

ASK THE WRITER *(continued from page 3)*

Cordelia & Steve: The biggest surprise though is what our collaboration has taught us about each other and our marriage. It's not often that a husband and wife can state, "I wholeheartedly disagree with that choice of yours; in fact, I detest it!" without plates and cutlery starting to fly. Additionally, there's a distinct sense of pleasure in recognizing and lauding each other's talents.

Jane: *Any tips to other couples considering writing together?*

Don: We have few disagreements about the direction a book is taking; however, when we do disagree, whoever has been working on the manuscript last calls the shots.

Renée: Walk away from the work at the end of the day and switch gears from being colleagues to being a couple.

Cordelia & Steve: Talk. Talk. Talk. Separately, we're not fans of outlines; we like to work more organically. When writing together, an outline is vital if you don't want the novel zooming off the rails by chapter three. We talk through every chapter and every scene. We talk through character development and clues and pivotal narrative points. We reread each other's work and ask questions. We pose and solve potential problems

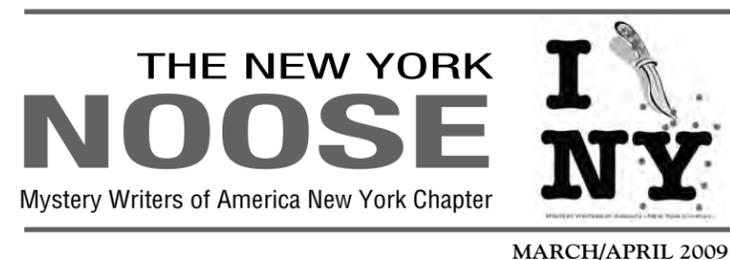
through constant conversation. The downside is that in the middle of a romantic dinner, one of us is liable to say, "What if the body isn't found on the beach at sunset...?" And do beware, collaborators, discussing murder while in a public place garners very suspicious and nervous glances.

Don: Never take criticism of the writing personally.

Meredith: I really think that collaborations bring out the strengths and weaknesses already inherent in relationships. If you have a strong partnership and if you respect each other, you'll have a great writing experience. If you have some negative personal issues, they will probably be reflected in your work together. So let married writers beware.

Larry: Make one very firm rule and follow it slavishly, without exception: whatever she says, goes.

Jane K. Cleland is the author of the IMBA best-selling and multiple award-nominated Josie Prescott Antiques Mystery series, and the outgoing president of MWA/NY Chapter. More information is available at www.janeclendland.net.



MARCH/APRIL 2009

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Last November, I was lucky enough to attend the Murder And Mayhem In Muskego conference where Dennis Lehane (Mr. Mystic River) was the Guest of Honor.

In his talk, he mentioned how much he enjoyed teaching writing and working with up-and-coming authors. "I'm Irish Catholic," he said. "We believe in sending the elevator back down."

Meaning of course, once you make it to the top, like Mr. Lehane has, you try to help others find their way up there, too. I think this is why I love our MWA-NY Mentor Program so much. It was headed up this year by Catherine Maiorisi who, with her whole team, did an outstandingly excellent job.

The program gives published authors, even guys like me who have barely made it to the mezzanine, a chance to send the elevator back down.

To help another writer get the break I got three years ago when, after many years of collecting rejection letters, my first mystery was published.

To use whatever connections our active members have to make sure mystery-shopping agents read the top submissions.

To help somebody else climb aboard and punch that first button on their ride up to Best Sellerdom.

As the new President of the New York chapter, I hope to do even more with the mentor program in the coming year. I'd also like to find other ways to serve our published authors in these difficult days while trying to help move more writers toward their dream of being published.

In fact, I'd love to cram the elevator car so full, the fire marshal gets nervous.

I look forward to serving you in 2009.

Chris Grabenstein
New President of MWA-NY

IMPORTANT DATES

Feb 24 Mentor Panel: How to Write and Sell Your First Mystery: Lessons from the Trenches – Mid-Manhattan Library

Mar 4 FBI agent tells us how investigations *really* work. National Arts Club

Mar 25 Fictional Private Eyes: Why Would Anyone Take This Job? – Mid-Manhattan Library, 6:30 pm

Mar 28 Jane Austen, Mystery Writer, The Jane Austen Society Chapter hosts MWA/NY Chapter. 2-4 pm at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, 7 West 54th St (bet 5&6 Aves). Further details available at www.jasny.org.

