



THE NEW YORK NOOSE

Mystery Writers of America New York Chapter

AUGUST 2008

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Hello everyone,

Welcome to our return to paper. Back by popular demand, the everything-old-is-new-again paper *Noose* is on a new schedule and features loads of new content—thanks to newsletter editor, Marie Hannan Mandel, and MWA/NY board member Peggy Ehrhart's newsletter committee's report. Marie will explain more in her editor's column. As always, we welcome your feedback.

Please take a look at the opportunities for our active members to participate on New York City Library panels—an article detailing the 2009 schedule of our monthly MWA/NY-sponsored panels is in this issue. I'm thrilled to report that Cordelia Frances Biddle will be coordinating moderators and panelists. Please let her know your preferences [cordelia@cordeliafrancesbiddle.com].

We're also sponsoring booths at both the New England and the North Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association conferences in September. Kudos to Rosemary Harris who's our conference expert, and our on-site conference coordinators, Meredith Cole (NEIBA) and Jeff Cohen (NAIBA) for overseeing our presence. Active members are welcome to sign up for signing slots or send promotional materials for us to distribute.

Program chair, E.W. Count, has organized our usual stellar line-up of programs. You know you can view upcoming meeting descriptions and listen to past meetings via our website, right? [www.mwa-ny.org] All programs—including our first-ever satellite programs in Philly (last March), Connecticut (last June), and New Jersey (this coming September 8th)—are available as downloadable pod casts on the member's only section of our website. (username and password are the same = mwanyc)

I hope to see you soon. With best regards,

Jane Cleland
President MWA/NY

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IMPORTANT DATES

Sept 3, 2008 - Chapter Meeting- National Arts Club
Sept 8 - Murder in New Jersey? New Brunswick, NJ.
Sept 16 - The Dark Side: Gritty Mysteries set in NYC, Mid-Manhattan Library
Sept 19-20 - NEIBA Conference, Boston
Sept 21-22 - NAIBA Conference, Cherry Hill, New Jersey
Sept 27 - MWA Satellite Meeting, Albany, NY
Oct 1 - Chapter Meeting - National Arts Club
Oct 21 - Angry Men Who Kill: Violent Thrillers, Mid-Manhattan Library
Oct 23 - Contemporary Mysteries NYPL Series -Webster Branch, York Ave between 77th and 78th

P.J. Watson: Murder Mysteries and Daggers

I had a one-in-ten chance of winning a Debut Dagger, and nominated entries had been selected from a pool of many hundreds. My wife and I have both spent periods of time in London, we've seen *Four Weddings and a Funeral* multiple times and we're fond of fish 'n' chips. We had to go.

The Crimewriters' Association's Dagger Awards are highly prestigious and winning one is the pinnacle for British crime writers, much as our Edgars would be. I had entered a competition last November on a whim—a \$38 gift to myself (entry fee=20 GBP) to celebrate the completion of my first mystery manuscript, *All the Wrong People*. In the time-honored manner, I had forgotten about the entry by the time I received the adrenaline-causing email about making the shortlist. The Debut Dagger is a beloved category at the CWA. It's for unpublished novels by unpublished authors only and has proven in the past to be a career-booster for most nominees. Being short listed puts you into the same room as real mystery writers, many of them the finest in the world.

Therefore, on July 10, Kathy and I walked, freshly polished, into the Park Lane Hotel in London and accepted mugs of Pimm's cocktails amidst a glamorous black-tie crowd of writers, agents, publishers and literary aficionados. Exciting. Swank. Nine other unpublished debut authors shared my dream. Only one would come out alive...or at least, The Winner. My wife and I worked the room, seeking agent types—rather challenging when you don't know a soul. We bounced around the wood-paneled Pine and Oak Room and then found ourselves inside a posh ballroom, eating delectable cuisine and supping fine wines. Swapping witty repartee and life stories with writers. Life could be worse.

A spectacularly funny monologue about the glories of winning and losing in public was given by former Member of Parliament, Giles Brandreth. A few fast introductions ensued. The Debut Dagger was happening. My name was mentioned with the other short listed authors. Beside me, Amer Anwar's wife gave a restrained shriek as he was pronounced to be the winner. Cameras snapped. I didn't have time to be bitter. It happened so quickly, and Amer was a lovable guy, an Anglo-Indian whose novel, *Western Fringe*, sounded intriguing. Toasts. The evening moved rapidly through the Dagger Awards, primarily won by UK writers. Some of my favorite authors were mentioned: Colin Cotterhill, Denise Mina, Andrea Camilleri. Frances Fyfield won the big one, The Duncan Lawrie Dagger, for *Blood from Stone*. The screams from her tablemates were loud and genuine—she'd won a Silver Dagger but had never gone home with the coveted main prize. Actually, a Silver sounds pretty good to me. Perhaps the check for forty thousand dollars helped a bit, too.

