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## THE NOOSE

September/October  
Noose 2011

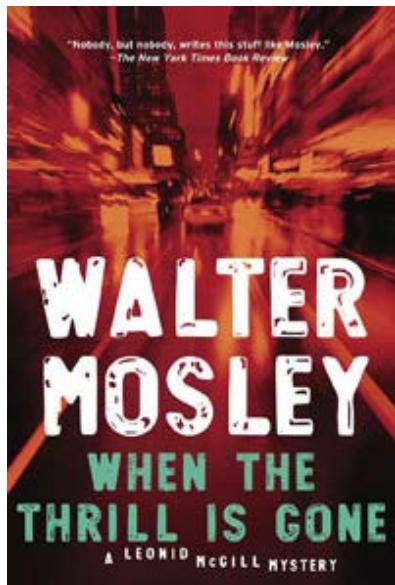


# Mystery Writers of America

New York Chapter

NEXT MEETING:  
September 8, 2011

Who am I in a Dead Man's Eye?  
Walter Mosley talks character.



Thursday, September 8,  
6:30 pm.  
THE NATIONAL ARTS CLUB  
15 Gramercy Park South -  
(a.k.a. East 20th Street)  
RESERVE YOUR SEAT NOW.  
Remember, this event is for  
MWA Members and guests  
only.

[Click here for more information.](#)

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President's Letter



Dear Fellow Members,

My "back-to-school" days are long gone, but who can escape the seduction of fresh reams of paper, new pencil cases (I do still write with a pencil) and the excitement of seeing friends who've gone away for the summer? That's the feeling I have as the New York chapter comes back from its two month hiatus.

Almost 100 members jumpstarted the "new school term" and their writing by attending August 13th's **MWA University** in New York City. It was a solid day of information and inspiration headlined by MWA Education co-chairs Reed Farrel Coleman and Hank Phillippi Ryan, who were joined by Cordelia Frances Biddle, Jess Lourey and Hallie Ephron. **Special thanks to MWA EVP Larry Light, MWA-NY Board member Andrew Peck and MWA Force of Nature Margery Flax for making it happen.** (If you live outside of the five boroughs and think we should have an MWAU near you, let me know and we'll see what we can do.) And our monthly dinners resume on **Thursday, September 8, at the National Arts Club** with New York Times best-selling author **Walter Mosley**. Kudos to Ellen Count and Persia Walker for kicking off the second half of the year with such an exciting speaker.

In addition to the monthly meetings, look for MWA-NY members this fall at the **Brooklyn Book Festival (September 18)**, the **Collingswood (NJ) Book Festival (October 1)** and at a special, free tour of a **New Jersey Ballistics Lab (October 4)** arranged for by member Jeff Cohen (aka EJ Copperman.) Details elsewhere in the newsletter.

So we've got a full line-up as we head into fall – and a **new fabulous venue for December's Winter Revels**. I hope you can take advantage of some of the chapter's offerings and I look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event!

Cheers,

Rosemary Harris  
2011 President, MWA-NY Chapter

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Hi all,

We at the *Noose* have been wondering how many of you find the *Noose* helpful, useful, and (I particularly care about this one) fun. In order to achieve these goals, we are adding new columns and ideas. The first is *Meet the Members*. Our stalwart board members have been asked to send in their details, and I would like to extend an invitation to all members to do the same. Keep it short, pithy and please send a headshot, if you have one. This invitation is **not** limited to published writers – we want to hear and get to know a little about **every** member. We are always on the hunt for good ideas, so please send us yours. Send your ideas, suggestions, and comments to [mhannanmandel@yahoo.com](mailto:mhannanmandel@yahoo.com).