Apr 1 How I Got My Agent: He Said/She Said. National Arts Club.

Apr 22 Paranormal Mysteries: Ghost Stories, Psychics, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night – Mid-Manhattan Library, 6:30 pm

Dear MWA/NY members,



In my two years as president of our chapter, I've had the opportunity to work with an active and engaged board, dedicated volunteers, and professionals throughout the organization.

During my tenure, we've improved our communications with our revamped Noose, e-mail blasts, updated website, and direct contact. We've expanded our library programs with a regular, monthly series of MWA/NY Chapter-sponsored panels at the Midtown branch of the New York Public Library as well as at other libraries throughout our region, and we now record and podcast all official meetings.

I've been fortunate enough to represent us at various conferences and events, frequently quoting our tag line: Crime doesn't pay—enough. With that in mind, I wish us all great success.

In this new term, I'm pleased to serve on the board of directors and I look forward to working with our new president, Chris Grabenstein.

With best regards,

Jane

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Hi all,

As our country welcomes a new President so does MWA-NY. In this issue we hear from our new President, Chris Grabenstein, as well as our outgoing President, Jane Cleland.

Our *What's Noose* editor, Peggy Ehrhart asked me to remind you that *The Noose* is an excellent vehicle for promoting your publishing endeavors. Send all entries to Peggy in the format in which you'd like them to appear and use your Noose as a means of letting the MWA/NY community know your good news.

Want to know what you should be reading? Well, we have advice from writers at Bouchercon and we have the last word on the seminal works of mystery from Andy Peck, MWA historian.

Worried about the future of publishing? Four leading editors tell you what to expect in the January *Meeting Notes*.

I look forward to hearing all your comments at mhannanmandel@yahoo.com

Slainte!

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

THE NEW YORK NOOSE

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New books out . . . and awards!

E. J. Rand, author of the Reluctant Sleuth Mysteries (Deadly Ink Press), featuring senior-citizen amateur sleuth Gary Kemmerman, notes that his first book, *Say Goodbye*, has won two awards and the second, *Perfect Cover*, has just come out. Gary's new wife, Becca, serves as a nurse in a hospital where women are being attacked—to get Gary involved, his police lieutenant friend pulls Becca off the night shift. But Becca is not the retiring kind: When she finds out, she volunteers as a decoy to catch a killer. Visit Gary, Becca, and E. J. (Ed) on the web at www.reluctantsleuth.com. Deadly Ink announced that the third book in the series, already complete, is expected to launch in June '09.

Moving to a new publisher . . .

Wendy Corsi Staub, who has published more than thirty books with Kensington over the last fifteen years, will move to Avon for three new ones; Lucia Macro acquired world English rights in a major deal with Laura Blake Peterson at Curtis Brown. The first novel in the deal, *Finders Keepers*, will be published in 2010, to be followed by its sequel, *Losers Weepers*, and an as yet untitled third novel. Staub's last book with Kensington, *Dead Before Dark*, will come out this April.

Interactive mystery . . .

Stab in the Dark, an interactive mystery written and directed by David Landau and produced and edited by Matt Clarke is now being distributed by LifeSize Entertainment. Learn more at www.indiefilmkiosk.com/stab-in-the-dark-html/prod_66.html.

Articles . . .

Peggy Ehrhart's article, "Serial Murders in the Haight-Ashbury," which deals with David Daniel's White Rabbit, appears in the current issue of Janet Rudolph's Mystery Readers Journal. (San Francisco Bay Area Mysteries II, Volume 24, No. 4, Winter 2008-09).

Please submit items for "What's Noose?" to Peggy Ehrhart at pehrhart@sprynet.com. You are encouraged to submit them in the form you'd like to see here.

ASK THE LAWYER



Dear Bob,

I have written a book which I think is good enough to be published. I have done all the research and had it professionally edited but I wonder if there's any point sending it out in this economic climate.

In your experience, do agents actually take on books in times like these, or publishers for that matter? Would I be better off waiting for a while rather than risk being turned down as a knee-jerk thing because people in the business only want sure-things or writers who've already been published?

