



# THE NOOSELETTER

Volume I, Number 4—October, 2005

## † Expert Testimony †

—From the Prez

Can it be true? Elections for next year are just around the corner. How did that happen? Last I looked we were just starting out as an organization. Now, we've got bylaws, a track record of great programs, and a solid membership that continues to grow with each meeting. Our board members can't believe we have so much fun together—though, I'll admit, the meetings often degenerate into social discussions because we all like each other so much.

Fun. That's what this year has been for me. A joy.

There's something so incredible about helping to found a chapter of an organization in which I believe wholeheartedly. But no one warned me that I'd get such a kick out of the people with whom I work and those of you I see at our meetings. This has been such a pleasure this year, I can't find words adequately to express my delight—and I'm usually never at a loss for words.

Right now, we're pulling the election roster together for next year. Our annual business meeting will be the fourth Tuesday in November.

Below are the SinC Croak & Dagger board positions and those people who've volunteered—so far—to step up to the task. Nothing is written in stone at this point. If you want to volunteer for a position, feel free—that's why we have elections.

As you'll see below, many of our current board members have volunteered to continue in their current roles. Others are willing to take on new responsibilities. Then, there are a few of us, like me, who won't be able to give as much time to the organization next year and who are bowing out . . . for the moment.

<b>President</b>	<b>open</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>Sarah Schwartz</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Ira Rimson</b>

<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Margaret Tessler</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Stephanie Hainsfurther</b>
<b>Programs</b>	<b>Rob Kresge</b>
<b>PR/publicity</b>	<b>open</b>
<b>Nooseletter</b>	<b>open</b>
<b>Hospitality</b>	<b>open</b>

Let me know if you're interested in serving on the board, in helping continue this happy beginning to what I hope will be a long-thriving and active chapter of Sisters in Crime.

Cheers to you all,  
**Pari Noskin Taichert, President,**  
**Sisters in Crime Croak & Dagger chapter**

## And more from our Prez....

“No Crime Unpublished© Writers Conference: Writing and Selling Killer Mysteries”

Last weekend, I went to Los Angeles, California to participate as a panelist at the Sisters in Crime LA Chapter's *No Crime Unpublished Writers Conference*. About 125 budding mystery writers—as well as total newbies—attended this day-long event packed with so much useful information and perspective that I'm still trying to debrief.

The morning began with a session moderated by Naomi Hirahara whose first book, *SUMMER OF THE BIG BACHI*, has been nominated for a Macavaity Award for best first novel, 2004. Hirahara interviewed panelists David Skibbins (*EIGHT OF SWORDS*), Harley Jane Kozak (*DATING DEAD MEN*) and Patricia Smiley (*FALSE PROFITS*) about their experiences with their own first novels that have become break-out successes.

The rest of the morning was devoted to dialog writing, editing and polishing manuscripts and forensic lectures. Panelists included Robin

Burcell (COLD CASE), John Morgan Wilson (author of the Benjamin Justice mystery series), Edward Wright (WHILE I DISAPPEAR), and Dorothy Johnston—a well-known Australian novelist whose first US book, THE TROJAN DOG, is due out later this year.

For writers who didn't want to listen to panels, there were other experts such as Doug Lyle, MD, (FORENSICS FOR DUMMIES), FBI special agent Mark Lorrin, and Ron Bowers who is a senior deputy district attorney whose presentations for authors about courtroom dynamics and basic law are nationally known and respected.

Our lunchtime speaker was Lee Child. This engaging and charming speaker told the crowd about how he came to write novels, the astounding success of his work so far, and how he remains flummoxed by it all. His talk lasted a good half-hour later than the organizers expected. To their credit, they simply pushed all the events forward that amount of time rather than cut a single minute from the programming. All the panelists were gracious enough to agree to the change.

In the afternoon, participants had the choice of four longer workshops focusing on character development, pitching for movies, killer openings, or juicing up creativity. The day concluded with a panel of literary agents for newer writers.

However sketchy my report, I wanted to give members here an idea of how Sisters in Crime chapters help their communities grow, learn and prosper. In the years to come, I think it would be wonderful if our chapter could come up with a similar day-long event—something with the breadth and quality of this fine conference. I know that chapters in California may have a wider group of people from which to draw their speakers—but given our Croak & Dagger programming thus far, I think we could certainly come up with an event that would marvelously fill our local needs.

