**Mission Statement**
Promote the ongoing advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers.

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**inSinc**
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**Past Presidents in SinC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987–88</td>
<td>Sara Paretsky</td>
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<td>1988–89</td>
<td>Nancy Pickard</td>
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<td>Margaret Maron</td>
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<td>1990–91</td>
<td>Susan Dunlap</td>
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<td>1991–92</td>
<td>Carolyn G. Hart</td>
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<td>1992–93</td>
<td>P. M. Carlson</td>
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<td>1993–94</td>
<td>Linda Grant</td>
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<td>1994–95</td>
<td>Barbara D’Amato</td>
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<td>1995–96</td>
<td>Elaine Raco Chase</td>
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<td>1996–97</td>
<td>Annette Meyers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>Sue Henry</td>
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<td>1998–99</td>
<td>Medora Sale</td>
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<td>1999–00</td>
<td>Barbara Burnett Smith</td>
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<td>2000–01</td>
<td>Claire Carmichael McNab</td>
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<td>2001–02</td>
<td>Eve K. Sandstrom</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002–03</td>
<td>Kate Flora</td>
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<td>2003–04</td>
<td>Kate Grilley</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004–05</td>
<td>Patricia Sprinkle</td>
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<td>2005–06</td>
<td>Libby Hellmann</td>
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<td>2006–07</td>
<td>Rochelle Krich</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007–08</td>
<td>Roberta Isleib</td>
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<td>2008–09</td>
<td>Judy Clemens</td>
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<td>2009–10</td>
<td>Marcia Talley</td>
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<td>2010–11</td>
<td>Cathy Pickens</td>
</tr>
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<td>2011–12</td>
<td>Frankie Bailey</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012–13</td>
<td>Hank Phillippi Ryan</td>
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<td>2013–14</td>
<td>Laura DiSilverio</td>
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<td>2014–15</td>
<td>Catriona McPherson</td>
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<td>2015–16</td>
<td>Leslie Budewitz</td>
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<td>2016–17</td>
<td>Diane Vallere</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017–18</td>
<td>Kendel Lynn</td>
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<td>2018–19</td>
<td>Sherry Harris</td>
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Hello Sibs!

I hope you all had a great Thanksgiving — but that you didn’t eat too much turkey. Remember, we’ve got several other holidays coming up, all of which seem to encourage over-indulging. And over-indulging tends to lead to napping when you should be writing!

Before I get too far along with a letter to you, let me give my heartfelt thanks to John Bychowski who has graciously allowed me to use so many of the great photos he made at Bouchercon. John is a gifted photographer and I totally appreciate his sharing.

I normally take most of the photos for inSinC, but my personal life had some bumps in the road and I wasn’t able to spend as much time as usual away from home. That said, my photos aren’t nearly as good as John’s.

As we all become accustomed to inSinC’s being totally digital, I’m learning how to make it more user friendly. Rather than have a bunch of underlines in text to indicate a “hot” link to an email address or website, I’ve chosen to make them bolder than the rest of copy in an article. Look at the information directly below this and you’ll see hot links to my email.

I wish wonderful holidays to you all — and, as always, happy writing!

—Molly

Most articles for inSinC are submitted by SinC members. If you are interested in writing an article (or a series), please contact Molly Weston who will send you submission guidelines.

Articles for inSinC are due the 10th of the month two months preceding issue date (April 10 for June issue, etc.). High resolution (1 mb or greater) photos are encouraged, however, please do not include more than two without prior authorization. NO CAPTIONS will be included. For submission guidelines or questions, please contact Molly.
Recently a publicist (OK, mine) asked me what my number-one self-promotion tip would be to another author. Some of you reading this may have already been that “other author” at some point. Maybe I’ve given my best move away to too many people already. But here it is: Service.

Service to other writers. Service to one of the writing associations. Service.

It’s not the only path. Plenty of people get published and sell a lot of books and never darken the doorstep of a single Sisters in Crime chapter meeting. But service was and is my path, and maybe it’s yours, too.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not doing that thing where when the job interviewer asks you what your weakness is, and you say, “Well, Karen, I’m just too hard a worker.” I’m not being saintly when I say I self-promote through service. Although some days the vast number of emails I get make my palms bleed. No. It’s not saintly to give my time. It’s selfish. I have gained so much through giving my time to Sisters in Crime that, honestly, I feel like I’m getting away with something. I should stand aside and give someone else a turn.

And I will. But in the year I have before me, it is my presidential duty to strip the mystery community’s bones clean of every single morsel of self-promotion meat I can for Sisters in Crime and, hey, what do you know? For myself, too. And I don’t mind teaching you all how to do it, too: Let’s unabashedly self-promote in a way that doesn’t make people hate the sight of us.

Here are some early lessons I learned about self-promotion by joining Sisters in Crime.

1. Joining might be enough. Or it might not. The check to SinC clears, great. You’re in. If you get self-satisfaction from simply being affiliated with the winning team that is Sisters in Crime, you’re done. Join and get on with the business of being you. If you’re looking for return on investment, however, I recommend getting involved. I know, horror story for introverts. I KNOW. But try a small assignment, first. Figure out something you’re good at and offer that particular skill to your local chapter. They will be thrilled.

2. Another lesson: Getting involved pays dividends. So now you’re doing some small assignments for your chapter, and you wonder: What’s in this for me? Well, do the local chapter leaders suddenly know your name? Do you have a presence at the meetings now that you’re helping out with setup or taking photos for the newsletter? Getting involved is the single best way to meet people without having to be your awkward-sauce self. You’re just trying to get this assignment done, but you’re also engaging with some of your writing heroes and the local booksellers and librarians. Maybe you’re getting a reputation for being a smart cookie, or for bringing the best cookies, whatever it is. You’re getting a reputation. That’s true whether you’re trying or not, so you might as well try to fetch a good reputation, rather than a wallflower one.
Next lesson: People want to help you. One of the best things about the mystery community is how generous it is. People want to help you—especially if you’re putting yourself forward to lots of people. Better odds. And the best thing about all of this is, when someone helps you, they get to take a little ownership of your trajectory. They want to brag on you and say, “Hey, see my friend there?” or “I read that book in its first draft!” It can feel strange to have someone take pride in you like that at first, even to take a little credit, but let them. They are the carriers of your message to readers you can’t reach. Let people help you. Let people take credit for you. That goes for places you’ve taken classes, your college alma mater, your old neighborhood haunts. As we all learned in Girl Scouts and 4-H, you make new friends but you also keep the old. Silver, gold, etc.

And here’s a lesson straight out of Marketing 101: **Figure out the benefits.** Welcome to your new small business. You will now find yourself icked out by the amount of self-promotion you’re expected to do. (If you’re not icked out, your family and friends and random strangers on the street might be, so take a breather.) It’s like you’re a used car salesman, you’re thinking! But wait. People drive used cars, don’t they? When asking for help, when you’re trying to figure out your self-promotion approach, ask yourself what’s in it for the other party. Don’t make any pitch — to a library or bookstore for an event, to another author for a favor — until you have considered what there is to gain for them. Is there nothing in it for the other party? Well, that’s a real favor you’re asking; be prepared for a no or a very generous yes and then treat that person like a god. There’s usually one benefit you can count on by engaging with another bookish person as you build your career: community. You can be in this together.

And that leads us to the last lesson, which is that **Community makes everything better.** When you invite another author to join you for an event, when you offer to teach something at your local library instead of doing a reading (which almost no one likes), when you offer to put together a solid panel of authors for your local independent bookstore, when you do things in good faith to benefit not just yourself but someone else, sure, it’s still marketing. But it’s a lot more fun, and leaves the ground behind you more welcoming for others.

A man named Nelson Henderson once wrote: “The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.” If there’s shade for us today, remember the group of women who decided to start Sisters in Crime. But step out into the sun, too. While it’s your season, plant a tree or two out where shade is needed.

When you give a little time, the dividends are so rich, I promise you, you’re going to think you’re getting away with something.

*Lori Rader-Day*

*President*
Sisters in Crime executive director Beth Wasson has announced her retirement, effective April 30, 2020. She will be the honored guest of Sisters in Crime at Malice Domestic 2020.

Beth has been the public face of Sisters in Crime for 28 years. “Beth has shepherded our organization from 300 members when she started to our present 4,000 members and from a national to international organization,” said Sherry Harris. “While her dedication to Sisters in Crime is beyond compare, her love of the organization is what has made Beth indispensable. Beth has always been more than an employee. She’s been the heart of Sisters in Crime. We all wish her the very best as she retires.”

The SinC board of directors has spent several months on a transition plan. The board hopes that by taking a professional, methodical approach to hiring her replacement, Beth’s legacy will be preserved, that our members and our board will be served well, and that SinC will have a solid foundation for the next 30 years.

After weighing and investigating many alternatives, the SinC Board have put together a two-pronged, two-stage plan for this transition. The plan is to engage two companies. One, a member management association called Next Wave Group, will take care of much of the day-to-day business, mailings, storage, etc.; they will also help with some yearly financial and maintenance responsibilities.