Few Americans had made the trek over to the UK. Big names were nominated, but I would hazard that our outsider crew of Debut Dagger nominees had more fun than anyone else at the occasion: we were just damn glad to be there. I don't remember much beyond staying very late and quaffing many glasses of Bollinger with a Dutch publisher. If you want to learn more about the winners, nominees and the Crimewriters' Association, go to www.thecwa.co.uk/

I plan to send out agent queries for my novel as soon as I get over the jet lag. Hopefully, our wallets will recover from all-out assault sometime within the next year or so.

P.J. Watson writes about the web for The Noose. A freelance advertising copywriter by trade, he's interested in your comments about the web or anything else: Peter@WatsonCrime.com.

EDITOR'S LETTER



Hi all,

It's been a year since I took over as editor of *The Noose*. In that year we have changed, grown, and most importantly, learned what you, the membership, want. So here it is – the bi-monthly hard copy Noose with a PDF copy of each issue

archived on the website.

Some things have changed and some will remain the same. Many of you will remember a feature called *What's Noose*. Well, it's back as a forum for members' writing news and activities. Please send us all your good news.

As editor of *The Noose*, I am charged with the responsibility of making this newsletter as informative, useful and entertaining as possible and can only do this with your input. I look forward to hearing all your comments at mhannanmandel@yahoo.com

Slainte!

Marie

(you know, *Marry* rhyming with *Larry*)



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Peggy Ehrhart - send all entries to pehrhart@sprynet.com

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Surfing, for Mystery Writers: Part VI by Peter J. Watson

Last month, we visited websites that use the web in refreshing ways to market authors and books. In this month's column, we feature great sites put together and maintained by people who love crime fiction, or writing in general. Enthusiasm counts for a lot of points here, and some of the sites we direct you to, one can surmise, involve many hours of work on the part of devoted people. As always, I throw in a site or two that I simply like.

Thuglit.com

What a great website! I wish I could find more like this. A chef at an East Village restaurant gave me the URL and told me that it was run by an acquaintance, Todd Robinson. Sometimes recommendations don't amount to much, but from the moment you land here and get punched by num-chuk-ish brass knuckles, you feel the flavor. This is urban noir, with a hard, gothic, funny sensibility, organized into a monthly magazine. Lots of free stories posted in current and back issues, and much of the writing is excellent. The reviews, too, are worth reading. Check it out, and pass the address along to your psychobilly and thrash metal friends.

QuillandQuire.com

The Canadians on the whole are damned reasonable people, many of them Anglophiles who love literacy. Mysteries per se are not the focus, but you can find interesting interviews and profiles of mystery writers in there with the rest of the coverage of interesting new books and everything about writers and publishing in Canada. The written word is thriving in the Frozen North.

MomentsinCrime.com

St. Martins' Minotaur imprint has created a sparkling site for mystery readers to find out about the way authors work and think. Each week there's a new guest blog host, selected from the roster of Minotaur mystery writers. The topics that people choose to write about during their week's reign give you a personal glimpse into the types of lives they lead and pointers as to where they may get some of their influences. Some ride with beat cops for fun (Theresa Schwegel). Some watch TV and baseball at the same time (James Patrick Hunt). Some keep memorable moss collections (Jane Cleland). An eclectic and interesting site—it's well worth a frequent look.

AbsoluteWrite.com/forums

Where can you go to find out about agents and share the trials and tribulations of writing? This forum makes a good start. Discussion threads, which you can read without registering, vary from candid assessments of agents to new postings of short stories that other writers can critique. The site is not focused on mystery writers but you can join in and post comments on all kinds of writerly concerns. Not to mention, find good couscous recipes.

MeganAbbott.com

Megan's novel, *Queenpin*, won an Edgar this year for Best Original Paperback. Visit her site to learn about chicks and noir. Megan teaches writing and has a Ph.D in English literature. It seems evident that she knows what she's talking about. In her writing, she's redefining the roles that women play in the vintage noir genre and in effect, reshaping the fictional past, to good effect. Not only is the site visually interesting but you could also learn a lot about Jean Spengler and other mysterious Hollywood cases here, and get links for the places on the web where other noir types hang out.

Next issue: More discoveries as we roam the web in search of oddities and essential stops on the mystery road. Questions/comments to Peter@WatsonCrime.com



— an occasional series about all aspects of the book business.

by Marie Hannan-Mandel

Sharon Preiss runs a company called Mobile Libris, which moves from event to event selling books. Sharon took time to explain her life in books.

1. What does your business do?

Mobile Libris is an independent bookseller that sells books exclusively at events that happen outside of bookstores, mostly author-related events like book parties and readings, lectures, conferences. We're a mobile bookstore

2. How long have you been in business?

July will be our three-year anniversary, though I didn't really start working it full-time until January of the following year, 2006.