It's something to think about.

Cheers to All, *Pari*

## HELP WANTED!!!

A New Editor for *The Nooseletter* is needed by the November meeting. Your current editors are stepping down—too many irons in the fire! Contact Pari at [ptaichert@comcast.net](mailto:ptaichert@comcast.net)

# The Cairn of Albertvs

**Latin is a language dead,**

*It's dead as it can be...*

**First it killed the Romans,**

**Now it's killing me!**

Well, you knew how the rest of it went. Given that some 75% of English words have a Latin root, I suppose that per cent of us should be deceased, yet it might be better to say that Latin was temporarily embalmed, then resurrected in the Romance languages and English.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> century Roman armies were largely recruited from the Germanic-language *barbatus*—Germans and Goths. The word “barbarian” originally meant any bearded tribesman living outside the Empire, but the obnoxious behavior of a few like the Vandals gave all of them a bad press. Everyday words in the Germanic branch of Indo-European languages entered Latin through *castrense*, army camp slang. These included naughty Germanic F and S words, which eventually passed into English (although Latin has an F-word of its own.)

I'm not a *fanaticus* about it, but when one of my Latin-speaking characters is in the dialogue, I try to use verbs and nouns based on that language—“arrive” instead of “come” (*ankom*); “domicile or “villa” instead of “house” (*haus*). Some English speakers, especially lawyers and writers, are familiar with Latin expressions still used: *ad hoc*, *ad-lib*, *alma mater*, *etcetera*. The Harper Collins Latin Concise Dictionary lists some lesser-known expressions that might be useful to mystery authors [Commentary by Cairn *gratis*.] ***Absit omen*** - may the premonition (omen) not happen. “*Beware the Ides of March*” *Oops, too late, Caesar!*

***Ante-mortem*** - before death. *And Ante-tributum. A taxpayer is an assiduus. (No comment.)*

***Beatae memoriae*** - of blessed memory. *More or less....*

***Casus belli*** - an event or act used to justify a war, or the cause of a quarrel. *Vietnam, Iraq, come to mind?*

***Corpus delicti*** - the body of facts constituting an offense. *Not to be confused with a vampire's corpo delicio. (Not actual words, but they rhyme....)*

***De mortuis nil nisi bonum*** - say nothing but good of the dead. *Amen.*

**Disiecta membra** - the scattered remains. *As in "Jeffery Dahmer."*

**Ex silentio** - based on a lack of evidence to the contrary of an assumption. *"The butler did it!"*

**Felo de se** - suicide; literally, "animosity toward self." *Says it all...*

**Horrible dictu** - horrible to tell. *As in, "The publishing situation today."*

**Ignis fatuus** - will o' the wisp; literally "silly fire." *Y' hear, Roswell?*

**In articulo mortis** - at the point of death. *But did they leave a will?*

**Lex loci** - the law of the place. *Um...check with the State Department before traveling to Lower Slobovia.*

**Lex tallonis** - the law of revenge or retaliation. *"Revenge is mine sayeth the Lord..."*

**Memento mori** - an object, such as a skull, reminding people of death's inevitability. *Twin to Form 1040—"Memento IRS."*

**Mens rea** - criminal knowledge that an act is wrong; literally "guilty mind." *"The Diablo made me do it!"*

**Mittimus** - a warrant of commitment to a prison warden or jailer directing him to hold someone in custody.

*Ante-bondsman: before bail do us part.*

**Modus operandi** - well, everyone knows that one, so fill in the blank \_\_\_\_\_.

**TBC** in the next "**Laqueusepistuala**" -

**Nooseletter.** Of course, you may take anything I said, *"cum grano salis*, because everyone knows, *errare est humanum.* ✓

—Albert Noyer

---

**OP-ED**

—**THE GALLOWS TRAP DOOR**—

—by Page Erwin

The Ultimate Escape

Perhaps we were just odd children, but both current editors of this newsletter shared the same peculiar tastes as we were growing up in the Forties. (Yes, we are that old.) We ignored the Andy Hardy phase, rejected the *Nancy Drew* series, and *The Honey bunch* books. Roy did admit to reading *The Boy Scout Manual* and *Boy's Life*. However, most of the popular children's literature of that period didn't interest him. I admit to reading *Wee Wisdom*, but only because my dear aunt gave

me a subscription that lasted long after my early childhood.