The second company is Your Ladders, owned and run by Julie Hennrikus, who will provide a human face to the transition but whose primary responsibility will be to help the national board assess what the executive role is and could be going forward, with a goal of hiring a full-time executive director within two years.

Why two-pronged? The maintenance of Sisters in Crime at the national level is a mixture of administrative tasks and high-level planning and strategy. Your Ladders will help SinC with the higher functions immediately and help leaders understand the ideal role of the executive director while Next Wave Group takes care of all the details, including responding to individual member inquiries.

Why two-stage? “Assessing what SinC needs from its next executive director is a critical moment in the life of our organization, and we don’t want to rush it,” Harris said. “Working with Your Ladders to work through the issues and to project our needs will help us make sure the job is done thoughtfully and professionally.”

More about the transition team
Patricia Troy is the CEO of Next Wave Group, LLC, a full service association and organization management firm that specializes in using technology and interfacing systems to provide simple, cost-effective solutions. They have been doing association management since
She also created support systems for a Gender Parity Task Force and the New England New Play Alliance. Under her leadership StageSource also took on an advocacy role. Julie is also a mystery author who attributes much of her success to Sisters in Crime.

Each company will be contracted for a year, with the option to add more time if the SinC board requires it. Your Ladders began its year November 1. Next Wave Group begins its year January 1, 2020. Beth Wasson remains in her position through April 30, and has agreed to stay on in a consultant role if needed for a few weeks after that date.

Members who have questions about this transition may email Lori Rader-Day. Those wishing to send Beth Wasson well wishes can email her, as always, at her SinC address. Look for Beth at Malice Domestic 2020 to wish her good luck! †
I’m not sure what the numbers would actually be, but I feel relatively certain that the percentage of books published annually by the Big Five (or is it four now? It’s so hard to keep track) by minority writers does not equal the population percentages (12.1% of the American population is non-Hispanic African-American, for example; are 12.1% of the books published by non-Hispanic African-Americans, centering their experience? I suspect not).

I have talked, here and on panels, about the lack of opportunity for queer writers writing queer stories with the major publishers. This isn’t to say there aren’t exceptions to these rules — Kristen Lepionka comes to mind, as does Ellen Hart — but for the most part, those venues aren’t as open to queer fiction as a queer writer might hope. The situation is equally grim for other minority writers. Kensington used to have romance lines dedicated solely to women of color — both Latinx/Hispanic and African-American — but those were romance-only lines of books; no crime novels published there. Likewise, Harlequin’s enormous umbrella of lines and titles includes a line directed at women of color.

But where do the minority crime writers go?

For every success story like Walter Mosley or Rachel Howzell Hall, for every Steph Cha and Angie Kim and Naomi Hirohara, there are dozens of other writers denied access to agents, publishers, and readers. For every #ownvoices post on Twitter, looking for titles and writers, there are an equal number of responses from unpublished minority writers, still trying to get their work read, into print, and out into the world.

It often falls to the small presses to pick up the slack from their larger, corporate brothers. This was certainly the case for queer writers — publishers like Bella, Bold Strokes, Bywater and numerous others carried the mantle for queer lit before, during and after the queer lit boom in New York.

But is that same economic opportunity — starting a press to publish work out of the mainstream — available to people of color in this country?

In December of 2018, Publishers Weekly did a piece on a new imprint for a small crime press: Polis Books announced the launch of Agora Books, an imprint headed and edited by Chantelle Aimee Osman, and also announced the first three titles signed.

This is, of course, a very exciting opportunity for minority writers, and for the crime fiction genre as a whole. One can never forget how the arrival of strong women writers in the 1980’s publishing business reinvigorated, reinvented, and refreshed the genre, at risk of getting stale and boring.

Interview with Chantelle Aimee Osman

by Greg Herren
I was delighted to get an opportunity to talk with Chantelle about the new imprint, her goals, and what the future holds for Agora Books.

She focuses on crime novels exploring society, economy, politics, culture, race, and gender in unique and different ways. The former Editor-in-Chief of RT Book Reviews Magazine and a freelance editor for over 10 years, she also co-hosts the Crime Friction podcast, and is an instructor at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing, Authors at Large and LitReactor. Chantelle is the author of the non-fiction series on writing The Quick and Dirty Guides To… and has also published numerous works of short fiction in addition to serving as editor for several anthologies. Find her online at chantelleaimee.com and on Twitter @SuspenseSiren.

How long have you been working on making Agora a reality?

It’s been a desire of mine for some time. And of Jason Pinter’s as well. It just happened to be something that crystallized for both of us around summer/fall of last year. When I talked to him about it, we realized we’d both been thinking along the same lines, and knew we had to make it happen. Everything moved quite quickly from there.

What is your mission statement? What kind of works are you looking for?

Agora means open forum, and was the political, artistic and spiritual center of the ancient Greek city. Crime fiction has always served — from the very inception of the genre — as a spotlight on issues of moral and social justice, shining light onto people and portions of our culture that tend to go overlooked. With this ethos in mind, the imprint features crime novels which explore society, economy, politics, culture, race, and gender in unique and different ways. And honestly? I’m looking for something I haven’t seen before.

How many books per season will Agora bring out?

We’re aiming for 6-9. Currently we have

- September - John Vercher’s Three-Fifths
- October - Patricia Shanae Smith’s Remember
- November - Tori Eldridge’s The Ninja Daughter
- January - Gary Phillips’ Matthew Henson and the Ice Temple of Harlem
- February - Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s Untamed Shore
- March - Gabino Iglesias’ anthology Both Sides
- June - Johnny Shaw’s Undocumented
- July - Sung J. Woo’s Shadows Deep

And we’re working on our Fall 2020 list now.

Wow, those are some impressive sounding titles! I’m already looking forward to reading John Vercher’s book, which sounds fantastic. How did you find your original list titles?

We’ve been so lucky to find authors in a variety of places. Several have come via agents, several via in-person pitches (like ThrillerFest, Pitch Slam, etc.) and even a couple through the slush pile! We’re on the lookout everywhere for new and different voices, and know that — just like we’re not publishing traditional crime fiction — we may not find them in traditional ways.

I see on the website that Polis accepts unsolicited submissions. Are you being overwhelmed? Does a writer need an agent to submit?

I was having drinks with the awesome and amazing Kellye Garrett around the time Jason and I were making the plans for Agora. She knew our ethos, and what we are looking for. She mentioned that a lot of the voices we want have a hard time finding representation, because they aren’t the mainstream most publishers are looking for. It was a wonderful suggestion, and therefore, Agora will always accept unagented
submissions. And yes, we’re overwhelmed, but that’s a good thing. (Just don’t expect a fast response time!)

**Are you open to submissions from LGBTQ+ authors?**

YES, please! These voices are so underrepresented in our genre, and I’d love, just even as a reader, to see more LGBTQ+ protagonists on the page.

**What can Agora offer an author in terms of support, once the book is signed?**

Polis Books is an award-winning publisher of fiction, and provides most of the support of any traditional publisher — marketing, events, review, blurbs, distribution, etc. We also take pride in involving our authors in every step of the process. From weighing in on cover design, to social media plans. Obviously, we are a smaller publisher, so don’t have the financial resources of a Big Five, but also, as a result of our size, are able to provide much more focused attention to each book.

Polis/Agora is listed as an approved publisher by the MWA and ITW.

**What tips or advice can you give an author who is considering submitting to you?**

First, wherever you’re submitting, please pay close attention to guidelines — what the agent/publisher wants (query, synopsis, chapters, etc.), and how they want it. It’s so easy to make small mistakes in a query or synopsis, but realize that agents and editors may receive 50–500 of these a day, and simply don’t have the number of hours to read every single manuscript thoroughly. Make sure that you don’t give the reader ANY reason to reject your work other than the fact that it, subjectively, wasn’t for them. Have it as polished and error-free as possible. But most of all, make sure you’re *telling* the story, not relating a series of facts scene-by-scene. I want to see your passion for your work coming through.

**How important is a social media presence for an Agora author?**

It’s not vital — what’s important is your book — but it certainly helps if an author has a built-in audience prior to publication. And, we certainly do look prospective authors up online prior to signing them on. What’s more important is that whatever social media presence you do maintain is consistent. Readers don’t want to see a Twitter account that hasn’t had a new post for 3 years, or has solely self-promotional tweets. You absolutely need to have a website where readers, reviewers, etc. can find the relevant information about you and your book. If you’re not comfortable with social media, I always recommend finding just one platform that suits you best and staying there; as a publisher we’ll also help you along the way.

**Would you give a thumbnail summary of Agora’s first three books?**

*Three-Fifths*, by John Vercher is a compelling and timely debut novel from an assured new voice about a biracial black man, passing for white, who is forced to confront the lies of his past while facing the truth of his present when his best friend, just released from prison, involves him in a hate crime.