Marie Hannan-Mandel  
Editor

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## IMPORTANT DATES



- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>SEPT 8 —</b>  | <b>Chapter Meeting:</b> <i>Who am I in a Dead Man's Eye?</i> Walter Moseley talks character at the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South (20th Street). <b>Please note different night.</b> Meeting and Library Lecture details at <a href="http://www.mwa-ny.org/meetings.php">www.mwa-ny.org/meetings.php</a> |
| <b>SEPT 21 —</b> | <b>Library Lecture:</b> <i>Partners in Crime: Are Two Killers Better than One?</i> Mid-Manhattan Library, 40th Street and 5th Avenue, 6th Floor, 6:30pm.   |
| <b>OCT 18 —</b>  | <b>Library Lecture:</b> <i>A Mystery Writer's Dialogue</i> with Lorenzo Caracaterra and Andrew Gross. Mid-Manhattan Library, 40th Street and 5th Avenue, 6th Floor, 6:30pm.  |
| <b>OCT 19 —</b>  | <b>Brooklyn Public Library Event:</b> <i>Killer Instincts: Crime Fiction</i> by Charles Todd & Laura Lippman. Brooklyn Public Library, Central Library, Dr. S. Steven Dweck Center for Contemporary Culture, 10 Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, NY, 7pm.   |
| <b>NOV 16 —</b>  | <b>Library Lecture:</b> <i>So You Think You Can... Detect</i> with Cordelia Frances Biddle, moderator, Anna Maria Alfieri (aka Patricia King), Kate Gallison (aka Irene Fleming), Roberta Isleib (aka Lucy Burdette) and Merry Jones. Mid-Manhattan Library, 40th Street and 5th Avenue, 6th Floor, 6:30pm.          |

## Using TV Techniques To Write a Killer Mystery

by Hank Phillipi Ryan

It all started with a deadline. A missed deadline.

Not mine, of course. I would never miss a deadline. And that's exactly the point.

When I was the newbiest of the newbies, a writer pal of mine was bemoaning her looming book-delivery date. "Oh," she said, "I'll never be finished in time. I'll have to ask for a month-long extension."

I burst out laughing. Extend a deadline? I'm a television reporter, have been for more than 30 years, and the thought of "extending" a deadline ... well, it's impossible. Can you imagine if I said to my news director, "Oh, woe is me! Can I go on the air at five *after* six instead of six? Because I'm just not ... feeling the muse."

I'd be tossed out of the newsroom faster than you can say "stack of resume tapes."



But that got me thinking—about how the many very useful things I've learned—and am still learning—as a reporter. And how they translate to my additional career as a mystery author.

Deadlines, of course. But there's lots more. And that was the essence of the seminar I gave MWA-NY members at your gorgeous Arts Center. The more I discuss it, the more powerful the realization that journalism techniques can be incredibly valuable in writing a killer novel—especially when you're stuck or worried you don't know where to go next.

For instance, when we're deciding what stories to put on the news, the big question is: "Why do I care?" There's a finite amount of time for the news, right? And we want to make sure people watch. So the only stories that make air are the ones we know people will care about. Same for your story. The only thing that should go on your pages is something people care about. Otherwise, they'll put the book down. If you're stuck, ask yourself: why is this here? Is it the most important, most compelling, most interesting thing that can possibly be here? Why will readers care about this part?

If the answer is, "They won't," then you're on the way to solving your problem. Figure out why *you* care. (Why is this scene here? Why is this paragraph here? What does it *do*?) Figure out how to make the readers care. And your story will suddenly take life.

Another question: Ask yourself: "What's the problem?" Great news stories are often about conflict. He said/she said. Someone who wants something and someone else who wants to stop them. Are you at a point in your novel where there's no problem? Think about how you can get to the clash of wills, or the obstacles, or the dilemma. It doesn't have to be huge. It just has to be conflict. When I was writing *Face Time*, I was at a point, very early on, where there was nothing wrong. Since it was early in the manuscript, it couldn't be actual danger. It just needed some tension.

So I made Charlotte hungry. That's all. Hungry. There was no food to be had, and her blood sugar was plummeting. So she was cranky and making bad decisions. All she could think about was food. A boring scene became injected with humor and tension and purpose. As it turned out—completely serendipitously—the need for food became pivotal to the entire plot.

I have ten questions I always ask myself when I'm stuck—and I'll send you the list if you like! But here's number 11: "What, me worry?" Because what seems like an insurmountable problem now won't be tomorrow. I promise. So just see what happens. And then you'll be powering ahead toward *The End*.

**HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN** is the investigative reporter for Boston's NBC affiliate, and has won twenty-seven Emmys for her work. Author of four mystery novels, Ryan has won the Agatha, Anthony and Macavity awards for her crime fiction. She's on the national board of directors of Mystery Writers of America and New England Sisters in Crime. Her newest suspense thriller, *The Other Woman*, is the first in a new series beginning in 2012 from Forge Books. Her website is [www.HankPhillippiRyan.com](http://www.HankPhillippiRyan.com)

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## ASK THE WRITER

### Interview with Brenda Novak by Mary Kennedy 8/19/2011

Recently I sat down with *New York Times* best-selling author Brenda Novak to learn about the Bulletproof series, her incredible work ethic and the secret of writing suspense.