3. What prompted you to set up this business?

I'd been running a bookstore for about five years, a job that just sort of dropped into my lap when I wanted to take a break from being an adjunct English professor. I was looking for something other than teaching or running a bookstore to do, and it occurred to me that I might be able to eek out a living from selling books at offsites. At the bookstore, we'd

been asked a few times to sell books at events and they always seemed to go pretty well. At first I thought I would just try to expand that part of my boss's business, but then someone suggested I could do it on my own.

4. What venues do you find the most satisfying (either professionally or financially) to service and why?

Well, it's kinda hard to say. Of course, all the booksellers and myself love when we sell tons of books and it feels like we've really contributed something to the event. But those are not necessarily the best events in terms of, shall we say, literary merit. What seems to work the best all the way around, though, is when the author, the venue, and the audience are well matched. For instance, ex-CIA agent Valerie Plame spoke to a Democratic leadership group at a venue called the Spy Club. That was a great match. Or when the author whose book about traveling around the Hebrides presented to a Scots-American group.

5. Do you have a large staff?

At the moment, we've got about 15 booksellers and four people who work part-time in the office. The booksellers are all sort of freelancers, picking and choosing the events they want to work when they want to work them.

6. What are your own reading interests?

Phew, my reading's all over the place. I studied poetry as a graduate student, and I have a pretty nice

collection of modern and contemporary poets in my library (most recently I read *Night Wraps the Sky*, a book of writing by and about Vladimir Mayakovsky). I've been reading more novels lately, because they are a restful escape from the very hectic spring season we've had (notably Charles Bock's *Beautiful Children*), and I love good memoirs and biographies, especially bios of writers and artists (Arnold Rampersad's bio of Ralph Elison is waiting for me right now). I also read a little science (physics, mostly), the occasional history (Latin America's had a fascinating life) and I love a great short story (Kelly Link is superb). See? All over the place.

7. What changes do you see/foresee for the bookselling business in the future?

I'm not very good at making predictions, but I'm pretty sure electronic content is going to become a big deal in the next decade or so. Someone will come along with a device like the iPod and a platform like iTunes, something that will be relatively universal, sleek, cool, user-friendly, and the book industry will finally take the leap into the the 21st century. Of course, that will signal the demise of Mobile Libris, but c'est la vie. Perhaps I'll find a way to keep making what we do work, or maybe I'll just kick back and write a book about this crazy ride.

Those interested in contacting Sharon can do so at : Sharon Preiss, Mobile Libris, Independent bookseller for special events.
917-539-4679 www.mobilelibris.com



Library Conversations-

Calling All Writers

Our New York City library panels and discussions have created a wonderful forum to connect mystery writers with readers. They've also made for lively evenings. And, yes, books have been sold. As the new coordinator for MWA/NY's New York Public Library panels, I'm seeking panelists and moderators for 2008-2009. I think you'll find the choices listed below intriguing. Active members only, please.

All programs are at the Midtown Manhattan branch unless otherwise indicated.

The schedule is:

2008:

Thurs, Oct 23: Contemporary Mysteries: From Urban Noir to Chicklit ... from Hard-boiled PIs to Cozy Cats... and everything in between – Webster Branch, York Ave between 77th and 78th – Jane K. Cleland moderates

2009:

Wed, Jan 14: Scaring Women: Creating Nail-biting Tension in Women's Suspense

Tues, Feb 24: The Mentor Panel: How to Write & Sell Your First Mystery: Lessons from the Trenches – Catherine Maiorisi moderates

Wed, Mar 25: Fictional Private Eyes: Why Would Anyone Take This Job?

Wed, April 22: Paranormal Mysteries: Ghost Stories, Psychics, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night

Wed, May 20: Contemporary Traditional Mysteries: Fair Play Puzzles in the Modern World

Wed, June 17: Killers on the Loose: New York Thrillers

Please email me with your preferences, and also whether you're willing to serve as a moderator, and I'll begin building lists. This is an outstanding opportunity to reach readers—as well as meet fellow mystery writers. Additionally, the library distributes flyers promoting the authors' appearances; MWA/NY links to the flyers' PDFs on the www.mwa-ny.org website, and provides a link to each author's website: all excellent promotional tools.

For those members of MWA/NY who wish to organize similar events at your local libraries, Jane Cleland and I are happy to assist you. You'll find a "how to" sheet on our website—library outreach section: www.mwa-ny.org

See you at the library!

Cordelia (Cordelia@CordeliaFrancesBiddle.com)

WHAT'S NOOSE

Lots of exciting book news this time around. . .