I'd appreciate your insight.

Dear Writer,

Your concern is justified: it's a difficult market right now. In November Houghton Mifflin Harcourt announced that it was suspending all book acquisitions; in December Random House announced that it would reorganize and consolidate several of its imprints. Other publishers must also be considering every acquisition (and its price) more cautiously than was previously the case.

In December one of my clients informed me that his literary agent (from a very well known and successful agency) had told him that the agency had decided it would be a wasted effort to send out any proposals that month, and it would not do so.

But here's the thing... agents must sell books if they are going to stay in business, and publishers need to buy books for the same reason. Neither can afford to wait out the recession without taking on new authors and new books.

Also, it is impossible to know how long it would be necessary to wait to find a more receptive market.

So my recommendation would be to polish your proposal or your manuscript to within an inch of its life... make it as good as it can possibly be, and then send it off.

Keeping your manuscript in your drawer doesn't serve any useful purpose. Even if your worst fears come true, and it is rejected everywhere because of the poor marketplace, you can wait a few years and resubmit it...there should be a new crop of agents and editors by then, anyway.

Advice given in this column is general, and is not based upon a thorough review of facts and considerations in any given instance. You should consult an attorney in depth if you need 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**

HEARD AT BOUCHERCON

Lisa Cotoggio asked some questions as she roamed the halls of Bouchercon—and these are answers she received

1. If someone were to write your biography, what would be the title and subtitle?
- LEE CHILD – Always Lucky
 CHRIS GRABENSTEIN – Funny Boy: From Trojan Man to John Ceepak
 JEFF COHEN – Jeff Cohen and other Short Stories
 JASON STARR – I was Ken Bruen
 JONATHAN SANTLOFER – An Interesting Life from the Outside; Or so it Seemed
 ROSEMARY HARRIS – A Work in Progress
 ANDREW GRANT – When are You Going to get a Real Job
 KEN ISAACSON – Oh Jeez
 MEREDITH COLE – If I Knew Then What I Know Now; A Writer's Life
 JANE K. CLELAND – Dream Big: From Bean Town to Mystery Alaska

2. Have you ever made a literary pilgrimage?
- LEE CHILD – 221 B. Baker Street (Sherlock Holmes)
 CHRIS GRABENSTEIN – Stratford-upon-Avon (William Shakespeare)
 JEFF COHEN – No, but have visited Grauman's Chinese Theatre and stood in Harpo Marx's feet.
 JASON STARR – Heinrich von Kleist's grave in Germany
 JONATHAN SANTLOFER – William Faulkner's House; Willa Cather's House
 ROSEMARY HARRIS – At 20 visited the birthplace of Hermann Hesse
 ANDREW GRANT – No
 KEN ISAACSON – No
 MEREDITH COLE – Laura Ingall Wilder's House
 JANE K. CLELAND – Rex Stout High Meadows, Brewster

3. Do you read blogs? What are some of your favorites?
- LEE CHILD – Yes Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind
 Crimespot.net
 Lipstick Chronicles
 Naked Authors
- CHRIS GRABENSTEIN – Yes Rapsheet
 Huffington Post
 Lipstick Chronicles
 Poe's Deadly Daughters

- Do you read blogs? What are some of your favorites?
- JEFF COHEN – Yes Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind
 Murderati
- JASON STARR – Yes Rapsheet
 Crime Fiction Dossier
- JONATHAN SANTLOFER – No
- ROSEMARY HARRIS – Yes Lipstick Chronicles
 Stiletto Gang
- ANDREW GRANT – Yes Janet Reid
 Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind
 The Dead Guy
- KEN ISAACSON – Yes Barry Eisler Blog
- MEREDITH COLE – Yes Debutante Ball
 Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind
- JANE K. CLELAND – Yes Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind

