

Bloodletter

New York/Tri-State Sisters in Crime Newsletter

www.nysinc.org

June 2012

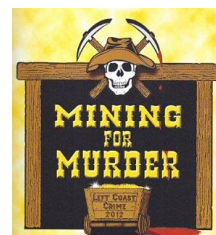
Mining for Murder in California

By Peggy Ehrhart

It's a long way from New York to Sacramento, California, so I was delighted to find three other members of Sisters in Crime New York/Tri-State chapter at this year's Left Coast Crime conference, held from March 29 to April 1. Hilary Davidson and Ken Wishnia had made the trip, and Pat Morin, who joined our chapter just last month, was there as well. Pat lives in San Francisco, but she and her husband will soon be splitting their time between the coasts.



Sacramento, the state capitol, was a Gold Rush town—thus this year's conference theme: "Mining for Murder." Attractions include "Old Town," which features Gold Rush-era storefronts; a railroad museum; and a city museum that documents Sacramento's past and the many ethnic groups that contributed to its development. The capitol building, surrounded by a beautiful park, is just a few blocks from the Grand Sheraton, the hotel where the conference was held.



For me, the conference offered a chance to revisit the state where I grew up and where my parents and two sisters still live. I flew into Orange County and spent a few days with my parents before setting out with a mystery-writing friend who I met at Los Angeles Left Coast Crime two years ago. Coincidentally, she lives in the same town as my parents and we've become good friends. We combined business with pleasure by detouring to San Francisco for two days en route and, after the conference, taking the slow road home by driving down the Pacific coast.

Attracting over 600 attendees this year, Left Coast Crime is a "fan con"—a conference where mystery fans show up to hobnob with writers, rather than a conference where writers and would-be writers gather to hone their craft. This year's guests of honor were John Lescroart, Jacqueline Winspear, Harley Jane Kozak, and James Rollins.

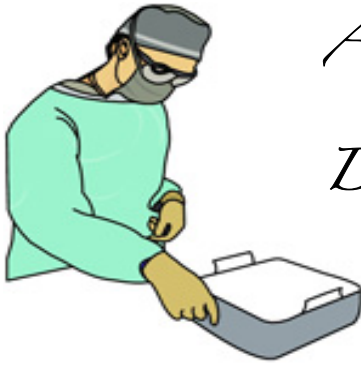
I was delighted to be assigned to a panel on Musical Mysteries, with Lorie Lewis Ham as moderator and including Bill Moody and Ken Kuhlken. There were also the usual panels on cozies, not-so-cozies, historicals, and the like. But there were also panels themed to the conference's particular locale.

Who knew there were enough mysteries set right in Sacramento to make up a whole panel? Not to mention panels focused on Northern California writers ("Where the Palm Trees Meet the Pines") and Southern California writers ("It Never Rains").

No mystery conference would be complete without a celebratory banquet and the doling out of awards. This year, Donna Andrews' *The Real Macaw* won the Lefty for best humorous crime novel. The Bruce Alexander Memorial Historical Mystery Award went to *Mercury's Rise* by Ann Parker. *City of Secrets*, by Kelli Stanley, won the Golden Nugget for the best mystery set in California. The Eureka, for the best first mystery, went to *Nazareth Child* by Darrell James. And the DILYS award, given by the Independent Mystery Booksellers Association to the title that member booksellers have most enjoyed selling, went to *Ghost Hero* by S.J. Rozan.

Next year's Left Coast Crime isn't quite as far away as California. It is March 21-24 at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs.

For more information, visit <http://www.leftcoastcrime.org/2013/>



An Evening at the Morgue with Dr. Jonathan Hayes

by Laura Joh Rowland

Our May meeting was a tour of the New York City Medical Examiner's Facility organized by Susan Chalfin, program chairperson, and led by Dr. Jonathan Hayes, the Chief Medical Examiner. A huge, brilliant, witty Englishman, Dr. Hayes is also a mystery novelist and foodie. He gave an inspiring talk about his job and how forensic pathology works.

He explained about the new trend in using stored DNA to change the verdict of old cases and said it's fraught with problems, including the expense of storage, the possibility of damage, and just locating the samples from old crimes.