**MK:** Incredibly, you've written forty books (or is it over forty books?) in the past ten years. I think everyone would like to know your secret.

**BN:** I've lost track. I always have new ones under contract, ones that are finished but haven't come out yet, ones I'm dreaming up but haven't yet sold, etc. I wish I had some great secret to share on how to be more productive (wish I could discover how to be more productive myself), but it's just a matter of juggling and taking it one day at a time.

**MK:** Can you tell us a little about the Bulletproof series?

**BN:** In *Inside*, Virgil Skinner must go undercover in a maximum security prison to break up a ruthless gang, and Assistant Deputy Warden Peyton Adams must work to keep him—and her heart—safe.

In *In Seconds*, Laurel Hodges has been on the run for the past four years, trying to out-distance the gang members who blame her for the death of one of their own. She's finally found peace and stability living next door to the handsome sheriff in the small town of Pineview, Montana. But just when she thinks she and her children are safe, the nightmare starts all over again.

In *In Close*, Brinkley Chapman has been searching for her missing mother for nearly two decades. It isn't until she uncovers the truth about her late husband's "accident" that she begins to suspect someone very close to her is behind both deaths. Then she learns that knowing too much can be murder.

**MK:** I loved the Department 6 series. A very clever concept, the notion of private investigators and high level operatives working as hired guns. I notice many of your books are set in the western states, Arizona, Montana and California.

**BN:** You know what they say: Write what you know. I was born in Utah, grew up in Arizona and have been

living in California ever since I married.

**MK:** For the past seven years, you've run a wildly successful online auction for diabetes research and have raised over a million dollars. How can readers be part of this wonderful event?

**BN:** It's easy! They can go to my website ([brendanovak.com](http://brendanovak.com)) and click on the auction link to register. Then they'll get the updates and reminders that keep everyone on track and will be all set when the auction goes live next May.

**MK:** Your books cover a wide range of topics, from supermax prisons to religious cults. How do you do your research?

**BN:** In my last online auction for diabetes research, I purchased the opportunity to pick the brain of Sergeant David Doglietto, an investigative officer at Soledad Prison. I'd just watched *Prison Break* and was mesmerized by it. I knew I wanted to write my own prison story but would need some help bringing that world to life. Dog helped me so much. He spent one whole Saturday with me, giving me a tour of the prison. He answered e-mail after e-mail. He even read the manuscript to double-check the details.

**MK:** Where can your fans catch up with you? Any events coming up?

**BN:** I throw a fabulous reader appreciation party (an entire weekend) every year with #1 *New York Times* Bestselling author Shristine Feehan. It's called FAN (Feehan and Novak.) It's on board a 1920s riverboat in Old Town Sacramento and it's always a lot of fun. The next one will be March 2-4. Beyond that, I'll be in Florida, New Jersey and Ohio in the coming months. Details are on my [website](http://brendanovak.com).

Readers can visit Brenda online at [brendanovak.com](http://brendanovak.com)

Mary Kennedy is a psychologist and the author of *The Talk Radio Mysteries*. Visit her online at [www.marykennedy.net](http://www.marykennedy.net).

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## ASK THE LAWYER

Dear Bob,

As someone who understands the industry, I'd like your input on ebooks. Do you think everything will have to be in ebook format soon? And does the writer have the same protections for their work in ebook format and hard copy?

It seems to me that this is the way the industry is going and I want to know how to protect myself.

Dear -----:

I cannot say authoritatively whether everything will have to be in ebook format soon.

However, I can tell you that of the seventy-eight books I have purchased in the last year, all seventy-eight

were ebooks, purchased from either Amazon or Apple. I have not purchased a single hardcover or paperback since I bought my iPad almost a year ago.

I would imagine that many or most Kindle, Nook and Sony Reader owners could say the same thing.

So the short answer to your question is that if your book is not available for purchase in the various ebook formats, you will likely miss out on sales to those readers who, like me, no longer purchase printed books.