*Three-Fifths* is a story of secrets, identity, violence and obsession with a tragic conclusion that leaves all involved questioning the measure of a man, and was inspired by the author’s own experiences with identity as a biracial man during his time as a student in Pittsburgh amidst the simmering racial tension produced by the L.A. Riots and the O.J. Simpson trial in the mid-nineties.
Remember by Patricia Smith is a riveting debut psychological thriller about the power memory has over us.

Portia Willows was a senior in high school in Los Angeles when her world fell apart. While dealing with the aftermath of the accident that took the lives of her mother and sister, she finds herself forced to face her own memory, which may not be quite what it seems. But Portia was not an average teenage girl. She suffers from severe social anxiety disorder that prevented her from having any sort of life, while her little sister, Piper, was her best, and only, friend.

Now, five years later, Portia is forced to recall the events of the past while being questioned about a horrific crime she doesn’t remember. During those years, she created a toxic, agoraphobic, life with her father, cigarettes and alcohol her only companions. She was unable to cope with her loss until Ethan Torke moved in across the street and changed Portia’s perspective in ways she could not possibly comprehend. But the truth always catches up and fantasies never last. An unforgettable tale of memory, love, and strength through the darkest of times, Remember announces a brave new voice in psychological suspense.

The Ninja Daughter by Tori Eldridge is an action-packed thriller about a Chinese-Norwegian modern-day ninja with Joy Luck Club family issues who fights the Los Angeles Ukrainian mob, sex traffickers, and her own family to save two desperate women and an innocent child.

After her sister is raped and murdered, Lily Wong dedicates her life and ninja skills to the protection of women. But her mission is complicated. Not only does she live above the Chinese restaurant owned by her Norwegian father and inspired by the recipes of her Chinese mother, but she has to hide her true self from her Hong Kong tiger mom, who is already disappointed in her daughter’s less than feminine ways, and who would be horrified to know what she had become.

But when a woman and her son she escorted safely to an abused women’s shelter return home to dangerous consequences, Lily is forced to not only confront her family and her past, but to team up with a mysterious — and very lethal — stranger to rescue them.

Till next time!

Frankie’s List

More than 10 years ago, former SinC president Frankie Bailey began adding to a list begun by the late Eleanor Taylor Bland of published African American crime writers. Frankie later added women of color and LGBTQ writers. For more details on the list see the SinC website.

To apply for the annual Eleanor Taylor Bland Award for Writers of Color see this page on the SinC website.

Greg Herren is a New Orleans-based author and editor. He is a co-founder of the Saints and Sinners Literary Festival, which takes place in New Orleans every spring. He has won numerous awards including three Lambda, the Moonbeam Gold and Silver Medal.
Well, friends, this is mysterious. How did we manage to misplace a whole 'nother year? We’ve been having too much fun, clearly. At least we have over here at Croak & Dagger (New Mexico chapter). The C&D Great Library Adventure will rollick on into its fourth year in January, 2020 — more great display opportunities for libraries, more great marketing opportunities for our author-members.

And from the “no good deed goes unpunished” department, this bulletin: If you’re a hit with the patrons of one library, other libraries will hunt you down. For some reason (that we know well) the words “statistically significant” circulation boost make librarians smile. And since we hand over packets of our chapter bookmarks (with our website and meeting dates) everywhere we go, it’s not that hard to track down the Great Library Adventure’s perpetrators.

Great (Little) Library Adventure
Our “big” strategic jump this year was an official “little” extension of the Great Library Adventure. We are now extending our community outreach to our state’s 50 smallest community libraries — The Great (Little) Library Adventure.

A bill filed last January in the state legislature proposed to offer a small amount of state funding annually to each of the 50 smallest community libraries (either municipally sponsored or nonprofit if there is no official library service). The initial form of the bill included a list of the 50 specific community libraries to receive funding. The bill made its way through The Lege and became law. Money for the tiniest libraries! Ta-Dah! However, the bill shed the list of the 50 smallest along the way, replaced with a formula for the State Librarian to identify libraries in communities with populations below 3,000 residents.

We of course snatched up the original draft, with the actual names of communities, so we could (sort of, mostly) find them on a map. (Thank you, Joan Saberhagen and AAA.) Skilled marketeers though we are, we could never have compiled a list of our state’s 50 smallest libraries by ourselves. But with a gift like this, we’re off!

Perhaps with better initial planning we could have avoided the outcome — two separate displays now making their way around the state. But, you know all about our experimental approach to the Great Library Adventure, and hey, what’s 350 miles among friends?

One of the great benefits of the G(L)LA is that our chapter has discovered the “hidden skills” of our members’ past lives. Our current president, Charlene Bell Dietz (newest: The Scientist, The Psychic and the Nut) was a regional sales rep for a major publisher in her past life, so she knows the location of lots of tiny places. Off she went through the sagebrush and the mountains, back and forth across the Rio Grande, bookmark packets in hand.

Follow up
We’re now following up with small-library (volunteer) directors who heard the magic word — free. Free bookmarks. Free totes. Free displays. Free pairs of newest-covers posters. Free events. Or as one librar-

by Ann Zeigler
ian said to Charlene in wonderment, “Wait, what? You’re not selling something?”

Well, not exactly free, now that you mention it. We are “selling” something — our author-members. The libraries are getting free-to-them stuff from us, and they’re paying in what we value, free-to-us promotion to their patrons for our 21 author-members. We know that the best of all recommendations is the hand-selling kind by librarians, even if they don’t have our books in their own systems.

**Doing it better**

We learned something else useful as we rollicked back and forth across the state, scattering displays as we went. (With 118 books, we can do that.) Librarians really really really like books with stickers on the covers. Those “finalist” and “winner” stickers are actual winners with librarians. They’ll take a sticker over a great cover design every time. Who knew.

And the totes. Ah, yes, the totes. We ordered 100 totes with our chapter logo on one side when we held a full-day workshop on evidence for mystery writers last year, headlined by Jan Burke (thanks, SinC National!!). With 25 totes left, we gave single totes to librarians as we signed them up for display months.

With another workshop (Voices in Your Head, about believable characters, with Rhys Bowen from SinC) coming up next April, we ordered “a bunch” (the technical term for 500) of totes, and have been handing them out by the tote-load to libraries, for distribution to their book club members. And, after a few hang dog looks, we tossed in more totes for the staff.

Because who ever gave a treat to the library staff? We did, because they’re our best sales people.

And then there’s the spooky part about the totes. I don’t think it’s because our logo is a skull with a dagger through one eye socket, but when I hand over that tote filled with more totes, bookmarks, and 8.5x11-inch double-sided handouts of our new covers posters, the circulation-desk librarians just cuddle the bag, petting it as we talk about dates for our display.

Even mystery writers can get creeped out. But it’s worth it to spread the word about our author-members across the state.

We did it. You can do it.

Rollick on, Great Library Adventures!  

— Ann Zeigler  
Library Liaison, Croak & Dagger
In 1986, 26 women crime writers, frustrated with the obstacles they faced in publishing, met at Bouchercon, the international mystery convention, held that year in Baltimore, to plot a path toward being treated as the equals of male writers. They gathered again in May 1987 during the Edgar Awards Week in New York to formally establish the organization, Sisters in Crime (SinC). The group formed a steering committee and held the first membership meeting at Bouchercon in 1987, establishing a tradition that continues.

Every year, a team of Sisters, led by the immediate past president, creates a publishing summit report on an aspect of the industry useful to our members. In 2017, that project became Raising Our Voices for Thirty Years, celebrating the history of this extraordinary organization through the lens of the women who founded it and who have led it over the years. Their work in creating, growing, and sustaining Sisters in Crime has helped SinC fulfill its mission of promoting the advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers for three decades. The impact extends beyond our members, influencing all aspects of the publishing industry.

Read all about it on our website.

As part of the project, we recorded interviews with Sara Paretsky, our founding mother and first president, and Marcia Talley, president in 2009–10, a particularly important year. Those videos are now available on SinC’s YouTube channel. Each runs less than half an hour — one or both would make a great program for your chapter.

Sara’s and Marcia’s interviews can be viewed individually.

From the report and videos, you’ll learn about conditions in the publishing industry in 1986–87 that prompted Paretsky, Nancy Pickard, Margaret Maron, and others to form the organization. You’ll read why they focused on reviews, and how the SinC review project has significantly expanded the audience for crime fiction by women. You’ll hear about early opposition to SinC, and how the hard-won changes in our tax status enabled the organization to begin much of the programming members still rely on.

Since humor has always been part of SinC, it’s fitting that the process has also given us a new nickname. YouTube’s closed captioning software doesn’t always hear well, and translated “Sisters in Crime” as “Sisters Incredible.”

Or maybe the software understood us perfectly. Read the report and watch the videos and you’ll be more convinced than ever that Sisters are pretty incredible.

