with Charlotte (boo, hiss!) he gets even scruffier.

The second nifty character is Robin Ellacot, a looker and newly engaged as well as new to London. She's star-struck all around, but when she takes a temp job at Strike's office, we learn that she also harbors a not-so-secret desire to be a PI herself.

She's also amazingly resourceful and efficient, and when Strike regretfully informs her that he can't afford her for another week, she offers to work cheap and not tell the temp agency boss that they've gone behind his back. (Come to recall, I got two of my "permanent" jobs starting as a temp; maybe that's why I identify with Robin).

Strike has one client and a host of debtors, but hopes for a turnaround in his deplorable financial situation when John Bristow asks him to investigate the death of his adoptive sister. Bristow is willing to put a considerable sum toward proving that she was murdered and didn't commit suicide.

Since Lula Landry was a super-model and a press magnet, the case was covered extensively, and Strike doesn't see how he can find anything the newshounds might have missed, but he keeps his doubts to himself and takes the retainer.

In the course of his seemingly lackadaisical investigation, Strike interviews a number of Lula's "known associates," most of them not very likeable—except the supposed loser of the lot, Lula's friend Rochelle. The rest are mostly self-obsessed, hypocritical, or just annoying. Rowling's picture of the celebrity culture indicates all-too-personal experience with paparazzi and other nosy parkers.

Although Lula is sometimes referred to as "Cuckoo," the title comes from a Christina Rossetti poem about untimely births and deaths.

--Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Rob's Random Shots

March Case File Number One

Unnatural Habits (Phryne Fisher No. 19) by Kerry Greenwood, Poisoned Pen Press, 2013, 305 pp, TPB, \$11.94 (Amazon)

Good news! Not only did I find a recent Phryne Fisher mystery, on Kindle but noted above as an actual trade paperback, and it's great! Those of you who know the series and love the character as I do will know it must be a great read when the quotation at the beginning of Chapter One (from a cartoon in *Punch* magazine in 1890) reads as follows:

"Do you believe in clubs for women, Uncle?"

"Yes, but only after every other method of quieting them has failed."

We can laugh ruefully at that now. It's irony. And indicative of how much things have changed from the world of 1890 and the Melbourne of 1929 (yes, the series has moved 10 years from where it began in Volume One).

In this case, Phryne has her hands full. Pretty little golden-haired girls are going missing. Three of them were pregnant, poor girls who'd been virtually enslaved at the church-run Magdalene Laundry. On top of that, ace girl reporter Polly Kettle (yes, that's what they were called then and they were rare birds anywhere, despite Nellie Bly's pioneering work in the 19th century) has gone investigating and disappeared. Having met the missing woman before, Phryne disparages Polly's lack of self-preservation sense and determines to use all possible resources (including her increasingly able maid, Dot) to go under cover in a convent (!), the laundry, a home for "wayward" girls, and even into a shady "movie producer's" office.

Those of you who know Phryne and this series know that she seldom goes anywhere unarmed, even when she can't carry weapons. Phryne and Dot deal with irascible nuns, a shady lawyer who handles divorces for husbands of "upstart" women, and domineering mothers in law. And that's just in the first few chapters. There's breaking and entering, outrageous impersonations (including Phryne's

willingness to find out if blondes really do have more fun--yes, that advertising slogan dates from this era), and eventually a breakneck race against the tide in which Phryne flings herself unarmed onto a departing white slavery ship without weapons or police back-up.

All your favorite characters are here-- Detective Inspector Jack Robinson, his constable Hugh, Hugh's love interest Dot, Phryne's two wards Jane and Ruth, her boy "adoptee" Tinker, cabbies Bert and Cec, even her friend Dr. Elizabeth MacMillan (Mac) of the Queen Victoria Hospital. As a reassurance to those planning to read this book, no children (including girls) are harmed during the novel, but plenty of women are ill-treated by husbands, mothers-in-law, nuns, and con artists.

