



Spring 2020

BLOODLETTER

CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES

Chapter News

JANUARY OPEN MIC

Our chapter launched 2020 with a celebration of our writers and their work. The January Open Mic night has become an annual tradition, much anticipated by our members. This year, the following members shared their work:

- **Peggy Katalinich** read from her work-in-progress, *Sheltered Proof*.
- **Naomi Rand** read from her as yet unpublished novel *Goodbye to Me*.
- **Nancy Good** read from *Killer Condo, a Melanie Deming Manhattan Mystery*.
- **Mary Jo Robertiello** read from her detective procedural *Graphic Lessons*, a work-in-progress.
- **Dawn Barclay (aka D.M. Barr)** read from *Saving Grace*, to be published by Black Rose Writing on 10/15/20.
- **Alexa Recio de Fitch** read from her debut novel *Triggers*.
- **Elizabeth Zelvin** read from her short story "[The Island](#)," published in the Nov./Dec. 2019 issue of *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*.
- **Roz Siegel** read from her new, as yet unpublished novel, *Book I. A Pilgrims Landing Library Mystery*.
- **Beth Mannion (aka Sarah-Jane McKenna)** read from her novel *Dreaming in Irish*.
- **Constance Meccarello-Gerson** read from her novel *Murder at Hassle High, Book 1*.
- **Joan Ramirez** read from her historical suspense novel *Twist of Fate*.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAPTER PRESIDENT

Dear Siblings,

I hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe, healthy, and as well as any of us can be in these uncertain times. If you're anything like me, some of the new struggles are expected, and other challenges are a complete surprise. (I anticipated getting tired of cooking and cleaning for a full house every day. I didn't expect my ability to focus for any length of time to completely evaporate.) Let's be patient and generous with each other as we navigate this new landscape.

As writers, we can find solace in knowing that riding these waves of fear, love, anxiety, and compassion on a daily, maybe hourly, basis can be the spark for a wonderful story. I'm trying to remember that every time my mind takes a dive into uncertainty.

Speaking of great stories, (Was that a smooth segue or what?) I'm thrilled to announce we're going to have our April meeting with the fantastic Carol Goodman on Zoom. Please pay attention to your inboxes for an invitation. We will need some time to adjust to this new way of meeting. There will undoubtedly be moments of confusion and frustration—and moments when things just don't work the way we want them to. That's OK. Really. Let's go into this with as much patience, as much humor, as much understanding as we can muster.

I'll stop here, since I've gone on for too long already. I want thank all of you for making this community so special. There's no doubt in my mind that we'll come through this challenge a little wiser, a little stronger, and a lot more understanding of our shared humanity.

Be well!
Alison

AN EVENING WITH P.I. CATHERINE TOWNSEND

Catherine Townsend's February visit—an entertaining and wide-ranging discussion with Dawn Barclay on the life of a private investigator—confirmed that Hollywood's version of a female PI is not nearly as realistic as a crime writer's, although we don't always get it right either. It's a world of waiting, digging, and watching that requires three full years of training to get licensed. Catherine has been at it for several years now, dealing with the mundane (like process serving) and the salacious (cheating spouses and partners), but she's also worked on cold cases, which she finds the "most rewarding." As fans of her podcast, *Hell and Gone*, are aware, she a tenacious investigator of unsolved crimes, sensitive to the families and determined to help give them closure. *Hell and Gone* began when she became curious about a cold case from 2004 that her sister told her about. She moved to the Ozarks for six months to investigate it. It remains unresolved, but her work certainly opened up lines of inquiry that had not been followed. The "weirdest thing" about her work there was discovering that "things I just assumed had been done had not been. It reinvigorated my love of asking tough questions." She's still asking the tough questions, combining her earlier career as a journalist with her PI training.

Writers in the crowd leaned forward—and laughed—when she commented that investigating a case is like getting an agent: "there's just not one way to do it." We also learned that there's not just one way to write a PI or, for that matter, to write a criminal mystery. "Justice," she lamented, "takes a really long time."

Thank you to Dawn and Catherine for a compelling conversation, and thank you to the attending Sisters for fantastic questions. It was a great night.

Beth Mannion's newest book Guilt Rules All: Irish Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction (Syracuse Univ. Press) will be out in May.



Alexa Recio de Fitch reads from her debut novel.



Roz Seigel reads from a new book.



Mary Jo Robertiello reads from a work-in-progress.



Dawn Barclay in conversation with Catherine Townsend.