Although we lived on separate coasts, he in San Francisco and I near the coast of New Hampshire, we gravitated at about the same time to a new genre for us, travel and adventure. We both enjoyed Thor Hyerdahl's books such as *Kon Tiki*, Richard Halliburton's travel books, Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, and Willa Cather's every word. Later we graduated to Wallace Stegner, Jack London, and Jules Verne. Soon we devoured Faulkner and Hemingway. All of these books took us to different places, and to our inexperienced eyes exotic ones. They also led indirectly to the reading of history, which has become a life-long obsession with both of us. Does this rejection of the popular literature of the times mean that we shared unhappy childhoods and were driven to escape to lands far away from our respective environments? I think not. It was a zest for adventure, a need for exploration even if it was from an armchair or huddled under the sheets with a flashlight. Speaking of armchairs, every evening during our early years we would curl up and listen to *Inner Sanctum*, *The Shadow*, or in Roy's case, *Bulldog Drummond*, and scare ourselves half to death.

So how have our tastes evolved? Well, we were oblivious to one of the ultimate escapes when it comes to reading – the mystery. Or perhaps we needed more life experience in order to appreciate this genre. We certainly appreciate it now, in our early dotage.

We are relative newcomers to the obsession. In our early years we exercised our imaginations by listening to radio mysteries such as *The Shadow*, *Inner Sanctum*, and *The F.B.I. in Peace and War*. In our middle years we succumbed to television's allure, perhaps because of our children. We all watched *Sam Spade*, *Matlock*, *Maverick*, *Rockford Files*, *Magnum P.I.* and early on, *Dragnet*. I like to think that they left me hungry, as some cozies do. For example, do the *Murder She Wrote* shows leave you with an insatiate feeling? They were fine for what they were, and entertaining, but they didn't offer much of a challenge.

With the ascendance of PBS, television mysteries got better, and the plots became more complex. We could access British television we delighted in anything PD James wrote. Colin Dexter offered intricate plots as well. I admit to

having had a crush on Morse, and genuine grief when the actor John Thaw died. We were titillated by Poirot, though we considered it light entertainment, and we did enjoy *Cadfael* and still watch *The Inspector Lynley Series*. We had progressed though, from the likes of Matlock, Maverick, Rockford, and rarely, Magnum. British mysteries, whether read or performed on television, seemed a vast improvement and certainly a more subtle way to approach the genre. Over the years we refined our tastes. Still, watching a mystery is not as good as reading one. Isn't it preferable to be able to imagine the characters and control the pace of the action rather than have directors, film editors and actors interpret the book for you?

Our obsession with mysteries is similar to having an eating disorder. People warn us that we read too much and that it's taking up a lot of time, but we justify it by replying, "No. You don't understand. It's research!" After all, we do write mysteries. We also attend writers' conferences where the strong and compelling personalities of some writers inspire us to sample their books. If we like that first sample, we are apt to devour everything they write. It's like feasting on a seven-course meal. Rarely do we suffer from indigestion, although a few series have one or two books that are hard to get through. I'm thinking of the wonderful Nevada Barr's side trip into Civil War Florida and Barbara Vine's excess of violence and serial killers recently. Still, we love their work and remain loyal.

One of the reasons that Sisters in Crime was founded was to gin up increased interest in women writing mysteries. It was hoped that with publicity, colorful events and conferences, and more even-handed reviews by women as well as men, more women (and men) would read and review women mystery writers. Reading and then discussing mysteries is a fine activity that sharpens the memory and improves mental acuity. Of course, the main reason to chat about good mysteries is that it's FUN!

We attended a delightful signing on Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> at Bookworks in Albuquerque. (Support your independent bookstores, please!) It featured Margaret Coel, of Boulder, Colorado, author of her tenth mystery, *Eye of the Wolf*, about the Arapahos on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming and good old Father O'Malley and attorney Vicky Holden. The amazing Ms Coel speaks of her work with such enthusiasm and has backed up all her

mysteries with careful and painstaking research. It is not surprising that the Arapaho respect and honor her.

Seated near us was a connoisseur of mysteries and a fascinating gal. I have prided myself on reading three mysteries on average per week, as does my co-editor. This lady reads nearly fifty, because she can't sleep. It occurs to me that if the mysteries are really good, no wonder she can't sleep. I am currently reading another Archer Mayor mystery set in Brattleboro, Vermont, *The Disposable Man*, and I keep trying to figure out how the author is going to get Lieutenant Joe Gunther out of his fix when I should be sleeping.