This is the first Phryne novel I've reviewed since *Dead Man's Chest* last year, set during a seaside vacation for Phryne's ever-growing household. The mystery and suspense are far more intense in this volume and I highly recommend it. But please consider beginning with the first book, *Cocaine Blues*, to see how this highly unconventional and multitalented sleuth got her start and peopled her home with all those she's rescued or helped along the way. --Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net and robertkresge.com

Full disclosure: The reviewer has a Blu-ray DVD of the first season (13 episodes) of Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries, produced in 2013 for the Australian Broadcasting Company in Melbourne with gorgeous women, beautiful costumes, period locations, and vintage automobiles. The second season is showing in Australia now and the reviewer will be purchasing that season when it's available in May. Responsible mystery readers (who've diligently read this far) may borrow the first season DVDs of this highly addictive series at the March and other Croak & Dagger meetings.

Key: PB=Paperback TP=Trade paperback NC=Hardcover
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March Case File Number Two

The Woman Who Died a Lot: A Thursday Next Novel by Jasper Fforde, Penguin, 2012, 366 pp, TPB, \$16.00

My other favorite madcap female sleuth is back again, too. I've reviewed the previous six volumes in the Thursday Next alternate reality/"present-day" England, when cloned dodos and mammoths run rampant, the Crimean War is a recent memory (Thursday received a leg wound there as an armored personnel carrier driver in the charge of the Light Armored Brigade), Wales (Fforde's home region) is an independent socialist state, and books and libraries are held in high esteem (the latter employing militant librarians whose fatigues resemble book spines on shelves). Sound crazy? Guess you haven't read this series before. Fforde makes Dr Who and Harry Potter look like "failures to imagine."

The first major difference in this latest novel is that members of the Chrono Guard (who make sure there's no tampering with the space-time continuum) have been disbanded after multiple trips into the far future and the past turned up no evidence that time travel had ever actually been invented, so there is a process afoot that ex-Guardians begin to receive Letters of Destiny telling them what their futures would have been like if Time Travel had not been found to be impossible. The second major difference is a Universal Supreme Deity has begun smiting various cities with super lightning bolts and time is counting down for Thursday's home town of Swindon to get blasted at the end of the current week. And if that's not enough to contend with, there's an asteroid on its way to Earth and the likelihood of a fatal impact keeps changing on a daily tote board.

Adding to all this chaos is a new invention by previous big business villain the Goliath Corporation (primary agent and Thursday's *bete noir* Jack Schitt returns from previous novels as well) in which real humans can be temporarily replaced by Synthetics--sort of exact replicants who immediately assume all the memories, emotions, and quirks of the original persons. All without the person who's been replaced

being aware of it. Fortunately, the Synthetics can be killed and if the original person's body can be found (usually in an insulated container somewhere nearby), the person resumes his or her normal life. If anything in Fforde's world can be considered normal. The title of this book refers to this happening to our heroine Thursday several times, but also harks back to the fourth volume in the series in which she dies three times, but is still alive at the end. Of course, that's when time travel really worked.

If none of the above made even the slightest bit of sense to you, I'm very sorry. If you start with volume one, "The Eyre Affair," some of which takes place within the pages of Jane Eyre, you can become just like me, an avid fan of the crazy imagination and world of Jasper Fforde.

But don't start with this volume. *It's so powerful, it should be taken only by Fforde addicts. Walk, don't run, to the nearest bookstore or library. Our librarians are, thankfully, not yet armed with automatic weapons.*

---Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net & www.robertkresge.com

Series mysteries:

The Angels Will Not Care by John Straley, Book 5 of the Cecil Younger series. Bantam, 1998 225 pp (HC).

Cecil is a private investigator in Sitka, Alaska, where he has lived for 15 years. His girlfriend of three years, Jane Marie DeAngelo, is a research biologist and CEO of a games company, the day job that funds her research on humpback whales. Their friend Todd lives with them. Todd is not well adapted socially. Cecil's neighbor says, "Todd ain't dumb, he's just smart in his very own way."

Cecil's job prospects wither after he mishandles a hostage situation, but Jane Marie finds him a job with the Great Circle Lines cruise line. Many deaths occur on a specific ship, and cruise director Sonny Walters wants to hire Cecil to investigate the ship's doctor. Cecil, Jane Marie, and Todd all go on the cruise, playing tourist in their home state. On board,

Jane Marie works as a lecturer and games organizer, Todd pursues his photography hobby, and Cecil immediately abuses his bar tab and gets it revoked.