Alice and Roy LaPlante (AKA Allyson Roy) announce their first mystery, *Aphrodisiac*, just out from Berkley/Penguin. Their sleuth, Brooklyn sex therapist, Dr. Saylor Oz, discovers her friend was murdered for an ancient secret perfume and is swept into a deadly seven-day race to find the killer.

Clare O'Donohue's first mystery, *The Lover's Knot*, is coming out September 30 from Plume. She'll be touring extensively in October, starting in Illinois, heading for the West Coast, and ending up in Texas.

Peggy Ehrhart's first mystery, *Sweet Man Is Gone*, came out from Five Star in July.

Larry Beinhart's *Salvation Boulevard* is out this month from Nation Books and has already collected impressive reviews. Larry writes, "The corpse is an atheist professor, the accused is an Islamic foreign student, the defense attorney is a Jewish lawyer, the investigator is a born-again Christian. The mystery is God." He's won the Edgar, the Gold Dagger, the Grand Prix de Literature Francais and has been nominated for two additional Edgars and the Barry Award. *Salvation Boulevard* has been optioned by Mandalay, which got him a cool writeup in *Variety*. He'll be touring extensively, starting on the West Coast.

Tom Coffey's *Blood Alley* (Toby Press) is a noirish mystery set in New York in the 1940s. It got a starred review from *Publishers Weekly* and it came out in May, as did **Selma Eichler's** *Murder Can Crash Your Party* (Obsidian). Selma has other good news too. The large print editions of *Murder Can Crash Your Party* have been acquired by Thorndike Press in the United States and by BBC Audiobooks in Great Britain. And in June the Deadly Ink mystery conference honored her with the 2008 "Certificate of Appreciation," awarded for outstanding achievement and lasting contribution to mystery writing.

Jane K. Cleland's new one is *Antiques to Die For* from St. Martin's Minotaur. **David Handler's** newest Berger-Mitry mystery, *The Sour Cherry Surprise*, came out from Thomas Dunne in July. And Philip Cioffari's novel, *Catholic Boys*, is out from Livingstone.

Chris Grabenstein's fourth John Ceepak

Mystery, *Hell Hole*, was published by St. Martin's Minotaur on July 22. Chris signed at several mystery bookstores and will spend most of August on the road. **Merry Jones** is on number four too. Her fourth Zoe Hayes mystery, *The Borrowed and Blue Murders*, appears this month. It's another page turner, revealing more about Zoe's boyfriend, Detective Nick Stiles, and bringing Zoe and her entourage up against the darkest and most powerful criminals of her lifetime.

Roberta Isleib's latest Dr. Rebecca Butterman mystery, *Asking for Murder*, will be out this month from Berkley Prime Crime. And Roberta just sold the Turkish rights for *Deadly Advice*.

Cordelia Frances Biddle's *Deception's Daughter* (Thomas Dunne) is the second in the Martha Beale mystery series, and is out in August. The first, *The Conjurer*, was released as a trade paperback in June. Cordelia's signing schedule is posted at www.CordeliaFrancesBiddle.com.

Shelley Freydon't's *The Sudoku Murder* is out this month from Running Press in trade paperback, and *Sudden Death Sudoku* is out in hard cover.

Jonathan Maberry, winner of two Bram Stoker awards, has turned to nonfiction for his latest. His new book, *Zombie CSU: The Forensics of the Living Dead* (Citadel Press) debuted at the end of August. It's a nonfiction work in which he interviewed over 250 experts in forensics, law enforcement, medicine and the sciences to ask how the real world might react to a zombie uprising.

On the short-story front, **Rosemary Harris's** "Growing Up Is for Losers"—a prequel to *Pushing Up Daisies*—has been nominated for a Derringer. The story is in *Still Waters*, an annual anthology of New England Crime Writers published by Level Best Books. **Joseph Benedetto's** "A Hot Summer's Death" appeared in *Woman's World* this summer. **Anita Page's** "Thin Ice," appeared in the summer issue of *Mysterical-e*.

Jerome Coopersmith's one-act play, "The Other Side" premiered last January at the New York Bar Association under the auspices of the Baker Street Irregulars. It's about the clash between Houdini and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle over the subject of spiritualism. He's hoping his play, too, will have an afterlife—like "Nine Dragons," the feature-length Hawaii 5-0 that he wrote way back when the show was on top of the charts. He just received a healthy residual check for multiple showings of that episode.