This very well read lady's knowledge of the genre is astounding. She shared with us a partial list of web sites where we can explore authors with whom we may not be familiar. I delved into some of them and it was like going to a giant buffet of delectables. And the nice thing about reading mysteries is that you don't gain a single calorie.

Upon attempting to access them, not all of the web sites were downloadable, but you might try a few of the following:

[www.cluesunlimited.com/american\\_history.html](http://www.cluesunlimited.com/american_history.html)

[www.womeninworldhistory.com/mysteries.html](http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/mysteries.html)

[www.mysteryguide.com/historical.html](http://www.mysteryguide.com/historical.html)

[www.sldirectory.com/libsf/books/mystery/topic./html](http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/books/mystery/topic./html) for websites by topic. (Murderous occupations, death in kitchens, gardens, locations, foreign, etc.)

Also:

[www.santafelibrary.org/nmystery.html](http://www.santafelibrary.org/nmystery.html) for series by NM authors or set in NM.

[www.siouxcitylibrary.org/resources.html](http://www.siouxcitylibrary.org/resources.html) for Midwest authors and settings

HAPPY READING! And if you enjoy a good mystery and lively speakers, why on earth don't you belong to Croak & Dagger? Why indeed? We are dying to have you!

Editor's Note: If you are aware of any additional websites pertaining to mysteries, please send electronically, with a short review if possible. Thanks! ✓

# ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

## September Case File Number One

*Boost*, by Steve Brewer, Speck Press, Denver, 2004, hardback \$24.00

If this were a newspaper article, the title would be "Hometown Boy Makes Good." That's right. Perennial local favorite and long-time Duke City resident Steve Brewer may have been transplanted to Redding, California about the time this, his latest, book came out, but it's still set in Albuquerque, like his previous novels. Brewer, like other exiles I've met, can't get back to New Mexico often enough. He's frequently here for signings and is also now chair of the committee responsible for publishing *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree*, the newsletter of the Mystery Writers of America.

But enough about Steve's status. On to his books, or in this case, his latest book. Better known for his six-volume Bubba Mabry, PI series and his two Drew Gavin, Albuquerque sportswriter, mysteries, *Boost* is Steve's third standalone crime caper/thriller. MWA Grand Masters like Lawrence Sanders, Elmore Leonard, and Donald E. Westlake write novels like these and Steve Brewer can hold his head up in their company.

Like his first Bubba Mabry mystery, Steve holds out hope that someone will make a movie of *Boost*, so let's look at the book like a movie. Albuquerque car thief Sam Hill (think smart-mouth Matthew McConaughey) specializes in boosting valuable vintage cars, stolen to order. When he drives off with a mint 1965 Thunderbird and stashes it in his storage locker, he finds the body of a junkie in the trunk. Discreet inquiries reveal the man was a DEA informant and local police, in the person of Lt. Vic Stanton (think character actor Jon Polito of *The Rocketeer* and *Bushwhacked*) have been tipped off. Staying one step ahead of the law, Sam tries to figure out who hates him enough to set him up. He turns for help first to girlfriend Robin Mitchell, daughter of his old stolen car fence (Salma Hayek or Penelope Cruz), then to old friends Billy Suggs (a younger Woody Harrelson) and club bouncer and former UNM football player Way-Way Anderson (think big, like Michael Clarke Duncan or Ving Rhames).

When Sam puts everything together, he finds he's up against lethal drug dealer Phil Ortiz

(Terry Quinn of *Lost*, playing another Locke character) and it's clear Sam will have to figure some way to pay Ortiz back, while staying out of the clutches of Lt. Stanton and DEA agents.

While this has many of the elements of a classic mystery (dead body in first few pages, innocent hero trying to clear himself), it is more a crime caper a la Westlake's *The Hot Rock* and others in the Dortmunder series and Block's *Burglar* series. Steve is an accomplished humor columnist for the Albuquerque *Tribune* and plays all the angles to highlight Sam's growing frustration. The satisfying payoff sets the stage for a series and Sam Hill could be back. That would be a welcome development. Albuquerque author Richard Peck's first foray into a crime caper, the much more serious and Leonardesque *Dead Pawn*, led his publisher to ask for a sequel. Movie or no movie, we can only hope Speck Press asks Steve Brewer to roll out another Sam Hill.