The first death occurs on the very first night. Cecil discovers a travel group onboard that caters to the terminally ill and meets a few of its members. The ship, officers, and crew belong to three different companies, a situation that provides a confusing (and sometimes conflicting) chain of command. Todd and Jane Marie are mostly on their own as Cecil suffers misadventures below decks, pursuing clues to the series of deaths.

When the doctor disappears, the ship's crew sends Cecil and Jane Marie to a small island to search for him. Their overnight adventure includes surviving the attentions of a bear.

The fairly obvious explanation of the deaths is eventually revealed. The cruise lines cloak the whole incident in secrecy, paying off key players to remain silent.

The Cecil Younger series concludes with *Cold Water Burning*. Learn more about the author and his books at www.johnstraley.com

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Murder at the Belmar by B. C. Stone, the first book of the Kay Francis mystery series, published 2013 by B. C. Stone, 166 pp (TPB).

Hollywood movie star Kay Francis is on vacation in Mazatlán, a city she knows well and loves from numerous previous visits. This story is set in 1937.

Kay is staying at the luxurious Hotel Belmar on Olas Altas in Old Mazatlán. After a dead body is dumped in her hotel room by a pair of thugs, Kay offers to help the local police investigate the crime. The murder victim, well-known mystery writer Mavis Wembley, was in town for a mystery writers' conference, along with her private secretary, Miss Niffin, and her lawyer, Mr. Tumworth. Other lesser-known writers at the conference are envious of Wembley's fame.

Kay interviews the writers, the secretary and the lawyer. All seem to have a perfect alibi: they attended a performance and a dinner

together on the night in question. Interviewees are eager to reveal secrets about the others and suggest Kay should investigate elsewhere. Kay balances her time between interviewing possible suspects and exploring Mazatlán for relaxation. Clearly the author shares Kay's love for Mexico and its culture:

Kay's resourceful friend Johnny Caballero hunts for clues back in Hollywood while Kay investigates in Mazatlán. She also calls upon famous friends Somerset Maugham and Errol Flynn for assistance.

The story is accented with period details: Kay consults *Terry's Guide to Mexico*, first published in 1922 (still available today in bookstores); she reads James Cain's *Serenade*, published 1937; and the 1937 autobiography of Errol Flynn, an avid sailor, entitled *Beam Ends*. At first, a reader may be tempted to rewrite awkward sentences. Ironically, when Kay describes Miss Niffin's diary as "a combination of perceptive eloquence and flowery, pretentious excess," the phrase also describes the surrounding prose. Hang on, and be rewarded with gems later.

Once Kay figures out what really happened and why, she gathers all the suspects together for her denouement, much like Hercule Poirot in an Agatha Christie mystery. Indeed, she credits "the little grey cells" that need to work hard to solve the mystery.

Unlike most series, the Kay Francis mystery series goes backward in time. The second book in the series, *Midnight in Valhalla*, is set in 1934 Bayreuth, Germany. When Police Captain Seguro first greets Kay Francis in *Murder at the Belmar*, he refers to her success with the Bayreuth case. The third mystery in the series will be set in 1932 Hollywood.

Follow Albuquerque author B. C. Stone on his blog, www.vagrantmoodwp.wordpress.com. —Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Death in Vineyard Waters by Philip R. Craig, Book 2 of his Martha's Vineyard Mystery series. Avon, 2003, 244 pp (PB)

Set on Martha's Vineyard in the 1990s, this was originally published as *The Woman Who*

Walked into the Sea. Protagonist J.W. Jackson is a retired Boston policeman, living year-round on Martha's Vineyard, fishing, clamming or raking quahogs daily. A bullet lodged near his spine caused his retirement from the police force, but he is still well qualified to solve island cases.

Esteemed university professor Dr. Marjorie Summerharp has come to Martha's Vineyard for a few weeks in the summer with a younger colleague, Dr. Ian MacGregor. They plan to finish a joint paper on a newly discovered work by Shakespeare. Before publishing to an academic journal, they must convince themselves beyond any possible doubt of its authenticity—to avoid public humiliation by avid critics. Marjorie has already announced her retirement, so has little concern about her reputation, but she has been a harsh academic critic in her long career and made enemies along the way. Ian has his professional reputation to lose.