Leslie Budewitz blends her passion for food, great mysteries, and the Northwest in the Food Lovers’ Village Mysteries, set in Jewel Bay, Montana, and the Seattle Spice Shop Mysteries. The 2015–16 president of Sisters in Crime and first author to win Agatha Awards for both fiction and nonfiction, she lives and cooks in NW Montana.
Death is a grizzly matter. But, let’s face it, as mystery writers and crime writers, death is one of our most popular inciting incidents. There’s nothing that pits one family member against another quicker than an inheritance from Grandma or Dad. Whether it’s money, real property, artwork, a business, a European title or even the family dog, there is no shortage of plots describing the clash over assets belonging to the previous generation. Jane Austen’s *Emma, Sense and Sensibility*, Dicken’s *Bleak House*, PD James’ *A Certain Justice*, Louise Penny’s *Kingdom of the Blind*, and Robert Galbraith’s *Lethal White* are prime literary examples of the dog-eat-dog infighting over a valuable estate.

Those of us flirting with Medicare will remember how, from 1979 to 1991, Jock Ewing’s sons, J.R., Bobby and Gary, repeatedly resorted to fisticuffs over the control of daddy’s Ewing Oil dynasty in the TV show *Dallas*. For those of a more tender age, the HBO phenomenon *Succession* is drawn from the real life machinations of the Rupert Murdoch clan to control the News Corp media empire.

This article will explore the wonderful world of inheritance to help your murderous estate plotlines ring true when the knives, the guns, and the arsenic come out. And we’ll examine what happens to the family’s assets after the body has been buried.

**What is a will?**

A will is a document that expresses the manner in which a person desires their estate to be managed or divided after they die. In New York, two disinterested parties, who also sign affidavits acknowledging that they witnessed the will signing, must witness a will. To probate the estate, the will and the affidavits must be filed with the Probate Court.

I don’t want give the impression that I’m obsessed with the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, but her life and death are still making headlines and serve as the perfect example of how a family can breed divisiveness over a “money grab” of mama’s estate. When Aretha died in August 2018, her family and business associates presumed that she didn’t leave behind a will expressing her wishes for the distribution of her $80M estate. Her “intestate” estate, an estate without a will, was submitted to Michigan’s Oakland County Probate Court and her neutral niece was appointed as the administrator upon the consent of her family. However, in May 2019, three “wills” were discovered in her Detroit-area home. One, dated March 2014, was found inside a spiral notebook under a sofa cushion and two, dated March 2010, were discovered in a locked cabinet. The Probate court has been asked to rule whether the three wills were valid, and the contentious litigation is expected to continue for some time.

Other famous disgruntled heirs include Julian Lennon, the first born son of John Lennon who was left out of his father’s will and given only a trust...
fund created at the time his parents divorced; Jimi Hendrix’s brother, Leon, who claimed a share of his brother’s estate and Anna Nicole Smith, who wasn’t left a dime of her billionaire husband, J. Howard Marshall’s, estate.

Why does the validity of a will make a difference?
Under the law when a person dies without a will, there is a codified inheritance chart as to who is entitled to receive the estate. Assuming that an unmarried Aretha died “intestate,” her surviving heirs — her four sons — would equally share in the estate under the law. Any newly discovered will would supersede the intestate distribution, requiring the assets to be divided as per Aretha’s specific wishes. In Aretha’s case, believing there was no will, the sons had no objection to their neutral cousin managing the estate, however, the 2014 will designated her son, Kecalf, to serve as representative (“executor”) for the estate. This conflict is just the tip of the iceberg, as the Michigan court authorized a handwriting expert to authenticate the will.

Even before the authenticity is established, there are disputes over Aretha’s $80M estate. Particularly, the later will does not name her son Clarence as a beneficiary, and the brothers have challenged Kecalf’s ability to serve as the executor.

Handwritten Wishes
Aretha’s case also raises the question as to whether handwritten wills are valid. In New York, a handwritten (“Holographic”) or verbal (“Nuncupative”) will only be recognized as valid under extremely limited circumstances (EPTL 3-2.2). A serviceman must make these unusual wills during an armed conflict. The fact is that unless a serviceman is expressing his last wishes before his death, there is no such animal as a “deathbed” will, unless it is in writing.

Michigan’s laws are different. A holographic will must be in the decedent’s handwriting, intended to be their final will, and must be signed and dated. However, if the terms of the will are unclear or the handwriting is not authenticated, the will could be thrown out. Numerous things can go awry when someone handwrites their own will, and the rules change from state to state.

No will? No way?
Above I referred to someone dying “intestate,” dying without a will, which is a fairly common occurrence. Not everyone desires to face their mortality by signing away their assets to future generations. It is questionable as to whether Aretha did.

I also mentioned that New York’s Estate, Powers and Trust Law (Article 4) sets out a laundry list of distributees who receive an estate in such a situation. If a person is survived by a spouse and children, the property is divided between them. If there are no children, then everything goes to the surviving spouse, and similarly if there is no spouse, then the property is equally divided between the children. Basically, the distribution order is as you would think it would be when you scale the family tree: spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles, etc. Sadly if there are no heirs, the property “escheats” or reverts to the state coffers.

I once had a situation where a very wealthy man died without a will, and my client, his wife, was in the process of divorcing him for his numerous misdeeds. As the divorce had not been finalized before his death, his wife inherited his entire estate as they had no children. While that outcome may seem unfair, the man’s only living relative was his wealthy, elderly mother, who clearly didn’t need the money. Frankly, the wife had tolerated her husband’s shenanigans for years and, in my book, she deserved the estate as battle pay.

Who’s kidding?
Another interesting question addresses who qualifies as a “child” under the estate laws. In order for a child
to inherit, there must a legal parent-child relationship between the child and the parent. To qualify as a child, he or she must: be born during parent’s life or after death of parent in a legitimate marriage, have had the paternity of an illegitimate child of a male established, or be an adopted child. Neither stepchildren, wards nor foster children inherit as there is no relationship by blood to the deceased.

A Tasty Motive for Murder
Not only do these basic estate issues give rise to a broad range of family issues that are ripe motives for murder, blackmail, estate challenges and theft, they also have practical implications to our own lives. Failing to settle our affairs during our lifetimes can create future problems for those we leave behind. It is recommended that you consult an attorney in your jurisdiction to draft a will so that your spouse, your children and grandchildren are protected from future uncertainty and contests.

Further information on wills and estates is available at New York State Office of Court Administration and the American Bar Association. Remember, where there’s a will, there’s peace of mind for you, your family and your readers.

Jodé Millman is a New York attorney. Her debut thriller was released by Immortal Works in June. The Midnight Call was short-listed for the Clue Award and was named Best Police Procedural by Chantireviews.com. In addition, she is the co-host and co-producer of the popular podcast, Backstage with the Bardavon and is the author of the bestselling theatre guide Seats: New York.
Last June, the two of us had the pleasure of co-producing the California Crime Writers Conference (CCWC) 2019, Laura as the board member chair for SinC/LA and Jennifer as the board member chair for Mystery Writers of America, SoCal. Eighteen months of work culminated in a terrific weekend, but it was not without hiccups. At some point, many of us will step up to the challenge of chairing a conference so, in the interest of sparing you some of our pain, here are the top seven things we learned while working on CCWC:

1. **Articulate Your Vision.**
The two of us had a shared vision of an inclusive, welcoming conference, and we used that vision to vet every decision, from the guests of honor to the editors and agents we invited, to the extra cookies during the afternoon break. Your vision might center around a subgenre like Cozy or Noir, or themes such as self-publishing, women writers, or even “Taking Risks.” Whatever your organizing principle, articulating it to yourself and your committee helps to make sure all decisions support it. Remember to speak as “One Voice.”

2. **Feed People!**
Those extra cookies we mentioned? It seems like a small thing, but when a prior California Crime Writers Conference had run out of cookies during the afternoon breaks, it left people both hungry and grumpy. Having a little extra coffee in the morning, enough snacks to go around, and plentiful water stations will help your attendees get the most out of the weekend. Prepare your wish list when negotiating your catering/hotel contract. Jennifer was a master at this, saving us time, money, and headaches at every turn. You may not get everything you want, but you shouldn't be reluctant to ask.

3. **The Power is in the Programming.**
Programming will make or break a conference — and it’s not just what topics you cover, but who you have covering them. We made sure we read something from everyone who wanted to be on a panel. We did our best to place people on panels that suited their strengths. Part of our vision was to not create tiers between writers who were traditionally published vs. indie, or big houses vs. small presses. Anyone who registered early and asked to be on a panel was offered an opportunity.

We also decided not to have any panels specifically on diversity among authors. Instead, we made sure individual panels had a variety of voices. One writer thanked us for being the first conference to put them on panels based on what they did well, and not based on their sexual orientation. Our philosophy: We are all writers first. We all bleed ink.

Whatever your vision, programming is the number one way to make it come to life.
Try New Stuff...
There were things we had to change, like creating a new website, and things we wanted to change, like using our proximity to Hollywood to bring in screenwriters, TV showrunners, and producers in addition to editors, booksellers, and agents. We devoted an afternoon to an “Ask Me Anything” session, where attendees got to sit in small groups with invited industry guests and ask questions. Laura wrote an Escape Room for some Saturday night fun and games. These were new to CCWC and involved extra prep and, we won’t lie, a certain amount of risk, but they were also among our greatest successes over the weekend.