## September Case File Number Two

*The Pearl Diver*, by Sujata Massey, Harper Collins, New York, 2004, Hardback, \$23.95

From homegrown local favorite Steve Brewer, my tastes also run across the continent to Baltimore author Sujata Massey and her big-city heroine, Japanese-American Rei Shimura. This series, which has won for Sujata a best first-novel Agatha and a double handful of best-mystery nominations, including for an Edgar, is now into its seventh volume. The first four novels were set in Tokyo, where fish-out-of-water Rei struggled to make a living as a foreigner (despite her Japanese appearance) teaching English and then as a freelance antiques dealer. Subsequent novels have placed Sujata's plucky heroine in San Francisco, where her Japanese father and American mother live. *The Pearl Diver* is the first Rei mystery set in Washington, D.C., where many members of her mother's family live, but it won't be the last. I vetted the intelligence community parts of Sujata's next mystery, due out this fall.

Readers familiar with the series have watched the ups and downs of Rei's tempestuous relationship with her Scots lawyer boyfriend Hugh Glendinning. This book is no exception. Rei has to balance the demands of her antique business in furnishing a Washington restaurant with the demands of romance, complicated by the unexpected visit of her traditional Aunt Norie from Japan, when crime rears its head.



First, Rei's American cousin Kendall is kidnapped from the grand opening of Bento, the DC eatery Rei has decorated. As she probes this mystery, Rei meets Bento hostess Andrea Norton, another Japanese-American, whose mother disappeared when she was a small child. Kendall is returned unharmed the next day, but that's not the end of the mystery. Was politics involved? Kendall is a fundraiser for Washington senator and presidential aspirant Harper Snowden. Were drugs involved? Kendall's husband Win, an important local real estate entrepreneur, seems to have a growing drug habit, a shaky business, and a possible relationship with their children's nanny, a la Jude Law.

But working with the waitstaff and chefs of Bento leads Rei into a deeper mystery. What happened to Andrea's mother, the former pearl diver of the title? Why has the hostess's apartment been broken into? Why does Andrea's American father seem as unconcerned with the fate of his first wife now as he did when she disappeared? And what's the role of his loathsome second wife? Rei's research into Andrea's father's military service in Vietnam yields some clues, but her investigation is sidetracked when she's kidnapped herself.

Her escape from her captors brings Rei face to face with the ultimate romantic complication and her resulting guilt and strained relationship with Hugh make this the most complex, emotional, and satisfying novel in this excellent series.

Most of Sujata's books are now available in paperback or can be found in Albuquerque libraries. But don't start with this one until you've acquired a little background. Sujata herself lived in Japan and taught English for a while. Her own adventures and meticulous research will make you want to travel to Tokyo, too. Save some money and travel with Sujata Massey first. You'll be glad you took the trip.

### **And a Bonus Blurp/Flash...**

*The State Fair was a cornucopia of mystery writer's resources!*

Chapter member Louise McShaffry and I discovered an untapped wealth of research materials at the State Fair that other Croak & Dagger members may wish to take advantage of next year. (Sorry, it's a once a year opportunity). It was just luck that we stumbled across this gold mine—Law Enforcement Day—and the Avenue of

the Governors was lined with police and other units of every description.

CSU: We spoke with a State Police Crime Scene Unit technician who gave us a tour of his mobile facility. Large enough for big officers to walk through and work in, it not only serves as an on scene repository for gathered crime scene items and can do fingerprinting, footprinting, and tire track casts, but it can also serve as a generator for crime scene lights in rural areas and as command post if needed. Much more spacious and capable than the little APD crime scene minivans we often see around town and the one usually parked at the Wyoming branch library. We also went through the mobile DWI lab and testing facility. It has a holding cell.

EOD: We spoke with two members of the bomb squad, saw their big vehicle that can carry live munitions, and saw their robot and armored suit (85 pounds). They go out on about 100-150 calls each year, 17 in the month of August alone. There are six bomb techs. Louise wanted to know the psychology of bomb squad members, having seen the BBC production of *Danger: UXB* back in the 1980s. Surprisingly, both men loved this job and wanted to stay with it until they retire. They get called out by the SWAT team every time it takes down a drug lab. Dealers tend to hoard explosives, some even wire their facilities to explode. Of the calls they roll on, about 15 percent involve armed devices. The other 85 percent are not rigged and they just take them to their disposal site.