4. Introduce one other author you think people should read, suggest a good book with which to start.
- LEE CHILD – Andrew Grant (his brother), *Even*, June 2009
 CHRIS GRABENSTEIN – Stephen King, *Bag of Bones*
 JEFF COHEN – Chris Grabenstein, *Tilt-a-Whirl*
 JASON STARR – Charles Willeford, *The Shark-Infested Custard*
 JONATHAN SANTLOFER – Mo Hayder, *Birdman*
 ROSEMARY HARRIS - Louise Penny, *Still Life*
 ANDREW GRANT – Michael Connelly, *The Black Echo*
 KEN ISAACSON – Kelli Stanley, *Nox Dormiendia*; Fred Vargas, *This Night's Foul Work*
 MEREDITH COLE – Will Thomas, *Some Danger Involved*
 JANE K. CLELAND – Rex Stout, *Murder by the Book*, *Plot it Yourself*
- 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 www.lisacotoggio.com.*

Your 2009 MWA-NY Board:		
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	Peggy Ehrhart, Director	Want to serve on a committee? Just let any board member know.



ASK THE WRITER

BLOODY HELL OR HEAVEN'S GATE? WRITING WITH YOUR SPOUSE
 Jane K. Cleland

Writing with your spouse—to some people it represents a dream come true, while to others it might be reason enough to kill. Three couples who've walked the walk discuss their experiences and how they've succeeded in writing bestsellers without shedding any blood—off the page.



From Connecticut: Renée Paley-Bain and Donald Bain
 Renée Paley-Bain collaborates with her husband Donald Bain on the *Murder, She Wrote* series of original mystery novels. Earlier in her career, she worked as an editor and reporter, advertising and speech writer, and public relations professional. Don is the author/ghostwriter of more than 100 books, including the best selling *Murder, She Wrote* series of 33 murder mysteries and *Coffee, Tea or Me?* which sold more 5-million copies worldwide. His autobiography, *Murder HE Wrote: A Successful Writer's Life*, was published by Purdue University Press in 2006. Don's the recipient of the 2007 Grand Master Award from the International Association of Media Tie-In Writers. More information is available at www.donaldbain.com.



From New York: Meredith Anthony and Lawrence Light
 Meredith Anthony is a copywriter for a major New York City ad agency. Her short stories occasionally appear in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. Her work as a humorist has appeared in books (*101 Reasons Why We're Doomed* and *The Best American Women's Humor*), magazines (*MAD Magazine*, *Hysteria*), and even greeting cards (The Spilled Milk Collection). The winner of many journalism awards, Larry Light is a finance editor at the *Wall Street Journal* and the author of three books, two in the Karen Glick series about Wall Street (*Too Rich to Live* and *Fear and Greed*), and a dark thriller with his wife, Meredith Anthony, *Ladykiller*. Larry is the national treasurer of Mystery Writers of America. More information is available at www.meredithanthony.com and www.larrylight.com.



From Pennsylvania: Cordelia Frances Biddle and Steve Zettler
 Cordelia Frances Biddle is the author of *Deception's Daughter* and *The Conjuror*, suspense novels set in Victorian-era Philadelphia. She also wrote *Beneath The Wind* and co-authored *Murder at San Simeon* with Patricia Hearst. With her husband, Steve Zettler, she created the Crossword Mystery Series under the pseudonym, Nero Blanc. Cordelia is the library coordinator for the monthly MWA/NY-sponsored library panels at the New York Public Library, Midtown Branch. (For details, see the MWA/NY website at www.mwa-ny.org.) Steve Zettler is also the author of international thrillers: *The Second Man*, *Double Identity*, and *Ronin*. More information is available at www.cordeliafrancesbiddle.com and www.crosswordmysteries.com.

Jane: What's the best part of writing with your spouse? What's the worst?
 Renée: One of the best parts about writing with your spouse is that we always have something to talk about—the book!
 Don: One of the worst parts is that we never seem to talk about anything else but the book!
 Meredith: I loved writing with Larry—he's always surprising! Like Jessica Rabbit, I love him because he makes me laugh!
 Larry: We share a dark and goofy sense of humor, so we both get a kick out of wacky sequences. In *Ladykiller*, for instance, there's a serial killer at loose in the skanky Times Square of 1991. We riff on what the sleazy customers of a dive bar called Foxy Lady think about the possibility (bruiated about then, but not yet a reality) that Disney might be coming: "If Donald Duck were to set one webbed foot in the Foxy Lady, he'd end up rolled and sodomized." To this day, neither one of us knows who penned that piquant passage.