But Don’t Reinvent the Wheel.
One of the reasons we could try so many new things was that we had a tried-and-true foundation to build on. We used the same hotel as in the past and the same audio experts; we were also lucky enough to have key positions on the steering committee, including treasurer and registration director, filled by women who had done the job before. Not only did they know what they were doing, they knew what we needed to do to support them. Surround yourself with veterans whenever you can and replicate the best ideas from past conferences.

Start Publicity Early.
This was easily our biggest mistake. We did not have a publicity plan in place or a dedicated team to spread the word. We made things easier for the next team by compiling a database (through Mailchimp) of people who had attended as well as those who expressed interest in CCWC 2021, so they can reach out early to the people most likely to register next time. We did offer early bird pricing and filled half our seats by January, and people kept registering right up until the final deadline. But an actual publicity plan would have helped us sell out earlier (much less stress!). It would also have better communicated what made us unique.

Communication is Key.
The two of us decided in the beginning that we would make all major decisions together — except in an emergency, when we would trust each other’s judgment. We built on our strengths to divide the workload, but communicated constantly throughout. You also need to communicate with your volunteers: Follow up to see that tasks get done, that people clearly understand their duties, and that everyone is on track. Empower people to do great work, but check in regularly to make sure there are no glitches.

Community is Everything.
We created small communities by designating Guppy tables at breakfast, as well as tables based on different subgenres, so people could sit with fellow historical or procedural writers. We sent out multiple e-mail newsletters in the weeks before the conference, answering frequently-asked questions and offering opportunities such as signing times, slots on the bookseller’s table, and chances to participate in a First Sentence contest — a big hit.

The community of our conference authors was topped only by the community of our wonderful volunteers. We included them in the head tables at lunch and thanked our steering committee members by hosting a Friday night dinner with them, our guests of honor, and the invited agents and editors, giving them a chance to chat one-on-one before the weekend got crazy. Building communities as you go forges connections and creates an impact that lasts long after the conference.

Finally, speaking of community, are you chairing a conference or on a steering committee? We’ve created a Facebook Group so conference organizers can ask each other questions, share best practices and help spread the word for each other’s conferences. Check it out! †
About Producing a Mystery Conference Authors

Laura’s eclectic career includes television, film, theater, fiction, and the podcast, “Destination Mystery.” Her short stories have appeared in anthologies such as Mystery Most Edible, Last Exit to Murder, and the upcoming Super Mysterious Puzzlers. Her first children’s picture book, Nana Speaks Nanese, helps parents talk to very young children about a loved one’s dementia. Find out more at her website.

Jennifer Younger writes noir fiction. Her curious nature has led her into back-alley Los Angeles joints with its pimps, gangsters and guns, where she continues to explore the worlds her characters inhabit. When not thinking of ways her characters can bump off the bad guy or seduce a good one, Jennifer can be found voraciously reading all genres of fiction. She continues to seek out the dirty secrets of small Southern towns, similar to the ones in which her stories take place.

Photos by John Bychowski
In the age of CSI and DNA, you might think that no one can get away with murder, but that’s not true. Some crimes have deceptive leads, set up by offenders who hope to divert investigators. We know from those who were caught how it’s done. Writers can use this information to form plot twists.

In 2007, Jocelyn Earnest was found dead in her home from a gunshot to the head. The weapon lay next to her body. The gun belonged to her ex-husband, Wesley, but he said he’d purchased it for her protection. He claimed she’d been despondent over the crushing mortgage debt they shared. Her one-page suicide note confirmed this.

Since Jocelyn’s friends insisted she was afraid of Wesley, she had not been depressed, and she’d been texting a friend at the moment she went silent, investigators looked for signs of staging. They observed that the thermostat had been set very high, the gun lay in the wrong place relative to the wound, and the body had been shifted. Jocelyn had no financial issues, as she had a good job and a judge had ordered Wesley to shoulder the house debt.

The note was the primary giveaway. Jocelyn wrote mostly by hand, yet this note had been typed. It had not been written on a computer in Jocelyn’s house or workplace. The sentiments expressed did not mirror her known state of mind, and the paper bore two partial thumb prints traced to Wesley. With this and other evidence from his behavior, he was convicted of murder. His staging had been poorly contrived, but if he hadn’t made a few key mistakes, he’d have gotten away with murder.

Looking at staging

“Crime scene staging is the physical manifestation of a person’s imagination for how things should appear when trying to turn a murder scene into a legitimate death scene,” says death investigation consultant Laura Pettler. Her Crime Scene Staging Dynamics in Homicide Cases features a study of staged homicides to identify the most common behaviors.

I’ve been working on a more specific study of suicide notes, because staged suicides often involve fake notes. I’m amazed at how many death investigators believe if there’s a note, it’s a suicide. It doesn’t seem to register that the scene could be staged and the note part of the setup. Yet I have a collection of faked suicide notes from confirmed homicides. The presence of a note does not confirm suicide, and the absence of a note is no indicator that it’s not suicide. Only 20–25% of suicides leave notes. That police misunderstand basic facts about suicide provides opportunities for killers.
The role of the suicide note in staged scenes has received little attention, especially in terms of how to distinguish a genuine note from a fake. I worked with a collection of suicide notes from my local coroner to create a Suicide Note Authenticity Checklist (SNAC).

We found that genuine notes and fake notes used to stage a suicide are qualitatively different, mostly because people who write suicide notes on behalf of someone they’ve killed often write what they think a note should say rather than what research tells us about actual note content. Genuine notes rarely give explanations, but they often provide lists of tasks that need doing. They’re often more angry than apologetic, and they do express love and relief. They show constricted thinking, frustration and requests for forgiveness. The actual notes are signed and sentences tend to be short.

Oddly enough, we found that the majority of notes used in staging, including Jocelyn Ernest’s, named someone in a positive light who turned out to be the killer. The recent Stephen Port case in England is a good illustration. He killed two men with drug overdoses within a month and left a suicide note in the hand of the second man that expressed despair over accidentally killing the first man. The cops thought they’d closed two cases. The serial killer went on to kill again.

I advise authors to look in the research literature about “misread” cases and staging. Offenders can be quite creative.

Dr. Katherine Ramsland teaches forensic psychology and has published 66 books, including Confessions of a Serial Killer and The Psychology of Death Investigations.
This was the opening to my first Dr. Dot Meyerhoff mystery, *Burying Ben*, where a rookie officer kills himself and leaves a note blaming Dot.

I’ve been a police psychologist for decades and spent many sleepless nights worrying about my cop clients. September is National Suicide Prevention month. Every year I try to write something on my *Psychology Today* blog about police suicide: Last year I wrote about the signs and symptoms of someone who is contemplating suicide and what friends and family can or can’t do to prevent another tragedy. This year I talked to officers about what makes cops block themselves from getting help in a timely way. If you have a suicidal cop in one of your books, the following might add dimension to their character.

The headlines are horrifying. Nine New York City police officers have committed suicide since the start of the year. Chicago PD lost 6 officers to suicide in an 8-month period. According to *Blue H.E.L.P.*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping officers with post traumatic stress disorder, depression and other mental health struggles, thus far in 2019, there have been at least 139 law enforcement suicides in the United States. That figure, which includes retired officers, has the dubious honor of being the highest toll in at least the past 4 years. Police officers are now twice as likely to kill themselves as they are to be killed in the line of duty.

President Trump signed a bill authorizing up to $7.5 million in grant funding a year for police suicide prevention efforts, mental health screenings and training to identify officers at risk. Several states have approved post traumatic stress disorder as presumptive and compensable for first responders under Worker’s Compensation. As the magnitude of this problem is becoming more visible, police departments across the nation are initiating suicide prevention programs as well as peer support, chaplaincy services, and culturally competent mental health providers. So why is the suicide rate going up, not down? Is this a statistical oddball? Or is there some enduring aspect of law enforcement culture that works against suicidal officers getting the help they need in a timely way?

**Concerns about confidentiality**

If one doesn’t trust her department, for whatever reason, why would she trust the people with whom her department contracts to provide confidential mental health services? I worked with one department for 25 years. When I left, there were still law enforcement officers (LEOs) who mistakenly believed I had a video feed that went directly from my office to the chief’s office. Being suspicious is part of the culture.

There is also a lot of misinformation about what is or isn’t confidential or privileged information. If an officer reports that he or she was abused as a child,
(something that may contribute to feeling suicidal) a clinician is not routinely required to report this abuse unless there is reason to believe there are children who are currently at risk from the abuser. Most employee assistance programs only report who uses their services by code, not by name or department.

There is no confidentiality in group counseling or in fitness-for-duty evaluations. Whether or not peer supporters have privilege (legal protection against disclosure) varies from state to state. The takeaway here is that officers and their providers should be crystal clear about the limitations of confidentiality. LEOs should avoid making assumptions or believing rumors.