Copyright protects books in ebook format just as it protects printed books. In addition, most ebook publishers encrypt their ebooks so they cannot be easily pirated.

Which is not to say that they are completely hacker-proof. Then again, a few years ago one of my clients discovered that some of her books, which at that time had been published only in paperback, and not in any ebook editions, had been scanned into digital form by some enterprising pirate and were available for free download on a Pirate Bay-type website. When we contacted Harlequin, her publisher, to let them know about the problem, Harlequin's lawyers were already familiar with the issue. My client was not the first of their authors to be pirated in this manner. So I don't think ebooks are necessarily less safe from piracy than printed books.

Where authors do require more protection for ebooks than printed books is in the out-of-print/reversion of rights clause in their publisher contracts. Those provisions typically allow authors to terminate the contract (which otherwise would continue in force for the term of copyright, i.e. the author's lifetime plus 70 years) if and when the publisher fails or refuses to reprint the book, and so allows it to go out of print.

But the neat thing about an ebook (from a publisher's perspective) is that, like diamonds, they are forever! They need never go out of print, unless and until technological changes require investment in new ebook formats. Even then, the costs are likely to be much lower than those of ordering new small-run printings of old print titles. So authors need to stipulate in the reversion of rights clauses of their publisher contracts that the availability of an ebook edition (or, for that matter, of a print on demand edition) shall not be sufficient to maintain their book "in print." The publisher, or at least the big New York publishers, will almost certainly respond, "OK, but if we pay you at least \$200 per year on royalties from the ebook and/or print-on-demand editions, then your book will be considered 'in print,' and you will not be able to revert rights." Unfortunately, you're not likely to be able to do much better than that.

I hope this has been helpful.

Best regards,

Bob Stein

*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 thirteen years in-house at Random House, Simon and Schuster and Warner Books before entering private practice.**

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**WHAT'S NOOSE?**



## Books

Lisa Bork. *In Sickness and in Death: a Broken Vows Mystery*. Midnight Ink.

Merry Jones. *Summer Session*. Severn House.

Kate White. *The Sixes*. HarperCollins.

## Short Stories

Richard Caciarelli. "Man of the Year." *Woman's World*, 25 August 2011.1

----- "Murder at Eleven." *Woman's World*, 22 September 2011.

----- "A Rose by Any Other Name." *Over My Dead Body*, Summer 2011.

## Ebooks

Annette Meyers' 1993 Broadway theatre mystery, *Murder: The Musical*, is now available on Kindle.

Send items for "What's Noose?" to Peggy Ehrhart at [pehrhart@sprynet.com](mailto:pehrhart@sprynet.com). Please use the format you see in the entries above. *Italicize* book and magazine titles and put "quotes" around the titles of short stories and articles.

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## The final part of an Interview with *Murder, She Wrote* Authors Donald Bain and Renée Paley-Bain



by Donna Nowak

**DN: How much of yourself do you put into the voice of Jessica Fletcher, Renée and Donald? What appeals to you about the character? How do you keep yourself true to Jessica's persona and voice? How much do you experiment with her identity?**

**DB:** It's a wonderful compliment to be told that reading the books is like watching the TV series on Sunday nights. Being handed the character of Jessica Fletcher has been a two-edged sword. On the one hand, she's a joy to work with. The character is multi-dimensional and full of vim and curiosity. On the other hand, having her already fully formed places restrictions on us. NBC-Universal has a substantial stake in the character and carefully scrutinizes every manuscript. There are limitations placed on to what extent Jessica can become romantically involved. Other than that, we're given considerable leeway in the directions we can take her, including having her take flying lessons and earn her private pilot's license. Renée and I watch TV episodes on a regular basis to keep Jessica's "voice" firmly in mind.

**RPB:** I love Jessica and am nothing like her. She is brave where I am timid. She is observant where I am oblivious. And she has an unending supply of energy and enthusiasm. What fun it is to put on her personality and face the world!

**DN: Is it difficult to come up with fresh mystery plots on a regular basis, Donald and Renée? Do you usually have the plots or outlines worked out before you begin writing. Do you ever find yourself at a snag on a detail - working out the crime? In *Murder, He Wrote*, I was amazed to read you don't write out of sequence, Donald.**

**DB:** You're right, of course. Plotting a murder mystery can be a daunting task, and we often run into snags that

were unexpected and that have to be resolved. We try to chart the stories as they develop, but even then we sometimes run into situations similar to painting yourself into a corner. But we hash those situations out and manage to resolve them in the rewriting and editing process. We also have a wonderful editor, Kerry Donovan, who has a keen eye for unresolved or poorly resolved plot issues, and keeps us honest. It's true that I'm unable to write out-of-sequence. Renée doesn't have any problem with it.