Cordelia & Steve: The best part is working together at something we both love! We met as actors in New York; the collaborative process is one we're very comfortable with—and miss when we're writing solo. Creating a narrative together allows us to build on each other's strengths. One of us has a loopy sense of humor; one of us is given to tragedy (you can guess which). Blending our two styles and voices pushes us in new and sometimes surprising directions. [Note from Jane: I'm guessing Cordelia is the dark one.] We like to make each other laugh, and we like to trump one another. When we hear a quiet chuckle or gasp while we're typing away at our separate computers, we know the scene is working.
 Meredith: The worst part was finishing the book. It was so great working together that I felt kind of lonely when we went back to working on separate projects.

Larry: There isn't a worst part about writing with Meredith. We both got a kick out of it. It was like going to a play we both loved. Only we were the playwrights.
 Cordelia & Steve: The worst part is nitpicking over word choices—and nitpicking, it is. However, when we began our series, melding two distinctive visions was HARD. (How do you politely tell your spouse/co-author that he or she is dead, dead wrong?) Without giving into our lethal impulses, we've discovered we can hold opposing opinions and that both have relevance. We're fairly stubborn; learning to really listen and analyze each other's differing viewpoints wasn't always easy.

Jane: What surprised you?
 Renee: We were surprised at how smoothly things worked.
 Meredith: Everything surprised me. It was such a fertile collaboration—ideas just seemed to pop up everywhere. We had a ball.
 Larry: I was surprised that the process worked seamlessly. I used to be a police reporter, so I could handle the cop stuff. She used to be a rape counselor and worked with social workers, so she knew about that world, which is a big part of *Ladykiller*.

(continued on back cover)



Marie Hannan-Mandel
Via podcast

At the January Chapter Meeting members gathered to hear Top Editors Reveal All.

Moderated by Larry Light, the editors Kelley Ragland (St. Martins Minotaur), Don D'Auria (Leisure Books), Bob Gussin (Oceanview Publishing) and Linda McFall (MIRA) gave us a clear picture of the state of the mystery market in these difficult times.

Did You Know?

- Kelley Ragland appeared with Andrew Martin (St. Martin's Press) at the April Chapter Meeting. For a write up check out the Aug '08 issue of *The Noose*.
- The MIRA imprint of Harlequin books publishes 120 books a year including re-issues.
- Creating a continuing, series character is one of the best ways to create a strong readership.
- Knowing your subject is not just a matter of writing quality, it makes marketing the book much easier.
- Kelley Ragland opens a submission with the word "no" in her head and waits to be persuaded.

Q. What are you looking for?

- ☞ What was good enough ten years ago is not good enough now. It's not enough to just be different (Ragland)
- ☞ Uniqueness is, however, very important. (Gussin)
- ☞ A series character or at least one strong enough to support a sequel.(Gussin)
- ☞ No niche markets – must be commercial. (D'Auria)
- ☞ Big, commercial books; big, sexy stories with recurring characters and fast, plot-driven stories. (McFall)

Q. What are you NOT looking for? There are always exceptions but...

- ☞ No cozies; no Islamic terrorists. (Gussin)
- ☞ Books written without necessary background or real life experience. (D'Auria)
- ☞ Plots copied from old movies – even if you think no one else has seen it. (D'Auria)
- ☞ Novels, no matter how well written, where the stakes aren't high enough – good writer, wrong story. (Ragland)

Q. What advice do you give writers about getting the word out about their books?

- ☞ Promote your book locally – local media, visit local bookstores. (D'Auria)
- ☞ Get on the blogs. (Gussin)
- ☞ Be a smart marketer. Get the most bang for your buck by attending conferences, especially Bouchercon where you'll meet the booksellers. (McFall)
- ☞ Have a website and use the internet as much as possible. (McFall)
- ☞ However, the moment promotion interferes with the writing, stop! (Ragland)

Q. What is the future of the mystery genre?

- ☞ Mystery readers are very loyal and will continue to read. (Gussin)
- ☞ People will continue to read but where they are buying their reading matter is in flux. (D'Auria)
- ☞ People love to be entertained and in hard times genre writers will do well. (McFall)
- ☞ Publishers have huge challenges ahead will have to consider new ways of doing business. (Ragland)