Gary Lovisi has all kinds of projects going on. His new book *The Antique Trader Collectible Paperback Price Guide* is out now from Krause Books and has a large section devoted to rare and collectible mystery and crime paperbacks

with over 1,000 color photos. He's just sold a new Sherlock Holmes pastiche, "The America Adventure" to the St. Martins anthology, *Sherlock Holmes in America*, edited by **Michael Kurland**. Gary also edited the new crime anthology, *Deadly Dames*, due out from Bold Venture Press in October and featuring his story, "The Inside Man," as well as work by **Max Allan Collins, Ed Gorman, Vin Packer** and more. Under his Gryphon Books imprint he's just published *The Sherlock Holmes Stories of Edward D. Hoch*, which collects all this legendary writer's Holmes stories with an Introduction by Ed and a short Afterword by Gary.

More news from **Jonathan Maberry**: he's just sold *On the Slab* to ABC Disney. Working in collaboration with Emmy Award-winner **Laura Schrock**, Jonathan will be co-creator and consulting producer for a horror entertainment news show produced by Disney's Stage 9 digital media division. The show is expected to launch on the Internet in October.

Robert Quackenbush's popular Miss Mallard Mysteries have been made into animated films by Cookie Jar Entertainment (Cinar) in co-production with China for children's worldwide television programming and DVD in five languages. They're presently showing in 70 countries. Negotiations are underway for movie/book tie-ins planned for 2009 distribution in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

Henry Chang is now on the web at Chinatowntriology.com.

Liz Zelvin, Peggy Ehrhart, and lots of other chapter members will be signing copies of their books at the New England Independent Booksellers Association meeting in Boston on September 19 and 20, under the joint auspices of MWA and Sisters in Crime.

Items for "What's Noose?" can be submitted to **Peggy Ehrhart** at pehrhart@sprynet.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Marty Meyers was kind enough to fill me in on the history of the title *What's Noose*. In the early '90s the MWA board gave a green light to the establishment of a separate New York chapter. My wife and I both attended the first organizational meeting, along with **Renee Gardner** and **Marianna Heusler**. There were about eight of us, led by **Alice Orr**, whom we'd chosen to be president.

Renee and Marianna volunteered to be the first editors of the chapter newsletter. I came up with "The Noose," for the newsletter and then offered to write a column called "What's Noose?" It ran for several years and then I handed it off to someone else.

MWA Mentor Program Panel: The Next Step – Part Two

by Marie Hannan-Mandel via podcast

THE NEXT STEP: RESOURCES

Compiled by Catherine Maiorisi

PRESSES THAT PUBLISH MYSTERIES:

- www.mysterywriters.org/pages/join/index.htm#
Click on approved publishers. Many presses on this list accept unagented submissions.

WRITING THE SYNOPSIS:

- **Mary Buckham**
www.marybuckham.com/. Mary offers two options for the synopsis writer: Do-it-yourself and one-on-one individualized synopsis help.
- **Beth Anderson**
www.bethanderson-hotclue.com/workshops/:
“Writing the Tight Synopsis” Workshop Presentation at Autumn Authors’ Affair XIV. Detailed write-up about creating a synopsis.
- **The Sell Your Novel Toolkit: Everything You Need To Know About Queries, Synopses, Marketing and Breaking-in** by Elizabeth Lyon. This book provides a good overview of what to do when your book is written, includes examples of synopses for various genres.
- **Poison Pen Press**
www.poisonedpenpress.com/. Submission guidelines include two sample synopses submitted by unpublished authors they later published.

DEFINING YOUR SUBGENRE:

Although the following define some subgenres, we have not found a complete list. One way to define the subgenre is to identify other books written in the same style.

- **Staff of Queens Library**
www.mostlyfiction.com/mysterydefinitions.htm
- **AgentQuery: Find the Agent Who Will Find You a Publisher** <http://www.agentquery.com/>.
Genre descriptions
- **From Cozy to Caper: A Guide to Mystery Genres** by Stephen P. Rogers.
www.writing-world.com/mystery/genres.shtml
- **Tanya Tienne: Genre & Sub-Genre Definitions**
www.tanyatienne.com/writing_genre_defns.shtml

WRITING THE QUERY LETTER:

- **AgentQuery: Find the Agent Who Will Find You a Publisher.** www.agentquery.com/. Offers tools for writers, including “How to Write a Query,” an article that gives specifics about what to include in a query letter.
- **Mary Buckham.** www.marybuckham.com/.
Individualized query or cover-letter instruction
- **The Sell Your Novel Toolkit: Everything You Need To Know About Queries, Synopses, Marketing and Breaking-in** by Elizabeth Lyon. This book provides a good overview of what to do when your book is written and includes examples of queries for various genres.

EDITING YOUR MANUSCRIPT:

Many good books on editing are available online, including the following:

- **Self-Editing for Fiction Writers** by Renni Browne and Dave King
- **The Chicago Manual of Style** by University of Chicago Press Staff

FORMATTING YOUR MANUSCRIPT, SYNOPSIS AND QUERY:

Formatting conventions (font, spacing, margins, etc.) must be followed when submitting to an agent or publisher. The standards can be found in most how-to-write books in bookstores or libraries.