**RPB:** Don is a real news junkie and between us, we read two newspapers a day in addition to following TV and online news. The criminals of the world are very inspiring. They don't have difficulty coming up with new and ingenious ways of committing crimes, so we just steal their ideas. About midway through the book, to keep track of what's happening, we do a chapter by chapter précis, and then a list of what needs to be resolved. This trick helps us work out the intricacies of the plot.

**DN: How do you keep from getting stale in a series? What galvanizes you?**

**DB:** I sometimes joke that our motivation is the mailman when he delivers bills that must be paid. Moving Jessica out of Cabot Cove and placing her in different settings certainly helps to keep things fresh. We also spend considerable time discussing the books as they progress, and looking for ways to inject new life into them.

**RPB:** What he said.

**DN: What are the key elements to any mystery? What are the key elements to being successful as a writer?**

**DB:** I wish I knew. Plot is everything in a murder mystery, or crime novel as the British prefer. As for being a successful writer, the word "professionalism" keeps coming to mind. Above all I want to be viewed as a professional writer. I say in my autobiography, *Murder, He Wrote* (Purdue University Press), that I approach writing with the philosophy that whatever I'm writing at the moment is the most important thing I'll ever write, and maybe the last. I apply that attitude even to books I'm ghosting that won't carry my byline.

**RPB:** I think successful writers inject their unique views into their characters and stories, whether the books are cozies or thrillers. I respond to the humanity of characters I either recognize or can identify with, the delight of solving a puzzle, and the thrill of vicarious living. That's what makes a mystery come alive for me. Then, too, the language has to move the story along without distracting the reader. That's what we strive to do. If we can pull that off, then the book is a success in my eyes.

You can contact Donna Nowak at [writerdonna7@hotmail.com](mailto:writerdonna7@hotmail.com)

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## MEET THE MEMBER

### MWA-NY members tell us about themselves.

#### HON. ANDREW J. PECK

United States Magistrate Judge  
Southern District of New York  
Email: [Andrew.Peck@NYSD.USCOURTS.GOV](mailto:Andrew.Peck@NYSD.USCOURTS.GOV)



Magistrate Judge Andrew J. Peck was appointed United States Magistrate Judge for the Southern District of New York on February 27, 1995, and served as Chief Magistrate Judge in 2004-2005. He graduated with honors from Cornell University in 1974 and from Duke University School of Law in 1977, where he was Notes & Comments Editor of the *Duke Law Journal*.

Judge Peck is an adjunct professor at Cardozo Law School, where he teaches a course in Pretrial Practice. Judge Peck is a frequent lecturer on issues relating to electronic discovery and is a member of the Sedona Conference.

In his spare time, Judge Peck is a member of the Baker Street Irregulars and other Sherlock Holmes societies. A member of MWA for more than thirty years, Judge Peck also has served as a member of the board of directors and as executive vice president of the MWA. At a local level, he was chapter president (2003-4) and executive vice president (2004.) Judge Peck has been a continuous presence on the MWA-NY, as member or historian for over ten years.



#### **CORDELIA FRANCES BIDDLE**

Cordelia Frances Biddle writes the Martha Beale suspense series. *Without Fear*, *Deception's Daughter* and *The Conjurer* are set in Victorian-era Philadelphia. She has just completed the newest tale, *The Actress*, and is an adjunct professor of creative writing at Drexel University's Honors College. Cordelia penned the historical novel *Beneath the Wind*, and co-authored the Nero Blanc Crossword Mystery series with her husband, Steve Zettler – twelve titles without slaying one another! Prior to becoming an author, she acted on the stage in New York City, and in the daytime drama *One Life to Live*. [www.CordeliaFrancesBiddle.com](http://www.CordeliaFrancesBiddle.com).