Marjorie keeps herself fit by swimming early each morning. One morning, she does not return from her swim. A boat finds her body six hours later. It seems like an accidental drowning. However, J.W. knew the tides would have moved her body far away from where she parked her car if she had simply drowned while swimming. He begins investigating any professional contacts or potential adversaries on the island.

The story abounds with convincing red herrings: Marjorie could have been killed just before she revealed an anomaly in a dissertation and ruined a reputation, or she could have been about to reveal illegal doings at a resort, or several other possibilities. Each of the suspects J.W. interviews has a secret to hide.

A major emotional setback for J.W. is the instant attraction his island ladylove Zee has to MacGregor. J.W. spends a lot of time distracting himself from thoughts of Zee by intensely fishing or researching at the library.

J.W. is fooled by red herrings right up until he and Zee are attacked by the killer during a fierce storm. Together they solve the island crime, but only after surviving a desperate, dangerous pursuit at sea.

Reading about J.W. fishing and/or relaxing with Zee on Martha's Vineyard, attuned to island weather and sea life, is almost like being on vacation. It's a good thing there are 20 more books in the series to enjoy. Next is *Vineyard Deceit* (originally published as *The Double-Minded Men*). --Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com) (If you like Martha's Vineyard mysteries, try Francine Mathews' Merry Folger Nantucket mysteries as well. --Ed.)

Holiday Buzz by Cleo Coyle, Book 12 of her Coffeehouse Mystery series. Berkley Prime Crime, 2012, 370 pages, including recipes (PB).

Clare Cosi co-manages The Village Blend coffeehouse in Manhattan with her ex-husband Matteo Allegro. Matt is the Blend's coffee buyer, traveling around the world for the best beans. Clare lives above the coffeehouse in a beautifully decorated townhouse, courtesy of her ex-mother-in-law and dear friend "Madame" Blanche Dreyfus. Allegro Dubois owns The Village Blend, a family business started by her grandfather.

Familiar characters are back: Clare's boyfriend, Detective Lieutenant Mike Quinn, is on a special task force in Washington D.C., so Clare and Mike only see each other on weekends. Clare's baristas—Tucker "Tuck" Burton, Esther Best, Nancy Kelly, and Dante Silva—contribute their unique personalities to the Blend atmosphere. Franco, a young police detective in a long-distance relationship with Clare's daughter Joy, appears briefly in the story (Joy is on a culinary apprenticeship in France).

In December, the annual Great New York Cookie Swap features exclusive parties to showcase city bakers' finest products and raise funds for charity. Clare attends the parties as the manager of the Swap's coffee service. Clare has a new part-time helper, Moirin "M" Fagan, a young Irishwoman who also works for a baker in the Cookie Swap. Moirin is teaching the Blend crew Irish slang.

The first party of the Great New York Cookie Swap is held at an ice skating rink and features a celebrity hockey player. Moirin and

Clare are serving Village Blend coffee. Moirin goes out for a cigarette break and never returns. Clare later finds her murdered body.

Since she knows the victim, Clare expects to be interviewed at length by the police. Instead, arrogant Detective Endicott dismisses Clare, convinced forensic evidence is all that matters. A political appointee, in his spare time Endicott writes crime novels. He's referred to as "Detective DNA" and widely hated.

Clare feels guilty that she didn't search for Moirin when she first went missing, so she begins investigating Moirin's life in hopes of uncovering clues to her killer. With Mike away in D.C., Clare recruits Matt and Madame to help her. Clare tracks down a musician who was very important to Moirin. As always, Clare takes dangerous risks to unmask the killer and survives to see justice done.

The next book in the series is *Billionaire Blend*. —Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Murder Pans Out by Emily Toll, the second book of the Booked for Travel mystery series. A Wheeler Large Print Cozy Mystery, published by arrangement with Berkley Publishing group, 2004, 399 pp, including a crossword puzzle and solution (PB).

Widowed Lynne Montgomery owns and operates a travel agency in the fictitious town of Floritas in San Diego County, California.