**Incident Envy**

_Thinking oneself is less deserving of help than someone else._

We see this frequently at the First Responders Support Network retreats. One feels shame because she is struggling with a SIDS death while the client in the next seat is struggling in the aftermath of a headline-making fatal shooting. Trauma is not a competitive sport. What causes pain to one person may not cause pain to someone else, and vice versa. What bothered someone this year may not have bothered her the year before. If your character is suffering for any reason, get help. Whether it’s in her personal or professional life, take care of the small stuff before it stacks up and she feels overwhelmed.

**Myth of Uniqueness**

_Thinking no one else will understand._

Ego or self-inflation is an occupational hazard in law enforcement. Remember the bumper sticker that says “We are all unique, just like everyone else.” If your character is suffering, find a friend or a peer supporter she trusts. Chances are they have walked in those shoes. Let her talk to family or friends. Police work is not astrophysics; it can be understood. The people who care for her don’t want to engage in a post-incident critique; they want to know how she feels and why she is contemplating taking her own life. Find a culturally competent therapist, someone who understands what cops do and why they do it (see resources below).

**The Imposter Myth**

_The fear of looking weak._

When LEOs seek help, they are often unduly frightened that this means they will be seen as weak, incompetent, out of control, or unreliable. I think it makes them look human. In order to function on the job, cops have to believe in their ability to control, not just other people, but themselves, particularly their own emotions. They don’t want to be a burden to anyone else (including their therapists). This is a necessary but unrealistic belief. Not seeking help for herself (or for a suicidal buddy) because she fears losing her job or reputation has far fewer consequences than losing her life. Don’t let your character fool herself into thinking her family will be better off without her. The opposite is true. Killing herself will damage her family for generations to come. Try to show that.†

**Resources**

1stHelp is a searchable database dedicated to finding emotional, financial, and spiritual assistance for first responders. It is free, easy to use, and confidential.

Safe Call Now is a CONFIDENTIAL, comprehensive, 24-hour crisis referral service for all public safety employees, all emergency services personnel and their family members nationwide. 206.459.3020.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a 24/7 free, confidential support for people in distress. 800.273.8255. Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7 crisis support by text. Text HELLO to 741741 to be connected to a trained counselor.


Ellen Kirschman writes the award-winning Dot Meyerhoff mystery series. Her non-fiction books are _I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know_, _I Love a Fire Fighter: What the Family Needs to Know_ and _Counseling Cops: What Clinicians Need to Know_ (with J. Fay and M. Kamena).
It shouldn’t be a surprise that the majority of applicants attended programs like Writer’s Police Academy, which provides hands-on, practical experience on everything from firearms to forensics, and smaller events such as the Desert Sleuths Chapter’s WriteNow! Conference in Phoenix.

Attending the WriteNow! Conference in Phoenix was a wonderful experience. From the speakers to the pitch sessions to the Friday night reception, the conference offered super information. The SinC grant helped me able to attend. As an aspiring fiction author, I heard from best-selling authors like Catriona McPherson, Dennis Palumbo, and Jess Lourey. My pitch sessions with Abby Saul (The Lark Group) and Terri Bischoff (Crooked Lane) were successful — both asked for my manuscript. Plus, I shared resources and ideas with other writers. Thank you. SinC!

—Nicolette Lemmon

The education grant program for 2020 will open in December. We hope to offer grants to 150 members. In the past, we created a list of eligible programs. This coming year we will rely on our members and the education grants coordinator to determine whether the program is eligible, based on information provided. NOTE: Eligible programs MUST have an educational focus. Please understand that funds are limited and, while we would like to offer assistance for everything, we must set limits. We understand that many conferences and workshops are beneficial and offer educational components; however, they may not be eligible for grant funds. Retreats and fan conferences like Malice Domestic, Left Coast Crime, and Bouchercon are not eligible.

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Sometimes publishing can feel as though it’s still stuck in the dark ages. Regardless of how slow the industry progresses, advancements are happening in every crack and crevice of the profession. Over the years since the first detective novel was published, crime writers have advanced from handwriting manuscripts to typewriters, word processors, laptops, tablets and voice translation programs.

It’s not just the tools used by writers that have undergone a change. From the types and methods of crimes to the techniques for marketing and promoting books, there have been momentous changes. Everything from cyber criminals to forensics, weapons, social media and beyond have left a mark on the genre. Staying up to date can be a daunting — and often expensive — endeavor for a writer. However, Sisters in Crime has come up with a way to assist members — by offering education grants.

In 2018, Sisters in Crime began offering grants for members to help offset the costs of classes, workshops, and conferences with an education focus. The education grant program was started to provide a benefit for members which aligns with the SinC mission: Promote the ongoing advancement and professional development of women crime writers. To this end, the Education Grant Program provides grants up to $150. To make sure that as many members as possible are able to take advantage of this benefit, the grant is available to be used only once every five years. In 2018, 60 applicants were approved. In 2019 we doubled the number of members we were able to assist.

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*Not all grant funds were claimed as of 10/3/19.
Schedule
by Chris Goff

inC is pleased to present 3 new webinars in the coming months — FREE for members and non-members, with archives of the sessions available for members only. Please visit SinC’s website for more information.

Tax Tips for Writers
Presenter: Carol Topp, CPA
Tuesday, December 10, 3:00 p.m. EST
Author and CPA Carol Topp can explain federal income tax in clear English. She will discuss tax deductions and special tax rules for writers, including deductions you can take before you sell your first book. She will also help you understand different business structures, their costs and advantages, and which one may be best for your situation. The presentation will be followed by Q&A.

Carol Topp has written several books about the basics of taxes for writers.

Get-It-Done Days
Presenter: Stever Robbins, CEO
SteverRobbins.com
Tuesday, January 14, 3:00 p.m. EST
Stever runs Get-It-Done Days, in which people work intensively for a day on creating a prospects list, sending out requests, making cold calls, etc. A group of 8–10 people work together and check in with each other every hour. Sharing the pain drains it off and keeps people going. Stever will talk about Get-It-Done Days and the Get-It-Done™ philosophy. The presentation will be followed by Q&A.

Stever Robbins hosts the Quick and Dirty Tips network’s Get-it-Done Guy podcast, an iTunes #1 business podcast with more than 36 million downloads. An executive coach, professional speaker, and entrepreneur, Stever holds a BA from MIT and an MBA from Harvard.

What Writers Should Know About Audiobooks
Presenter: C.S.E. “Claire” Cooney
Tuesday, February 11, 3:00 p.m. EST
What is a narrator’s process for recording an audiobook? How does she choose character voices, or decide on overall tone or pacing? What other decisions does an audiobook narrator make as she creates an entertaining audiobook? How is narrating a book different when it’s your own? What can the writer do to make things easier or harder for the narrator? Where does an author’s control end and trust in a narrator’s interpretation begin? The presentation will be followed by Q&A.

Claire has narrated more than 100 audiobooks. She is also a singer, an award-winning poet, and author of the World Fantasy Award-winning Bone Swans.

Creating Your Own Promotional Videos
Presenter: Sarah Smith
Tuesday, March 10, 3:00 p.m. EST
Social video generates 12 times more shares than text and images combined. 92% of mobile video viewers share videos with others. 64% of customers make a purchase after watching branded social video. You should be in this marketing space! And you can (and should) do the most important work yourself. Sarah Smith tells you how to give guidance to the person who’s creating a video for you, or create a video or animated GIF yourself. The presentation will be followed by Q&A.

In her day job, award-winning mystery novelist Sarah Smith produces videos for a major publisher. Her newest mystery, Crimes and Survivors, about survivors of the Titanic, will be published April 15.
In the Fall of 2012, six-year-old Lucia Krim and her two-year-old brother Leo lay in a bathtub, in their Upper West Side Manhattan apartment, in a pool of their own blood. A kitchen knife covered in blood was on the floor. Each child had been stabbed multiple times.

The children, fully clothed and barely breathing, were discovered by their mother, Marina, who had returned home early from a swimming lesson with their sister, three-year-old Nessie. She had left Lucia and Leo in the care of their nanny, Yoselyn Ortega, whom she found, dazed, lying on the floor beside the bathtub. While Marina was calling for an ambulance, Yoselyn grabbed the bloodied knife and began stabbing herself in the neck and throat. In the ambulance, on the way to the hospital, both children were pronounced dead.

The Perfect Nanny, by Leila Slimani, which became a bestseller in Europe in 2016, opens with the discovery of the Mass children, one dead, the other dying, in a home in an affluent area of Paris. Following the real-life story of the Krim case, the damaged bodies of the two children in the book are also found by their mother whose name is Myriam. The murders were committed by their nanny, Louise, who, like Yoselyn Ortega, tried to end her own life and lies unconscious on the floor near the children.

Author Slimani says that her book was influenced by the 2012 true crime New York City murders of Lucia and Leo Krim. The New York Post quoted her as saying that she “was inspired by the horrific deaths of Lucia and Leo Krim, the two young children who were found stabbed in the blood-soaked bathtub of their well-appointed Upper West Side apartment a few days before Halloween in 2012.”