Q. What makes a great beginning?

- ☞ It has to keep me reading and propel me forward. (McFall)
- ☞ Something has to grab you upfront fairly quickly. (Gussin)
- ☞ It's the publisher's job to create a cover to make the reader buy, but it's the writer's job to make the reader keep reading. (D'Auria)
- ☞ If your submission to an editor/agent is – chapters 8, 9, 10 because that's where the action is – then you have too much build-up. (D'Auria)

Q. Do you accept unagented writers?

- ☞ I have a hierarchy – I read work submitted by agents I know first, then well-know agents, and then unagented. I once took on an unagented writer, fifteen years ago. (Ragland)
- ☞ I accept unagented things but have never published one. (McFall)
- ☞ The best way for an unagented writer to be published is by winning a writing contest. (Ragland)

Q. Would you ever publish a book that does not have a clear resolution to the plot?

- ☞ I would fight such a book. If we allow this then, what next, starting the story in the middle? (Ragland)



☞ The reader would have to be glad that the killer got away. (McFall)

Q. What do you foresee as the next big trend?

- ☞ Never try to catch a trend. (Ragland)
- ☞ It's a high stakes game betting a lot of work on the outcome of a guess about what will be big. (Gussin)

Q. How is a publishing house marketing budget distributed? How is it decided which is the "big" book?

- ☞ No publisher buys a book thinking, "This one is going to sink without a ripple." (D'Auria)
- ☞ As a small publisher, we go for the slow build and advertise over the first year of the book's life. (Gussin)
- ☞ A lot of what the publishers do, the writer doesn't even see – buying placement at stores; paying incentives to wholesalers, etc.

Q. You mentioned that the publishers will have to do things differently in future. What about writers?

- ☞ Write a good book and be open-minded about how it will be sold. (Ragland)

Q. What percentage of your sales come from Amazon?

- ☞ It varies widely. Amazon has filled a niche in the market because they can respond quickly to demand. (Ragland)
- ☞ Not a very large number of our books sell through Amazon. It's not a large factor for mid-list books. (D'Auria)

Q. How important is teaching the readers something?

- ☞ It was a big part of the success of *The DaVinci Code*. (Ragland)
- ☞ We rank those kinds of books very high. (D'Auria)
- ☞ It has to go hand-in-hand with a great mystery.(Ragland)

And we all want to write those!

"The Seven Mysteries Every Mystery Writer Must Read"

In case you missed our February 4th meeting at the National Arts Club, here are MWA-NY Mystery Authority Barry Zeman's top seven picks (with some of Barry's speaker notes):

The Valley of Fear, Arthur Conan Doyle. And every other Sherlock Holmes book and short story written.

The Innocence of Father Brown G.K. Chesterton (1911). The late Ed Hoch, MWA Grandmaster, called this the most outstanding single collection of detective short stories. A lot to learn here about ideas, story structure, plot.

The Maltese Falcon, Dashiell Hammett (1930). Widely regarded as Hammett's best work and the most important American detective novel.

Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier (1938). The greatest romantic suspense novel ever written?

Red Dragon by Thomas Harris (1981), predates *The Silence of The Lambs* is the quintessential novel of violence and suspense. Write one like this and you will never have a problem getting a book contract.

The Daughter of Time, Josephine Tey (1954). Not only one of the best historical mysteries ever written, but a masterpiece of pure detection and construction. In the not too distance past the British Crime Writers Association ranked it the top mystery novel of all time as well as the best historical mystery.

The Long Goodbye, Raymond Chandler (1954). Chandler's best novel. Chandler's best have first-rate plots, intelligent writing style and, as Otto Penzler says, "an unflinching sense of morality philosophy that helps to define the most distinguished literature".

In Cold Blood, Truman Capote (1966). A brilliant work that created a genre.

If you'd like to hear the whole talk, go to www.mwanyc.org, click on the "Past Meetings" button, look for the February 4th meeting listing, and click on its blue "Podcast" button.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you want to see an entire presentation on Barry Zeman's *How to Create a Killer Mystery Collection*, it is available at the MWA under that Library Outreach tab.