SWAT: Bernalillo Sheriff's Dept SWAT team members unanimously swore the bomb techs were all crazy. They (the SWAT members) all served time as street cops and even now SWAT is an extra, on-call duty from whatever their regular positions are: patrol, school security, training, recruiters, etc. They showed us a variety of weapons. They prefer the US-made AR-15 carbines for a long arm over the HK submachineguns which fire 9mm pistol rounds. They described test firings of those weapons against stuccoed walls that were drywalled (the standard house construction in this area). The 9mm rounds lose their effectiveness after going through a wall, but the other rounds can travel out the other side of house and keep going. They prefer a revolving tear gas gun to the single shot that looks like a big shotgun, because the firing officer gets a face full of gas when he opens the

breech. All members of any unit firing gas must mask up first.

Police Explorers: Part of the Boy Scouts, for boys and girls 14-18, it's the most popular Explorer program nationwide. The three young men we spoke with enjoy the training, the work, and intend to become policemen themselves.

Bernalillo County Apprehension Unit: We spoke to two officers who spend a remarkable amount of time traveling out of state and out of country to pick up apprehended fugitives who are wanted in NM. They also pick up or even apprehend wanted fugitives within NM themselves and handle extraditions. Their white containment vans can carry up to 11 felons, six in the back and three in a separate unit in the middle (for women or juveniles) and are purposely so plain as to be undetectable. Their squad has seven members. For training, they all have to be Tasered (lightweight pistol fires two wires, knocks the crap out anybody it hits out to 15 feet), maced and pepperballed (a paintball gun that fires a bursting capsaicin pellet). These guys had shaved heads and were very tough. If they had to subdue anybody bigger than them, they relied on "technique."

Hydrofoil: APD has two small hydrofoils for Rio Grande duty. They have no draft, so they can operate over shallow water, mud, sand banks, and right up onto the highway. Just right for an action movie. They are planning to get a third unit. They use them mostly for boater and balloonist rescues right now, but these things can do 40 mph on water, 50 over mud or sand, 60 on dry land, and 70 over ice. The officer described the joys of "pirouetting" on ice, turning in huge circles while still maintaining forward progress.

You might want to attend law enforcement day next year. Beyond what we experienced, the folks we talked to today gave me a lot of ideas for future speakers and field trips. I'll be in touch with State Police, APD, and county sheriff about a crop of guest speakers and possible tours/demonstrations next year.

And, no, your program chairperson is never off duty. ✓

—Rob Kresge

## THE GREATEST MYSTERY EVER WRITTEN

by Margaret Tessler

I'm so excited! I'm finally beginning THE GREATEST MYSTERY EVER WRITTEN. It's also time to renew my driver's license. All the Aquarians have taken care of this task, but every Piscean born in February has waited until the 28th, and we've now converged on the Motor Vehicle Department en masse.

Since this means there will be a very long line, I'm prepared to do something constructive during the wait. I have a spanking new yellow legal pad and a jillion scraps of paper containing ideas scribbled over time. I haven't actually organized these yet, so I'll just spread them out here on the floor. Darn, I wish these people would quit stepping on them.

I've fallen in love with my new characters and already visualize a sequel — possibly a trilogy. Of course, I haven't written the first page yet, but I'll get started soon here at the MVD.

Maybe I should forget the trampled scraps of paper and look at the notes I took as my husband and I were returning from vacation. He said he was interested in hearing more, even as he turned up the volume on the radio.

Let's see. Here's the page written during the stretch from Laredo to Del Rio. It's easy to spot since I'd used a tattered sheet of quadrille paper scrounged from the glove compartment. Luckily I did this in shorthand. Hmm. Must have been a rough road. "Miranda" (or was it Melinda?) hmm, "something something with the many." No, wait, "with the money."

If only I could remember what it was Miranda/Melinda did with the money. "She droff to the pink." Hmm, oh yes, "the bank." Oh, here's where I've described her. "She changed into sheets and sliggles. On her tinny feet she wore brick shoes."

Could be THE GREATEST MYSTERY EVER WRITTEN might take longer than I'd thought. All I need is a more inspirational place to write. But that doesn't mean I'm going to waste time here, no sirree. I'll use this time to plan my wardrobe for my book signings. Of

course, I'll need a new outfit for my interview with that handsome Matt Lauer.