For her long-time friend Betsy Danforth and Betsy's fellow schoolteachers at Pettigrew Elementary School, Lynne organized an informal "Highway 49 Revisited" tour of California Gold Rush country. It's the first week after school gets out for the summer. For Lynne, it's perfect: "...a week in a historic natural location with a group of bright and entertaining women, some of whom had been her friends for decades. A grown-up summer camp...."

Lynne and Betsy met as children when their fathers were stationed on Guam. They grew up and went their separate ways, but happily met again when Betsy came to teach at Pettigrew when Lynne's children were enrolled. Betsy did much of the advance prep for the Gold Rush

trip, including sewing polymer-filled neckbands to keep everyone cool.

Along Highway 99 on the way to gold country, the Booked for Travel van needs repairs. While Lynne and Betsy wait, they browse Ledbetter's Antiques shop. Betsy buys a Victorian fringed lamp like one her grandmother had. The lamp is ugly, very heavy and needs rewiring, but Betsy loves it.

Judith Limone and her daughter Lisa take the more efficient I-5 route to Hwy 49. Judith is the principal of Pettigrew Elementary, and Lisa teaches there, a source of great joy to Judith. They are traveling with Mandy Mosher, one of Judith's former pupils and now a Pettigrew teacher.

Nikki Mason drives up with fellow schoolteachers Marianne and Susi in her SUV. Susi is a fussy 'high-maintenance' woman. She has created a Gold Rush themed crossword puzzle for the group. Marianne is divorced from her husband Mark, and they're fighting over child custody.

Nikki and Marianne love the outdoors, and set up a tent to camp in, while the rest of the group settles in at Murmuring Pines Cabins outside Nevada City. Murmuring Pines is group HQ for the first several days of the tour. Their first night is relaxing and peaceful as they gather around a campfire and toast marshmallows to make s'mores.

"Lynne liked the feel of this group, the sense of camaraderie and good nature and gentle irreverence"—which sums up exactly what I like about Emily Toll's novels.

That first evening campfire at Murmuring Pines is the last truly peaceful moment. Besides hot weather in dry and dusty country, tour members experience food poisoning, the murder of their campground host, malicious and destructive cabin and automobile break-ins and thefts, and a surprise arrest. The teachers are "accustomed to encountering unexpected annoyances and swiftly resolving them," so they go on exploring and enjoying historic locations, unaware they are still in danger. Alternating chapters describe a villain's search for smuggled goods, in fear of ruthless gangsters.

The Gold Rush tour culminates with a

Characters Dinner in the restored 1856 City Hotel in Columbia. Each woman dresses as a Gold Rush character in a period-authentic costume. Although Lynne captures a villain at City Hotel, the group's misadventures are not quite over. Next day they foil a premeditated murder attempt at Moaning Caverns, and finally all mysteries are solved.

Susi's Gold Rush crossword puzzle and its solution are included. The next book in the Booked for Travel mystery series is *Fall into Death*. —Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Cliff Hanger by Philip R. Craig, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993, 227 pages, HC

This is book four of the Martha's Vineyard mystery series set in the 1990s. The first three books of the series have been set on Martha's Vineyard, but half of this one is set in Durango, Colorado.

J. W. Jackson, retired from Boston PD in his mid-thirties with a bullet near his spine, lives a vacation lifestyle on Martha's Vineyard. Besides fishing, he does handyman work, occasionally works for the police, and takes care of vacation homes for friends.

"Books, beer, fish, and fresh veggies on Martha's Vineyard made a winning combination, one which had made an islander (howbeit a transplanted one) out of me."

For me, a "muy simpatico" facet of J.W. is his fondness for the public library, where he checks out books by the armful. He says: "Libraries are some of my favorite places. They're filled with books and information and give you the good feeling that no matter how much you've read, there's an endless amount of reading material still ahead of you, so you never have to worry about running out. It's a nice certainty in an uncertain world."

I also enjoy J.W.'s occasional understated humor: "I tacked in past a crowd of people on the Edgartown town dock, waved at some waves I received, slid past the yacht club, and fetched my stake with an eggshell landing. I looked around. No one was watching. There are hundreds of observers when I come in too fast or too slow or otherwise screw up my landings,

but never anyone there to see me do it right. It's a law of the sea."