- **AgentQuery: Find the Agent Who Will Find You a Publisher.** www.agentquery.com/. Formatting tips.
- **The Sell Your Novel Toolkit: Everything You Need To Know About Queries, Synopses, Marketing and Breaking-in** by Elizabeth Lyon

RESEARCHING AGENTS:

- **Publishers Market Place**
www.publishersmarketplace.com/. Track deals, sales, reviews, agents, editors, news. For \$20 per month, you may view new deal information posted live every day
- **AgentQuery: Find the Agent Who Will Find You a Publisher.** www.agentquery.com/ Agent Query offers a database of literary agents that can be searched by keyword or by genre
- **Literary Market Place**
www.literarymarketplace.com
LiteraryMarketPlace.com brings the power of automated searching to the world’s largest, most complete database of the book publishing industry. Weekly subscription (\$19.95). Yearly subscription also available.
- **Jeff Herman’s Guide to Book Publishers, Editors and Literary Agents 2007** by Jeff Herman. Issued annually, this classic writer’s directory provides everything working writers need to find the most receptive publishers, editors, and agents for their work.
- **Preditors and Editors**
www.anotherealm.com/prededitors/
Preditors & Editors’ sole purpose is to provide writers with information and contacts for the purpose of seeking publication of their work. P&E provides information about and rates agents, literary attorneys, publishers, writing services, etc. Known scam artists are identified.

SUPPORT:

- **Sisters in Crime/Guppies**
www.sistersincrime.org/chapters.html. The Guppies is a special-interest group of Sisters in Crime, comprised of writers (men and women) dedicated to improving their craft and helping each other on the road to publication.



ASK THE LAWYER

Dear Bob,

I'm considering the self-publishing route for my family history.

Do I need to be worried about dealing with self-publishing companies? How should I handle contracts? I'd appreciate any advice you could give

me to help me avoid any problems in the future with copyright or if I want to publish it in a different form through a regular publisher.

Dear Family History:

While I don't like using this column for self-promotion, this is a perfect example of a situation in which a lawyer familiar with the publishing industry (I would guess that there are probably about 20 of us in private practice today) can be useful.

Each company which assists authors who want to self-publish does so on its own terms, with its own contract form. I have not studied all of the forms, and so cannot tell you to use this one rather than that one.

But you have to read with great care the contract form offered by any particular company, to see whether you or the company will control the copyright. I say "control" rather than "own" because often publishers will say you "own" the copyright, but you license control of all publishing rights to the publisher.

If the company owns or controls the copyright, how and when can you regain ownership and control?

What termination provisions does the contract have? Do you have the absolute right to terminate and recover your rights at any time?

If these matters are not clear in the contract form, they should be specifically negotiated with the company and made explicit in the contract.

If you are unsure how to interpret the contract, that's when you contact a publishing lawyer. It's much better to pay for an hour or two of a lawyer's time before you sign the contract, than to pay for many hours later in what may be a vain attempt to get out of a contract you previously signed.

Advice given in this column is general and brief, and is not based upon a thorough review of facts and considerations in any given instance. You should consult your attorney if you need personal legal advice.

Bob Stein counsels and represents people at all levels of the entertainment industry from writers to film producers. He has represented David Baldacci and Janet Evanovich and spent 13 years in-house at Random House, Simon and Schuster and Warner Books before entering private practice.

Please send your legal questions for Bob to mhannanmandel@yahoo.com

CORRECTION - Last issue's legal question included the mention of a 20% fee for an agent. Agents typically charge 15% for representation with foreign rights, etc. negotiated at a different rate. We apologize for any confusion caused by this error.

NAIBA

MWA-NY Chapter will be offering its members a chance to meet with about 300 booksellers at the New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association (NAIBA) conference on September 21 and 22 in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

An MWA-NY booth will be available to members, and Board member Jeff Cohen is coordinating the chapter's presence at the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza Hotel, where the conference will be held. Members interested in signing at the booth should get in touch with Jeff as soon as possible at jeff@jeffcohenbooks.com to secure a time. Signings will be held only on Monday, September 22. Times will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, and spaces are limited, so members are advised to get in touch quickly. This is a strictly promotional opportunity.

For more information, members can go to:

www.newatlanticbooks.com/trade_show.asp

There is no fee for a signing slot. Members may send promotional materials such as postcards or bookmarks (limit of 200, please) to: Jeff Cohen, P.O. Box 4374, Highland Park, NJ 08904-4374.