Status, location, family, and relationships between the real and the fictional stories are nearly identical. Both families live in upper class areas of a city; the Kirms on the classy Upper West Side of New York and the fictional couple, the Masses, on the stylish 9th Arrondissement of Paris. Both sets of children, real and fictional, are found by their mothers. Both nannies are found lying on the floor near the bodies of the children, both having attempted to take their own lives. Both Yoselyn and the fictional Louise are estranged from their own adult children.

Most disturbing of all, both women were in actuality highly dangerous choices for any childcare position. Their pasts were dark and disturbing. Yoselyn was mentally ill, a woman who heard voices in her head, but had never been professionally treated. Louise, in Slimani’s book, was said to have a damaged past and, once ensconced in what she saw as a
safe home life, lived in fear that it would all come to end for her when the children grew up and her services were no longer required.

The similarities between the real-life and fictional nannies are a study in the mental fitness of those to whom we entrust our children. What did the real-life Krim couple really know about the woman in whose care they placed their children? Readers can ask the same question of the fictional Parisian couple in *The Perfect Nanny*.

Slimani’s book flashes back to the reasons Louise was hired and details her almost manic desire to insert herself into the lives of the family who hires her. It is eerily similar to Yoselyn’s desire to become a real part of the Krim family and not just the hired help who is paid $18 an hour for childcare. Both fictional nanny and real nanny had pasts that were virtually unknown to their employers. In both cases the children paid the horrible price for their parents’ lack of research in, and knowledge of, the background histories of the nannies.

Unlike Louise, her fictional counterpart in the book, Ortega survived her self-inflicted injuries and was able to stand trial. She was found guilty of first-degree and second-degree murder and on May 14, 2018, was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. The trial judge in his ruling called Ortega pure evil, also stating that she and her family were both to blame for hiding her serious mental condition from the Krim.

*New York Post* journalist Isabel Vincent interviewed Slimani for an article about *The Perfect Nanny*. She asked her if, in using the Krim story as inspiration, Slimani felt any guilt for benefiting financially from such a painful event. Slimani said only that the focus in her fictional work was more about the dynamics and relationship between the children’s parents and the childcare provider than the murder itself.

While Slimani’s book, sold under the title *Lullaby* in Europe and translated from the original French to English, was highly popular in France and Europe, it failed to gain as much success in the United States.

Kristen Houghton is the author of the popular series, *A Cate Harlow Private Investigation*. Book 5 in the series will be out in the fall. She is also the author of nine fiction and two nonfiction books. Her short stories appear in many horror and crime anthologies.
Many thanks to all the authors who donated a book to our It’s Raining Books Giveaway at the American Library Association Conference in Washington DC this past June. We are a generous group. So many books were pledged that we “showered” two winning libraries with books: Durham (NH) Public Library and Willowick (OH) Public Library. The librarians made special displays of our books and reported that their patrons are delighted with the varied choices.

SinC National will have a booth at two library conferences this year: Public Library Association Conference in Nashville TN (February 25-29, 2020) and the American Library Association Conference in Chicago IL (June 25-28, 2020). Watch your email for information on volunteering at the SinC booth.

United for Libraries has shuttered Book Club Central and so will not be running any more of SinC’s themed booklists. It was a corporate decision — nothing to do with SinC — they loved our lists.

As always, if you have questions please feel free to contact me.

—Shari
Not long ago an article on the front page of my local newspaper caught my attention. Beneath a photograph of tennis legend Billie Jean King was a report about the opening of the new library in downtown Long Beach, California, the Billie Jean King Main Library. King grew up in the city and spoke at the opening ceremony.

It’s nice to see that new libraries are still being built and used by the community. And, of course, they need content. Which is where Sisters in Crime comes in with its monthly grant to libraries. We continue to give out grants of $1000 to libraries in the United States. Here’s what’s been going on lately:

**In Arizona**
Our August WLL winner was the Florence Community Library in Florence. Founded in 1866, Florence is one of the oldest towns in the state. Its historic downtown has been designated as a National Historic District.

**In Florida**
The check for the July winner, the Hastings branch of the St. Johns County Public Library in Hastings, was presented at an author event October 4. The event, titled “Anatomy of a Mystery,” featured members of the Northeast Florida chapter. The panel, moderated by Nancy Quatrano, included Nancy Haddock, Judy Weber, Skye Taylor and Florence Love Karsner.

Nancy Haddock is the author of the Silver Six Crafting mystery series. Judy Weber writes the Angela Rossi mystery series under the name J.H. Weber and co-authors another series under the name Amber Adams. Skye Taylor is the author of numerous books and short stories. Florence Love Karsner writes the Dr. Molly McCormick Series, set on an island off the coast of Florida during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Nancy Quatrano is the author of the Point and Shoot Mysteries.

**In Indiana**
Our June winner was the Pulaski County Public Library in Winamac. The library serves nine townships in the county. Its beginnings can be traced to the Winamac Public Library, which opened in 1905 as a small reading room downtown.

**In Massachusetts**
On October 5, Lisa Lieberman, vice president of the New England chapter, presented the grant check to the May winner, the Jones Library in Amherst. The check presentation was made at the start of a Halloween panel, “Stealing From The Dead,” featuring Leslie Wheeler, Sharon Healy-Yang, and Lisa Lieberman.

Leslie Wheeler is the author of the Miranda Lewis Living History Mystery series, set in the present-day at historic sites, as well as the Berkshire Hilltown Mysteries. Sharon Healy-Yang writes the Jessica Minton series set in the 1940s. Lisa Lieberman is the author of the Cara Walden series of historical mysteries featuring blacklisted Hollywood people on the lam in dangerous international locales.

**In Michigan**
The September 2019 WLL winner was the Fowlerville District Library in Fowlerville. With more than 40,000 items in circulation, the library serves a diverse
population in the Fowlerville School District area, which encompasses ten townships in Livingston, Ingham, and Shiawassee Counties.

If you haven’t already, be sure to make your local library aware of the grant. It’s easy-peasy for them to enter. The library just follows the directions on our website, completes the form, and uploads a photo of one or more of their staff with 3 books in their collection by 3 different Sisters in Crime members.

This is my last article for inSinC on the We Love Libraries! program. It’s been my pleasure to serve as your WLL coordinator for the past two years. The program is now in the very capable hands of Susan Hammerman. Please give her your support.

Sybil Johnson writes the Aurora Anderson mystery series featuring computer programmer and decorative-painting enthusiast Aurora (Rory) Anderson. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, Sybil now wields pen and paintbrush from her home in Southern California.

Lou Berney’s November Road won the Anthony Award for Best Novel, and the Barry and Macavity Awards for Best Novel.

John Copenhaver’s Dodging and Burning won the Macavity Award for Best First Novel.

Jeff Mariotte’s Narcos: The Jaguar’s Claw won the Scribe Award for Best Original Novel from the International Association of Media Tie-In Writers — and is the only licensed novel based on the Netflix TV series.

Sujata Massey’s The Widows of Malabar Hill won the Sue Feder Memorial Award for Best Historical Mystery.

Margaret Mizushima won the Writer of the Year Award from the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers for her Timber Creek K-9 Mystery series.

Nancy Quatrano’s Still Shot was the winner in the Action category for the 2019 Book Excellence Award.

Kathy Prairie’s Blue Fire was a semi-finalist in the Adventure Writers Competition and was shortlisted for the International Rubery Award from the UK open to Indie published books.

Lori Rader-Day’s Under a Dark Sky was the Anthony Award winner for Best Paperback Original Novel.

Art Taylor’s “English 398: Fiction Workshop” in EQMM won the Macavity Award for Best Short Story.

Sarah Weinman’s The Real Lolita won the Macavity Award for Best Nonfiction.
The Editorial Process

The middle stage of the journey toward an anthology can be challenging for editor and authors alike.

Having picked the best of the submissions, she can do a flyover, fixing only gross errors of spelling and grammar. Or she can e-scribble in the margins, expecting compliance, not a substantive response. *A dialogue between editor and author? What's that?*

The author may assume that now the story’s been accepted, her work’s done. Overconfident, she may dismiss the editor’s comments. Or fearful, she may make changes that instinct tells her are wrong for her story or her voice. *A dialogue between author and editor? What's that?*

For the editor

The goddess Internet, who is infinite and can be everywhere at once, and her handmaiden, Track Changes, have transformed the editorial process from an authoritarian patriarchal model to one in which editors and authors are all sitting in a virtual circle and communication takes place continually — thus community is formed. An e-list gives the group a meeting place in which everyone can speak.

Don’t worry, you’re still the boss. It’s your anthology, and you know what you’re trying to accomplish. You have a vision. You have skills. You know how to help an author make the three legs of her story — storytelling, characterization, and prose — stand as sturdily as possible on solid ground.