J.W. takes care of the summer home and boat belonging to a professor in New England, who suddenly and mysteriously becomes the target of a hit man. The hit man is shooting at J.W. to start with, thinking he's the professor, clearly not knowing his target. J.W. goes out west to Durango to warn his friend, after J.W.'s address book is copied by the hit man.

J.W. is impressed by the completely different landscape and climate out West. He is somewhat mesmerized by a strong and resourceful young woman, but also pines for his ladylove, Zee. His future with Zee is completely in doubt. Zee is off to New Hampshire for the summer, to decide if and how she would like to re-invent her life.

Rather than fishing and piloting a boat, J.W. is riding a horse and hiking most days. He tries to let local law enforcement to handle the case, but the killer outsmarts them. J.W. stages a dangerous confrontation in the mountains to keep his friends safe.

Reading this pleasant series is like being on vacation. For the first time in the series, as J.W. cooks his fresh gourmet dishes he gives the quantities of ingredients as a recipe, and he first uses the exclamation "delish" to describe his satisfaction with his home cooking. Both foreshadow Craig's cookbook *Delish!* that contain his recipes from the series.

--Susan Zates, smzates@qwest.com

2014 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, March 25, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, May 27, 7 p.m.

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.

†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 Rob Kresge at rkresge777@comcast.net, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. □ —Rob

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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. □

(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, for schedule changes and upcoming programs.

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The Tucson Festival of Books – March 15-16, 2014

By Patricia Smith Wood, author of the *Easter Egg Murder*

(You hear a lot about this festival at other book events. Here's a first-person account of what authors and readers can expect. --Ed.)

From the first time I heard about the Tucson Festival of Books, I wanted to attend. When I discovered last summer the date of the 2014 festival, it occurred to me that if I started planning right then, I could probably do it. It would be held on The Mall at the University of Arizona.

Getting there is always the first consideration when deciding to attend a conference or festival. I realized that this event lent itself to the perfect plan: I would prevail upon my long-suffering husband Don to drive me there. It wasn't an outrageous plan. He went to the University of Arizona in Tucson, and three of his grown children and their families live in the Phoenix area. He was enthusiastic about the idea.

One of the early things I learned about the festival is the writing contest prior to the event. I had ample time to enter and become involved. By doing that, I went on their email list and was periodically updated about the various events. I didn't win, nor did I make the top 50 runners up, but I had my foot in the door. I learned that by entering the contest, I was eligible to try for a two-hour signing at one of four Author Pavilions they set up. It would be on a first come, first served basis. They sent an email as soon as the Author Pavilion signup became available. Cost for a spot would be \$35, and had to be paid at the time you signed up. I got my name on the list within the first five minutes it opened. I secured my slot for 11:45 until 1:45 at the East Author Pavilion. There would be space for twelve authors at each two-hour segment at each of the four pavilions.

We couldn't know until we arrived on Saturday morning, March 15, just how huge this event is. The number of tents set up filled the entire mall, three or four rows deep. I'm only guessing, but I think the mall from west end to east is about a mile. A person would need every hour of the two days to see and participate in everything offered.

I'd heard we should be prepared for both warm and cool, rainy weather. The temperature was wonderful, but it did get very windy by noon that day. Within half an hour after my signing started, the wind kicked up and everything had to be secured so it wouldn't blow away. I handed out brochures and bookmarks for *The Easter Egg Murder*. Don collared folks walking by, gave them a bookmark, and suggested they stop and talk to me. The man is an amazing manager!

The crowds were huge. I'm not good at guessing absolute numbers, but I believe it was a couple thousand people (not to mention the dogs accompanying many of those people!) There were more than 400 authors there, and dozens of panels, signings, talks, and other events. Some of the seminars were held in the buildings adjacent to the mall. Fortunately, they provided a newspaper for the event that included a schedule of author appearances and signings.

By 5:00 p.m. we were exhausted, and returned to our hotel. The original plan was to also attend on Sunday, and then depart for Phoenix in the afternoon. But we were both too exhausted after the Friday drive over, the hours on our feet on Saturday, and all the walking needed to get from point A to point B. We opted, instead, to say farewell to Tucson and the Festival of Books, and headed out of town at 10 a.m. on Sunday.