NEIBA

MWA/NY is heading to Boston for the Annual New England Independent Booksellers Association Trade Show (NEIBA)! If you're an active member, and would like to have the opportunity to reach 800-1000 booksellers by signing at our booth September 19-20, 2008, please contact Meredith Cole at mscfilm@earthlink.net. This is strictly a promotional opportunity. All participating authors need to be ready to sign and give away free books, and have plenty of promotional giveaways. If you can't come, but would like to include your bookmarks and postcards in our goody giveaway bags, please send them to Rosemary Harris by August 15th at 276 Chestnut Hill Road, Stamford, CT 06903.

Murder in New Jersey? Perish the thought!

MWA/NY will hold its first New Jersey satellite meeting on Monday, September 8, at 6 p.m. in Tumulty's Pub, 361 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ. The evening will begin with a buffet dinner, to be followed by a panel, "Jersey Boy (or Girl) Writes Good: How to Take Regional Success to the Next Level." Panelists will include Mary Jane Clark, Jeffrey Cohen and Chris Grabenstein. MWA/NY President Jane K. Cleland will moderate.

The meeting is designed to give New Jersey-based members a more easily accessible and NJ-oriented meeting and new members or those interested will certainly be welcome. The cost of the evening will be \$30, which includes dinner and the panel. There will be a cash bar.

Those interested in attending can contact Jeffrey Cohen at jeff@jeffcohenbooks.com. Checks to reserve a place at the meeting should be sent to: Jeff Cohen, P.O. Box 4374, Highland Park, NJ 08904-4374. Cost at the door will be \$35.



ASK THE WRITER

A CONVERSATION WITH REED FARREL COLEMAN – PART TWO

by Lisa Cotoggio

Now that you've had time away from your position at the MWA, do you miss it?

I found my time on the board and as executive vice president enlightening and rewarding. It was wonderful to get out there and meet so many people who were committed to the growth and health of MWA. The amazing part was that we had a wide range of people on the board. There were really big names like Janet Evanovich, Linda Fairstein, Lisa Scottoline and writers with much smaller careers, but the level of commitment was the same. It was very gratifying. I was part of some fundamental changes that will help secure our status in the twenty-first century, but I was glad to get back to my writing. There are quality people on the board now. Harlan and Harry will be a great duo and the NY chapter is in great hands with Jane. I think she's really done a lot to revitalize the chapter.

Ten books and three series, what's that about?

Amazing! The other day I realized that I have already published more novels than either of my writing heroes—Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. When my follow up to *Hose Monkey*, *The Fourth Victim* by Tony Spinoso—my pen name—appears next fall, it will be my tenth novel. Shows you how far you can go on a little bit of talent, luck, and a lot of persistence.

Early on in your career as an author, did you ever reach a point on the way to publication where you thought about giving up? If so, what kept you going?

If giving up is in your list of possibilities, don't bother starting. I began publishing poetry in high school and continued on past college. It was a good education for me because by the time I turned to fiction, I had taken my fair share of abuse, rejection, criticism, etc. My skin was already tough and thick when I submitted my first novel to publishers. Luckily, my first long piece of fiction was published as my first novel.

Do you think you'll ever publish a book of poems?

I haven't really written much poetry in the last ten years. I don't enjoy it as much as I used to and I don't have the chops for it I once had. I enjoy editing it far more than writing it. I think that's my real poetic skill these days.

Are you teaching this year?

Yes, I'll be teaching at Hofstra again this summer. It's cool. You can actually earn three college credits for taking my class. It's intensive—4 hours a day, 5 days a week, 2 weeks in a row. It's all part of a summer writing program run by the university. There are classes in poetry, screenwriting, short fiction, writing for children. I teach

genre writing. We're trying to help build it into a nationally-known program. I make it fun and it's much more helpful, I think, than the typical workshop. I have guest speakers in and each student gets a chance to read his or her work in front of all the attendees. I had a few students last year who are definitely on track to be published.

I see you're touring with *Empty Ever After*, what's that like?

Touring is the most misunderstood and least romantic aspect of the life. It's like business travel, only lonelier. It's very disorienting, tiring, and expensive. However, you have to keep your name fresh for booksellers and you have to be out there for the fans. After years of doing it, I've learned how to do it without wearing myself out or filing for bankruptcy! See www.reedcoleman.com for touring info.

Do you always spend a lot of time promoting your books?

I spend some time promoting my books. I tour. I do conferences. I guest blog. I do any media I can. I make postcards. I'm a member of several writers' organizations. But if you don't write the best book you can write, the rest of it is silly.

Any tips for writers who want to get out there and promote their books, but don't have the opportunity to because of budget restraints?

I know all about budget restraints. Try and get as much free coverage as possible, even if it's from the local *Pennysaver*. There are all levels of PR reps for all budgets, some are incredibly cost effective. If you can't tour all over, get in your car and do it locally. Be good to booksellers. They are like your own indirect PR people. Again, none of it is worthwhile without the best book you can write. Work as hard as you can to cooperate and suggest things to your in-house publicist.