A good writer needs to be observant. I've observed lots of strange people standing in line here—I must be one of the few normal ones.

Oh look, look at that weirdo wearing a trench coat. Oh no — don't look!

Well, here come the police. Wow, what an exciting scenario. Hmm, I'm nothing if not resourceful. I'll jot down a few notes about this and use it in my sequel. Good thing I brought this yellow legal pad along. ✓ —Margaret Tessler

## And now for some Unbridled Optimism

From Sarah Schwartz

### HOMELAND SECURITY: THE NEXT CRISIS FOOT-AND-MOUTH?

*Notes on the Rocky Mountain Chapter of Mystery Writers of America meeting held on September 17, 2005 at the Hotel La Fonda, Taos, New Mexico.*

Although the Mystery Writers of America's Rocky Mountain Chapter includes the states of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, the Chapter rarely meets outside Denver. Several Croak & Dagger "Sisters" took advantage of the nearby location.

Mystery Writers of America also has a "Southwest" Chapter. Why is New Mexico not included *there*, you might ask. The Southwest Chapter consists of the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas! (I thought perhaps the Chapter harkened back to a time when the "West" lay within the Louisiana Purchase, but not so: The national organization was founded in 1945. I have decided to leave the formation and naming of regional chapters a mystery.)

In the first panel of the afternoon our own Pari Noskin Taichert (author of *The Clovis Incident* and *The Belen Hitch*) enlivened an all-woman panel with her observations. Panelists recounted how they became writers, how they use the sense of place in their novels, and whether or not their perspective as writers is essentially female.

Croak & Dagger members Albert Noyer (author of *The Secundus Papyrus* and *The Cybeline*

*Conspiracy*) and Rob Kresge (formerly of the CIA Counterterrorism Unit) graced the all-men's panel, which consisted of the panelists' "doing their own thing." This approach was in distinction to the all-women panel's traditional answer-the-same-question style. Did the panels' organizational differences reflect gender differences?

After a dinner catered by the hotel's restaurant, Joseph's Table – I would consider another trip to Taos solely to have another meal at the restaurant – Ron M. Dolin, Ph.D., of the Integrated ReachBack Center for Homeland Security at the Los Alamos National Laboratory served up a riveting address.

"ReachBack" is the Center for Homeland Security's technical response capability. The organization uses the full spectrum of Laboratory technical and analytical expertise support efforts during nuclear, chemical and biological emergencies, natural disaster emergencies, and any other contingencies where Laboratory expertise is needed.

Speaking as a private citizen, not as a spokesperson for the LANL, Dolin delivered information that will undoubtedly be the stuff of future thriller novels. A few of his one-two punches:

- Osama bin Laden's goal is not to destroy our country through direct warfare but by "bleeding" our economy through protracted guerrilla warfare. This may not be new information, but Dolin presented enough examples – from remotely possible to highly probably – to make a case that bin Laden's approach is not pie-in-the-sky. After all, this strategy has already worked against Russia, and we're all aware of the economic drain of natural disasters added to the costs of occupying other countries.
- We are vulnerable to biological attack. At present we are protected from biological agents solely because no one has figured out how to "weaponize" them. They are out there, and someday someone will develop the technology.
- Avian influenza is a threat, and we currently have no protection from it.
- Our food supply is vulnerable. Dolin detailed current and potential problems. One in eight U.S. jobs are tied to the food supply, making it a vital chain our economy. Did you know that Florida is suffering from soybean rust delivered to the state by Hurricane Ivan? Dolin outlined a scenario in which a cow in Deming is discovered to have foot-and-mouth disease. 800,000 dead cattle later, our state borders are sealed, 800,000 of our state's citizens have been exposed to the disease, and the rest of the world no longer allows the import of beef from this country.



- Fingerprinting is in its twilight. The Laboratory has developed a hand-held device that can analyze DNA in real-time.