It was a wonderful experience and pretty overwhelming. If I were even five years younger, I would make it a point to do it again. But at this stage, I think I'll opt for the conventional writers conferences. They are less stressful on the old body!

Author Appearances and/or Signings March-April-May

March 28th--*NY Times* bestselling author **Anne Hillerman**, author of the *NY Times* bestselling *Spider Woman's Daughter*, will appear with award-winning New Mexico author **Don Bullis** at the monthly meeting the Albuquerque Book Co-op at Golden Corral on San Mateo in a separate dining room on March 28th from 11:00-1:00 to speak on "Book Signings--the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. You do not have to be a member to attend, but attendees are urged come at 11:00 and have lunch before the meeting gets underway at 11:30.

May 15th--*NY Times* bestselling author **Craig Johnson** (the Longmire series and television show) will speak and sign copies of his new book *Any Other Name* at the Kimo Theater on Central Avenue from 6 to 7:30. Copies of the novel will be available for purchase at the event, courtesy of Bookworks. Tickets to the event will be available at the box office. **Plan to arrive early. If you are concerned about the neighborhood, consider carpooling. Male members of C&D will be available after the signing to walk C&D members to their cars.**

Local author **Rob Kresge** (*Saving Lincoln* and four novels in the Warbonnet series, including 2014's *Warrior Hearts*) will be appearing at the following events and times:

--Larry Ahrens' *Morning Brew* program (Comcast channel 22) on April 8th at 7:32, 8:32, and 9:32 a.m.

--Bookworks on Rio Grande Blvd. on April 11th at 7 p.m.

--Collected Works, 202 Galisteo St. in Santa Fe on May 13th from 6-7:30 p.m. in a combined appearance with New Mexico thriller author **Joseph Badal** (*Ultimate Betrayal* and many other novels)

ABQ mystery author and publisher (ABQ Press) **Judith Van Gieson** and Rob will appear at:

--The Octavia Fellin Public Library on 1st Street and West Hill Avenue in Gallup on April 12th from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

--The annual Moriarty Literacy Event on April 19th at 9:00 a.m.



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.

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime Croak and Dagger Chapter, Albuquerque, NM, March 17, 2014

Board members present: President Jan Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Olin Bray, Treasurer Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, *Nooseletter* Editor Rob Kresge, Web Master Susan Zates

President Jan Bray called the meeting to order at 7:15. Minutes from the January 20 meeting were approved.

The Treasurer reported that as of March 17, our checking account balance was \$2,729.25. Our paid up membership is now 43. Olin Bray was reimbursed for \$109.04 for the bookmarks.

The next three programs (March, April, and May) will be Christine Barber (her first book won a Hillerman award), Jen Brown of the Agora Crisis Center, and Judith Van Gieson, mystery author and publisher.

Announcements: None

Old business: Rob is still looking into a possible event at a shooting range. If that can be arranged, we will try to tie in a speaker (possibly from the FBI) that month on firearms.

New business: The Albuquerque Little Theater will be doing *Anatomy of a Murder* Jan 23--Feb 8, 2014, so we will plan a dinner and play some time during that period since people seemed to enjoy the few mystery plays we've attended there.

Fred is looking into a possible wine tasting event probably at Total Wines just south of Coronado. Since there are several mystery series set in various wine areas, the *Nooseletter* will have reviews of a

number of them in the issue before the wine tasting and we will try to get a speaker on a related topic. What poisons go with red or white wines?

The next board meeting will be at 7:00 at Jan's home on May 19, 2014. By then we will have moved and will get out the address and a new set of directions.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30.

Good Advice From Authors About Avoiding the Word "Very"

Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very;' your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be. ~**Mark Twain**

'Very' is the most useless word in the English language and can always come out. More than useless, it is treacherous because it invariably weakens what it is intended to strengthen. ~**Florence King**

Avoid using the word 'very' because it's lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don't use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys--to woo women--and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do. It also won't do in your essays. ~**N.H. Kleinbaum**

Now aren't you glad you read this far? (Ed.)