Would you say there was ever any point in your development as a writer where you may have handled things differently if you knew then what you know now?

In the past, I made the mistake of not letting my agent do his or her job. I tried to have too much direct contact with my publisher and editor. Let your agent do his job. He understands the turf better than you do. He understands the language, the protocol, the dos and don'ts.

Well, you've been very gracious with your time, thank you.

A top ten finalist in the 2002 Nevada Film Office 15th Annual Screenwriting Award, Lisa Cotoggio has worked as a script doctor for Summer Moon Productions and with Classical Alliance as a TV series creator and writer. You can contact Lisa at <mailto:lisa@lisacotoggio.com>.

MYSTERY MANUSCRIPTS WANTED

Get ready for the New York MWA Mentor Program in September. This once-a-year MWA/NY program offers members an opportunity to have the first fifty pages of their mystery manuscript or a short story critiqued by an active member of the chapter. The three most highly rated submissions (completed novels only), will be read by a literary agent.

We invite submissions from unpublished writers and from published writers looking to take their careers in a new direction.

So polish your manuscripts and short stories, check the MWA/NY website, and watch your mail for details of this year's Mentor Program.

MWA Mentor Program Committee, Catherine Maiorisi, Chairperson.



The April chapter meeting welcomed Andrew Martin and Kelley Ragland from St. Martins Minotaur. Andy began by telling the audience that this press publishes 130 hard cover originals each year across the sub-genres of mystery writing. Andy pointed out that St. Martins Minotaur is a “dynamic farm where we sow seeds, we water them, give

them sun and we clear away the brush and we help them grow as best we can. But the reality is they’ve got to grow on their own a lot. They have to find an audience, they’ve got to deliver an audience and the authors—and we’ve always marveled at this—can write a book a year and then go out and promote it like crazy.” Andy added that his “most crushing challenge” was with 130 books a year it was difficult to know how many of these books the press would be able to “shed light on”.

When discussing trends, Andy drew attention to the rise of the espionage novel and the widespread interest in international crime fiction. Andy cautioned against any idea of mystery fiction as less than literature and urged the audience to think of this genre as worthy of literary attention.

Tips for getting published:

- ⇒ Write a really, really good book – in fiction it boils down to the book.
- ⇒ Get an agent.
- ⇒ Package yourself—find potential markets, know who your audience is and how you can sell yourself and your work.
- ⇒ Identify and use every contact you have.
- ⇒ Get quotes ahead of time and send them with the manuscript.
- ⇒ Kelley stressed the importance of letting the publisher know of any author platform you may have.
- ⇒ Accept starting small with sales of 2,000. The goal is to increase sales with each book.

Once an author is published, the next step is what Andy calls “breaking out”.

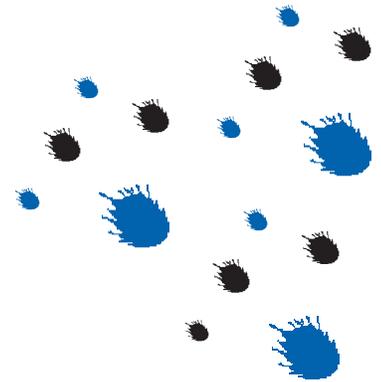
Tips for breaking out:

- ⇒ A passionate editor to act as advocate within the publishing house is key. In-house enthusiasm is more important than a month of ads in *The New York Times*.
- ⇒ The “next wave” is getting the customers on board—booksellers, librarians, book clubs, etc.
- ⇒ Charm is essential when dealing with these customers—make these people your friends.
- ⇒ Find non-fiction angles to boast publicity, e.g. make connections to business and interest groups connected to your novel’s subject or your own background; set up speaking engagements; reach those who are not traditional mystery readers. Think outside the fiction box.
- ⇒ Keep up with all the new trends—as Andy points out, we are “at the precipice of a lot of different things going on right now.”

Challenges mystery publishing faces:

- ⇒ What is the make-up of the mystery crime fiction audience these days?
- ⇒ How do we grow this audience?
- ⇒ What’s the next generation? Booksellers report that bulk of the audience for mystery fiction is the 35+-age bracket. How do we reel in the younger audience?
- ⇒ What does the electronic book mean for the future?
- ⇒ How do we best use the huge potential of online marketing?

During the question and answer Andy and Kelley addressed segment a number of interesting issues. On the matter of author’s blogs both agreed that this could be useful but only if it does not take away from the writer’s main business—writing a great novel. On the subject of stand-alone versus series books, Andy stressed that it really came down to how well the book is written. Kelley added that it was easier for an editor to see progression and a future with a series character. And for those of you hoping to “crack” the market—St. Martins Minotaur published 14 new authors in 2007!



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