Dr. Hayes specializes in sexual assault cases and is very good at neck dissections, which are important with strangulation. The signs can be subtle and easy to miss.

He mentioned that he admires Patricia Cornwell because she bankrolls a course in forensic pathology for medical examiners in rural areas that don't have training or much experience available. Dr. Hayes occasionally teaches these courses. He said there are only about 500 board-certified MEs in America, and "some of the biggest names are charlatans and sociopaths."

He allowed that fiction does give a little creative freedom about what forensic pathologists and cops do, but never have the ME eating a sandwich while doing autopsies. They really *don't* do that. However, whatever you say, it will probably reflect something that's actually done somewhere.

At one time, those who worked in pathology were people with no social skills who were squeezed out of other medical fields. Now many young people are inspired by the CSI television shows and "Bones" and are moving into the field of forensic pathology. He said these shows make forensics sound sexy. More women are entering the field. In NYC, six of the nine MEs are female.

New York City's ME department is considered one of the best in the world, much better funded than other cities. Due to lack of training and experience, there are a lot of mistakes made in rural areas of the U.S. Dr. Hayes said Miami is just "insane" because the murders are so extreme. Where a victim might be stabbed once in New York, it could be twenty times and the body dismembered in Miami. However, Miami has a state-of-the-art facility.

Dr. Hayes also said he solves more cases by telephone than with a scalpel. He said it's important for the ME to question the victim's family, cops on the case, and witnesses. In suicide cases, the insurance will pay if the policy is a few years old. The ME must also be aware of religious requirements with the bodies of victims. For example, a rabbi must observe the autopsy of a Jewish victim.

Following his talk, Dr. Hayes led the group on a tour of the morgue. There was nothing gory, which member Shizuka Otake thought was due to respect for the dead. I thought it was because he didn't want twenty fainting women on his hands.

Everything was extremely clean and orderly. We saw the autopsy tables and tools and the hedge clippers used to break open the ribs. We saw some brains in jars and Dr. Hayes said that fresh brains have the texture of Greek yogurt and must be preserved in formaldehyde to be firm enough to cut and examine. (I could almost hear everybody thinking they'll never eat Greek yogurt again.)

The only thing that smelled bad was the walk-in refrigerator where the bodies are stored. We saw bodies covered with sheets, and they really do have tags on the toes. The bodies aren't stored in drawers like you see on TV. Drawers are too hard to clean. Fluid leaks from the bodies and runs down to the bottom and you can't get it out and it stinks. They're on modular, moveable racks.

After the tour we were supposed to go to dinner, but I didn't feel like it. (I wonder why.) When I got home and told my husband Marty about the tour, he said, "So twenty women went into the morgue. How many came out?"

Building Suspense with Hallie Ephron

by Catherine Maiorisi

On a warm Saturday in April, the New York/Tri-State Chapter of Sisters in Crime presented “Tooling up to Write a Crime Novel,” a workshop led by Hallie Ephron, award-winning writer, book reviewer, and teacher. Each member talked about what they were writing, and, throughout the day, read and had their responses to Hallie’s exercises critiqued.

The morning session addressed:

- How to show the reader your character through description, dialogue, action and/or thought.
- The connection between the crime and the sleuth (motivating your sleuth, especially the amateur sleuth).
- Make readers care: What’s your character’s goal? Does it change? How do characters change? Same for villains.
- The three-act structure: Moving back and forth from disequilibrium to escalating disequilibrium in pursuit of the protagonist’s goals. Competing goals for characters.
- Secrets

The afternoon session covered writing suspense, with Hallie illustrating how to build suspense. After hearing Hallie’s examples, participants wrote about their own character/books and shared that with the group, and received feedback.

“Hallie advised me to make my second chapter the first chapter. I gave it a shot to find that it was a perfect lead for my story,” said Dot Hayes. “It was a fruitful day.”

It was a great day, and those who attended felt it definitely helped them improve their craft. It even garnered some new members for the New York City group.

Musical Tables by Cathi Stoler

Recently I attended my second Malice Domestic conference and participated in my first “Malice Go Round.” This is an event designed to help authors promote their new work. The organizer, the intrepid Barb Goffman, described it as Speed Dating for Writers and advised authors “to practice using their outside voices.”