• We could have had a slick presentation from a public relations apologist for Homeland Security, but—oh, no—instead, we heard a current analysis of vulnerabilities from a researcher who did not try to sugarcoat the realities. At the end of the evening, the thriller writers in the audience floated on air. They've got themes to keep them in business, at least until the next payload of revelations from those in the know. ✓

Sarah Schwartz

## And more from Sarah...

### What is a Booktalk?

A booktalk is an advertisement for a book. A booktalk is not evaluative and is not a review. It is an intriguing glimpse of what lies between the covers of a book. A booktalk is a *Performance*. A booktalker wants to hook the audience and convince people to read the book. Booktalkers use every trick they can conjure to make the booktalk fun, exciting, and suspenseful.

### Booktalking Basics:

1. Talk about a book you have read.
2. Talk about a book you like.
3. Create your own style.
4. Never tell the ending.
5. At the end of the booktalk, show the book and announce the title and author.
6. Practice, practice, practice. Practice alone, in front of your friends or family. Practice movements as well as the words. Know your material.

### Writing & Delivering the Booktalk

- Use the present tense to involve the audience.
- Grab the audience with the first sentence.
- Drop your audience into the action, character, or mood.
- If you plan to use props in your talk, make sure each one you use has a purpose and does not overshadow what you are saying about the book.
- Keep the purpose of your talk in mind—persuading someone to read the book. Don't wander on and on. Plan a beginning, middle, and an end. Don't go off on tangents.
- The last sentence must also be a hook for your audience. It's always a good idea to end the booktalk with a cliffhanger. Let the audience know that they will be missing out on something if they don't read the book.

- Stop when you get to the end of your talk.

## Types of Booktalks

Use one or more of the following elements. How you talk about the book depends on the book's character. Be selective.

**Plot Summary:** When plot is the main focus of excitement, summarize plot up to a climactic moment and stop. "To find out what happened next, read . . ."

**Character Description:** Describe one of the main characters in detail or describe briefly several of the main characters.

**Episode, Anecdote, or Short Story:** Tell one episode. Choose one early in the book, and one that gives the flavor of the characters and action. Good for collections of short stories or plays, for books with chapters that stand alone, or for nonfiction that involves telling a series of events.

**Mood Based:** Capture a unique writing style or mood of the book, using quotes from it, reading short excerpts aloud, or stringing together phrases and sentences from the book to make your talk sound like the book. To create a mood, (spooky or mysterious, for example), use your voice, changing the pitch, pace, and rhythm, and pausing for effect to heighten the suspense.

NOTE: Most of the tips included here are from Nancy Keane, From Joni Richards Bodart (MORE—Minnesota Opportunities for Reference Excellence--Readers' Advisory), and Booktalking Colorado

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

Tuesday Oct 25, 7:00 p.m.—Speaker Pari Noskin Taichert  
 Tuesday Nov 22, 7:00 p.m.—Susan Slater (pending), Gen. Membership Mtg. & Election  
 Saturday Dec 17, 1:00 p.m.—TBD

**Free to the public in the police briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Substation, 12700 Montgomery NE, east of Tramway. For more information, call 281-5765.**

## SPECIAL NOTICE FROM SinC HQ

**New England Crime Bake.** Nov. 12 & 13, 2005. Doubletree Hotel, Lowell, Massachusetts. Toast Mistress Tess Gerritsen. Linda Barnes, Lisa Gardner, Peter Abrahams head panels of East Coast authors and agents. [www.crimebake.org](http://www.crimebake.org)

## SPECIAL LIBRARY DISPLAYS

The Book & Dagger Committee (Noyer, Erwin & Schwartz) has a library display of all the published authors who are members of our Croak & Dagger Chapter of Sisters in Crime. It's moveable, and so far they've set it up at the Library in Tijeras (August), Wyoming Ave. (September), and presently at the Juan Tabo Branch Library between Comanche and Candelaria. They are looking to place the exhibit in other branches of the Rio Grande Library System beginning @ November 1st. If your favorite library has a glass display case and is interested in supporting mystery writing and Croak & Dagger authors, please contact Albert Noyer at [anoyer@msn.com](mailto:anoyer@msn.com) ✓

## 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 Stephanie Hainsfurther, membership chair at 505-298-2155, or [words13@osogrande.com](mailto:words13@osogrande.com).**

### IMPORTANT NOTICE!

Someone needs to volunteer as editor(s)!!!

The next issue will be edited by whoever steps up for the coming year. We have enjoyed producing *The Nooseletter* and will be happy to provide advice and assistance. Contact Pari if you're interested.

FOR NOW, CASE CLOSED!

###

—Page Erwin, ED