Send contributions to Meet the Member to [mhannanmandel@yahoo.com](mailto:mhannanmandel@yahoo.com)

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#### **MWA-NY University Hits New York**

Attended by a large group of members and non-members alike, the MWA University in New York on August 13th was a very valuable experience for all attendees, whether published or not. In his introduction, Larry Light reminded us that mystery fiction deals with three things: the nature of evil, how to solve a problem, and the restoration of order. Crime writers must learn "how to bottle lightning." The instructors then

proceeded to discuss ways to do just that.

**Jess Lourey** demonstrated her “Pyramid on a Point” method for starting a novel. Starting with a one sentence summary of the book, she moves on to expand the sentence into a paragraph. Then she clearly describes her characters (everything from how they look to their quirks), sketches the setting (sometimes literally drawing or taking a picture), expands the paragraph about the novel and then roughly outlines the book. When she has completed all these steps, she is ready to start her novel. **TIP: Whether you’re a “pantser” who just goes with the flow or a “plotter” who outlines before writing, understanding your characters and their concerns is key to a successful novel.**

**Hallie Ephron** explained that the mystery story is so difficult to write because it is two stories – the story of the crime and the story of the sleuth. Breaking the novel into acts, Ephron explained that Act 1 is where the reader meets the characters. By page 10 the reader should know who the protagonist is and by the end of Act 1 the reader should have, unknowingly, met the villain. Act 2 is where the complications arise, secrets are revealed, and the stakes are raised. Act 3 is where the protagonist and villain confront each other and the story is brought to a climax. Each Act is separated by twists, of which there are many different types. Twists work to shift suspicion and raise the stakes. **TIP: Hallie reminded us that readers focus on the beginnings and the endings of stories – make them great!!**

**Dan Stashower** pointed out that setting and description are the hardest things to get a handle on. Used properly they will mirror elements of tone, theme, character, etc. **TIP: Each element of a setting must work on more than one level and exert an emotional undertow.**

**Cordelia Biddle Barrow** urged us to believe in our character’s struggles and aspirations. Find out each person’s “ghost” by writing a character autobiography. Cordelia stressed the importance of allowing the characters to develop organically – they are living creatures. In each scene, ask these questions of **all** your characters: Who am I? What do I want? What’s my obstacle? How do I overcome my obstacle to achieve my goal? She reminded us that characters must react. **TIP: Don’t save anything. Don’t hold anything back.**

**Reed Farrel Coleman** discussed the sometimes tortuous topic of editing. Reminding us that editing is not an organic thing to do, Reed asked us to consider that: 1. There is no such thing as wasted words – you only get better by doing, not thinking. 2. Your words are not your babies – they are words. Anything you fight hard for should probably be the first thing to go. 3. Listen to everything others say to you. Don’t be anxious to throw something out, but be **willing** to do so. Follow Reed’s “Rule of Three”—don’t change something unless three people say the same thing. He pointed out that it is often what you take out and/or add that is the difference between being published or unpublished. **TIP: Read your work aloud to someone else. This uses a different part of your brain and only by reading it to someone will you really hear what it sounds like.**

**Hank Phillipi Ryan** finished off the day with a much needed pep talk. Outlining her thirteen things she wished someone had told her, she guided us through the pitfalls and must dos of the novel writing process.

From "your first draft will be terrible" to the importance of celebrating each small victory along the way, Hank reminded us what a courageous bunch we mystery writers are. **TIP: Remember to ask yourself : What would I do if I knew I couldn't fail?**

What indeed?

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## MWA-NY Mentor Program



**Would you like a critique of your manuscript? The Mentor Program offers MWA-NY members the opportunity to have a crime related manuscript or short story critiqued by an active member of the chapter. Both unpublished and published writers looking for an outside opinion of their work may participate.**

Features of the program:

1. The first fifty pages of a manuscript or one or two short stories up to fifty pages may be submitted for critique.
2. Only crime genres are accepted – mystery, thriller, romantic suspense, police procedural, etc.
3. Constructive feedback is provided in writing by published members of the New York chapter.
4. A \$50 fee to participate.

The 2011-12 cycle will kick off after Labor Day with an e-mail describing how to submit to the program. This year's deadline for submission is midnight October, 31, 2011. Critiques will be sent in February, 2012.

We look forward to working with you!

The Mentor Program Committee:

Catherine Maiorisi, Chairperson

Peggy Ehrhart

Ken Isaacson

Deborah Pines

Persia Walker

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