She wasn’t kidding! There was a lottery to pick 42 authors from 61 entrants. We travelled in pairs to twenty tables filled with Malice attendees. Each author had two minutes at each table to pitch their work and answer questions.

Then, the team had 30 seconds to move to the next table, working its way around the room until all tables were covered. Whew! Who knew two minutes could go so fast and that 42 people talking at the same time could be so loud?

I had the good fortune to partner up with Catriona McPherson, author of *Dandy Gilver and the Proper Treatment of Blood Stains*, the latest novel in a series just acquired by the BBC which will hopefully appear in America on PBS as well.

I pitched both *Murder New York Style: Fresh Slices*, the New York/Tri-State Sisters-in-Crime anthology, which has my story, “Out of Luck” along with my novel, *Telling Lies*.

Catriona and I practiced our spiels before the event and by the time we’d moved around a few tables, could probably have done each other’s without missing a beat. The time flew by and it was great fun. I look forward to doing it again next year.

MALICE DOMESTIC 25

May 3-5, 2013 Hyatt Regency Hotel, Bethesda, MD
www.malicedomestic.org



IN THE NEWS . . .

Terrie Farley-Moran signed a contract with Kim Lionetti at BookEnds, LLC to write a cozy. She is adamant that her connections with SinC and MWA helped with the sale along with her other related work with the Women of Mystery and Criminal Element blogs.

Lina Zeldovich recently graduated from Columbia University School of Journalism with honors in science reporting. She also won a science writing award for a story about a biologist who uses fruit flies to study rare diseases like ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease. Certain aspects of flies’ motorneuron genetics are very similar to human genetics. Lina’s first freelance article about foraging in Central Park was just published in the New York Press.

<http://nypress.com/foraging-through-central-park/>.

Liz Zelvin’s paranormal whodunit e-novella, *Shifting is for the Goyim*, will appear on Untreed Reads in June.

Patricia L. Lorin’s play, “The Gatekeeper,” won First Place and Critics Choice at the 2012 Fringe of Marin, CA, Playwright Contest. It also won for Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Actress. The play is a twenty-minute humor-fantasy that revolves around the cemetery of buried emotions. Her second short-story series, *Crime Montage*, was released by Top Publications Ltd. and is available through all book outlets and at www.patriciamorin.com.

Message from the President:

It's hard to believe that it's almost a year since the Sisters in Crime tiara was placed on my head. And what a year it's been! In addition to the excellent monthly programs we've all come to expect, members had the opportunity to take a tour of a police precinct, a tour of the New York City Morgue with a very informative lecture by Medical Examiner Dr. Jonathan Hayes, and to improve their craft in a day long workshop with author and master teacher, Hallie Ephron. Over the next few months, the board of New York/Tri-State Sisters in Crime will be working on next year's programming (we take July and August off and start up in September). We welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

The programs are always interesting, educational, and fun, but what I most enjoy is the feeling of camaraderie during the meetings and after at the voluntary dinner. The holiday party in December and the June annual meeting/end-of-year party are devoted to socializing and the opportunity to get to know other members. Our chapter is friendly and welcoming, and I encourage you to attend a monthly meeting or special event this year. In fact, please join us for the end of year party June 19th!

Catherine Maiorisi

Sisters in Crime New York Tri-State Chapter

Meetings are usually held the third (3rd) Thursday of the month at the Muhlenberg Public Library in Manhattan, 209 W. 23rd Street (near 7th Avenue).

Join us for a brief social time at 6 p.m., with the business meeting and program from 6:30 till 7:45. Afterward, members who wish to gather for dinner at a nearby restaurant. Unless noted, meetings are free, open to the public, and guests are cordially invited to attend. In the event the meeting date or time is changed, it will be noted on the group's website www.nysinc.org.

Websites: www.nysinc.org Local chapter
www.sistersincrime.org national organization



Kick up your heels at Cowgirl!!

Tuesday, June 19, 6 p.m.
519 Hudson Street @ 10th
Private room—Cash bar
Meat & Vegetarian Dishes
RSVP w/\$38 check to:
Stephanie Wilson-Flaherty
537 84th Street
Brooklyn, NJ 11209