But you don’t have to do it alone. When you tell the author, "It’s your story," you’re not being disingenuous. You’re inviting her to be your ally and companion in the editorial process, so that she’s willing to make the changes you propose. You’re also committing yourself to an open mind about her vision of the story. You invite her to think more deeply about why she used certain phrases or plot twists and explain it. You can go back and forth as often as you like in Track Changes. And when her way is sound, do it her way. It is her story.

My new anthology, *Me Too Short Stories*, felt special to me and to all the writers who contributed to it. I strengthened a sense of community by creating a Yahoo group and sharing news and some of the decision making with them at every point in the project. In return, I asked them to go along with my vision.

For example, I asked those who had fat characters or references to obesity as a negative trait to revise their stories. The cruel or thoughtless shaming of the fat is one of my pet peeves. Too often, they are
cast as physically unattractive, stupid, comical, or villainous. While we were smashing stereotypes, why not smash that one? I asked them to replace those references with some other trait, and they were willing to cooperate.

This particular request enriched the editorial process for me in an unexpected way. One author had a character she’d described as terrifying and powerful, using the woman’s rolls of fat as a symbol of her ability to overwhelm her powerless young daughters. Now the author told me this abusive mother was abused herself in both childhood and adulthood. She needed to put that back story on the page.

Fat, therefore a villain is the formula for a flat character. A villain because the cycle of abuse in a family is intergenerational and perpetuates itself generates a rounded character. As we talked via Track Changes and then emails, I learned that this author was a police officer who’d known many women affected by domestic violence. So have I, from the very different perspective of a mental health and addictions professional. That whole conversation — priceless.

**For the writer**

To get the most out of the editing process, think working holiday — a “Road” Scholar course or a stint with Habitat for Humanity — rather than death march. It’s an opportunity to learn. If you’re new to short stories or ill at ease with electronic editing tools, ask questions.

If you’re a novelist breaking into short fiction, an editor can help you step up the pace and kill some of those darlings — subplot, elaboration, descriptive writing, and secondary characters — that are a staple of long fiction.

If you’re baffled by Track Changes, be prepared to get over it. Just add coffee — it will be your virtual Starbucks for the duration. Once you’re comfortable, you’ll find it a terrific way to self-edit as well as work with an editor.

Many authors have told me that I helped them make their stories stronger. In short fiction from both new and experienced authors, pace is the crucial factor.

One of my favorite things I was ever told about my own work: “You don’t need to say three or four clever things in a paragraph. One or two are enough.” Clever or not, don’t say anything more than once. Don’t make a point in both dialogue and narrative. You may miss it, and an editor may spot it. Another rule of thumb I offer writers that helps keep their stories tight and down to 5,000 words or however many are required is to delete what I call stage directions: I walked. He ran. She turned. I laughed. He nodded. She shook her head. I smiled. They slow the pace, and they’re neither fresh nor necessary.

The editorial process is collaborative, not adversarial. Be receptive to the editor’s suggestions. But stand firm when your gut tells you that an edit changes meaning or is false to your voice. 

Elizabeth Zelvin is the author of the Bruce Kohler mysteries and the Mendoza Family Saga. Her short stories have been nominated three times each for the Derringer and Agatha awards and have appeared in numerous magazines. She has edited two anthologies: *Me Too Short Stories: An Anthology* and *Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4.*
Atlanta
www.sincatlanta.com

This year, under the leadership of Angela Durden, Wanda Morris, and Brandi Wilson, we realized we need to reach out to the community more and have finalized a book event for March 2020 open to the public.

Our great line up of 2019 programs began with a well-attended planning session for the year. Our following meetings featured author Susan Crawford speaking about foreign rights and other publishing matters, the inimitable Joshilyn Jackson telling of her offbeat Southern mysteries, and Alexandra Hightower, editorial assistant at Penguin Random House giving the “inside scoop.” Karen White, author of the enormously popular Tradd Street series, outlined her writing journey. A journaling workshop in August helped many members to reach deeper for material.

Lisa Malice worked to continue our Webinar series with Nancy Cohen on Cozy Mysteries, Anne Brewer on What You Always Wanted to Know about Acquisitions Editors, and in October, Jaden Terrell on Dazzling Dialogue.

Former police officer and chapter member Lynn Hesse, award-winning mystery writer and contributor to *Me Too Short Stories*, Liz Zelvin, ed. moderated a Domestic Violence Panel Event at the Decatur Library in November. Panel members featured a non-fiction author, a poet, a director of preforming arts, and performance artists. Proceeds from book sales benefitted the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

—Anne Lovett

New England
www.sincne.org

Sisters in Crime New England authors Sharon Healy-Yang, Leslie Wheeler, and Lisa Lieberman presented a lively Hallowe’en-themed panel, "Stealing from the Dead," at the Jones Library in Amherst MA on October 5, a prelude to the awarding of the Doris Ann Norris We Love Libraries $1,000 grant. Tina Swift, the former business manager of the Jones Library and a member of the New England chapter, submitted the application prior to her retirement in 2017 as a parting gift to her colleagues who were quite surprised to learn that they had won the award.

SinC New England board members Connie Johnson Hambley, Lisa Lieberman and Leslie Wheeler presented a Vendor Demo at the New England Library Association’s annual conference entitled "How Sisters in Crime Speakers Bureau Can Attract a More Diverse Group of Library Patrons." We have begun a partnership with the Massachusetts Library Association’s Reader Advisory section to address the issue of diversity and see this session as a preliminary opportunity to showcase the initiative.

Kathryn Gandek-Tighe
The Texas Book Festival was a blast! Our chapter members talked to book lovers and sold books from our booth at the Texas Book Festival on October 26–27. Thanks to beautiful weather, happy hordes of readers came out to meet favorite authors, listen to panel discussions in one of the 20 festival venues, and enjoy activities for the whole family.

The Sisters in Crime booth showcased the work of 11 of our members and sold approximately 100 copies of our books during the 2-day festival. We had historical, paranormal, religious, and humorous mysteries; legal and international thrillers—basically something to tempt every kind of crime fiction lover. Eight of our chapter members staffed the booth and talked to readers about books and about joining Sisters in Crime. Dozens of people approached our booth to ask “What is Sisters in Crime?” Our members answered questions about the organization and supplied informational flyers about how to join.

Attracting up to 50,000 people annually, the Texas Book Festival is a massive event. The festival takes place in the streets surrounding the Texas State Capitol every year and features more than 250 nationally and critically acclaimed authors along with thousands of books. More than 100 exhibitors and multiple food trucks provide books and food for the crowd. What more could a reader need! Our members feel right at home among the publishers, editors, readers, writers, and illustrators who come to the festival to talk about books.

—N. M. Cedeño

Promoting—it’s all about promotion. Our meetings showcased some star-studded authors these last months. In August, Don Bullis, New Mexico Historian Extraordinaire, exploded myths and brought us truths about the Land of Enchantment. Then a representative of the Albuquerque Journal attended and presented an award to Anne Hillerman. In September, Darynda Jones, the colorful author of the Charley Davidson books and television series, began our fall list of speakers.

Our Great Library Adventure certainly has opened promotional doors. We’re displaying our books and posters in city libraries and storming the small, forgotten rural libraries. Why? When we support libraries we get recognition, create interest, and librarians promote our works. Often these librarians ask us to hold author-panel discussions or private book talks, creating a most symbiotic relationship.

Promotion requires us to be out there. We do this by sharing our knowledge, speaking at conferences, and by our books and short stories garnering attention from contests. Last month several of our members presented at the SouthWest Writers-Military Writers Society of America joint conference. Many won writing awards. A few members were on panels at Bouchercon 2019. Some of our members’ books have been recognized as finalists in the New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards. We expect several will land in the winners’ circle.

We start with the joys of reading and writing, but then we’re required to promote our works. Happily, Croak & Dagger members always stand by to lend support.

—Charlene Bell Dietz
We kicked off the fall with a program designed to help members get to know each other — and their writing — better. This meet-and-greet, show-and-tell program was a great success, thanks to the 18 members who talked about their work for a sprightly two minutes each. And Marty Wingate, our timekeeper, kept us on pace. The program also included a big display of authors’ books, swag, a book giveaway and refreshments.

Following are a few highlights:

- Marty Wingate led off by telling about the launch for *The Bodies in the Library*, the first in her new series.

- Debra Borchert talked about her publisher’s suggestion that she change the point of view for her upcoming book… and her debate over how to respond.

- Julie Brown, writing as J.L. Brown, told us she had signed that day with a NY agent she met at Thrillerfest! The agent will represent a new stand-alone.

- Curt Colbert announced that the first Matt Rossiter mystery, *All Along the Watchtower*, will be released on October 8.

- Professional editor Michelle Sundholm described being in the thick of writing her first mystery.

- Rachel Bukey said the third in her series about *Seattle Times* reporter Ann Dexter is under contract with Epicenter/Coffeetown/Camel Press.

- Robert Herold announced that he has signed off on the final galleys for his first book, *The Eidola Project*, to released by Wild Rose Press in November.

—Alice K. Boatwright