THE INTERROGATION ROOM

An Inquisitor Questions Our Members

For the Spring, 2020 issue of the Interrogation Room, we've interviewed another three talented authors/Sisters in Crime on issues of import to writers:

Cathi Stoler is an award-winning author. Her new series, with Blackjack player, Nick Donahue, includes the novel *Out of Time*, and the novella, *Nick of Time*, recently published by Black Opal Books. She is also the author of Urban Thriller, *Bar None, A Murder on the Rocks Mystery*, featuring The Corner Lounge bar owner, Jude Dillane, published by Clay Stafford Books; the three volume Laurel & Helen New York Mystery series, which includes *Telling Lies*, *Keeping Secrets* and *The Hard Way*; and a three time finalist, and winner of the 2015 Derringer for Best Short Story, *The Kaluki Kings of Queens*. Very involved in the crime writing world, Cathi served as Co-Vice President of Sisters in Crime New York/Tri-State and is a member of Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers.

Jill Brock, a native New Yorker, based her first book, *Pennywise*, on her experiences running a restaurant, being one of three sisters, growing up in Queens, NY and her love of mysteries. She created the *Maggie and Odessa Mystery* series because she wanted to reflect the multicultural world that surrounded her and her sense of humor. Her new series, the *Thursday Night Book Club*, comes from the same source—of family and friends and living in New York.

Mariah Fredericks was born and raised in New York City. She graduated from Vassar College with a degree in history. She enjoys reading and writing about dead people and how they got that way. She is the author of the Jane Prescott mystery series. The first in that series, *A Death of No Importance*, was nominated for the Mary Higgins Clark Award.

What's been your biggest influence as an author and why?

Cathi: I believe it's my love of reading. I always joke that I was born knowing how to read and I honestly think that's not too far from the truth. As far back as I can remember, I was always reading something,

sometimes sneaking books that were not entirely appropriate for a young child. Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys sparked my love for mysteries and I was hooked for life, eventually moving on to great writers like Agatha Christie, P. D. James and Sue Grafton, just to name a few. Their books offer captivating stories with complicated cases to solve, villains to be outted, and surprising twists you don't always see coming. How could I not want to do the same? It took a while, but about eight years ago, I began writing my own novels and I don't intend to stop.

Jill: My biggest influence had to be my mother. Growing up, she was always reading. Our house was filled with books and more importantly stories. I was also close to my aunt, a librarian who gifted me with books. They ignited my imagination, inspiring me to tell stories of my own. So, I would have to say, I was affected by those closest to me. Both the *Maggie and Odessa* and *The Thursday Night Killers Book Club* Mysteries are heavily influenced by my family and friends. These themes are very important to me.

Mariah: In terms of writers whose style I admire, I could throw out a hundred names from Edith Wharton to Louise Penny to Minette Walters. But I'll never forget meeting Robert Harris. I worked for Book-of-the-Month Club and we always had the author of the month to lunch. Some of the authors—I won't name names—gave the impression that their success was kind of a drag. Compliments bored them. Questions about their work bored them. It made the writing life feel cynical and frustrated.

But Harris was clearly having the time of his life. He was there for *Archangel* but talked happily about his book on the *Hitler Diaries* when I asked him. His entire aspect was of a man who was doing what he loves and was thrilled and grateful to have the chance. And I remember thinking, If I ever sell a book, that's what I want to be like. I want to have fun and I want to be grateful.

Steven James wrote an entire book about how Story Trumps Structure. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Cathi: I do agree. A book can have a traditional structure—the traditional three-part structure—this happens, that happens, then, this happens next—but if

the story is not compelling and well-told, it doesn't work for me. The structure is the frame, while the story is the body of what you're offering your readers. The structure needs to serve the story, whether it happens in one act or in three, in one setting or in several. As long as it's exciting, grabs the reader and keeps them turning the pages, that's what counts.

Jill: Mystery writing is sometimes a very structured genre. Despite that, I believe story does trump structure. I can't remember coming away from a book I've read and thinking, what a great plot. This is not to say structure doesn't matter, it does. I've outlined most of my books when I start. That outline doesn't often resemble the finished piece, but that's okay. I'll assume every writer gravitates to their strength, whether outlining every chapter to no outline at all. Either way for me, the story comes first.

Mariah: Can we argue for mutually beneficial co-existence? Forced to choose, I'll go with story. We've all read those books that follow every rule, tick all the boxes of "good writing," but they're predictable and boring. The story has to come first—excitement for the characters, what they do, what happens to them. If that's not there, good structure is beside the point.

What's your tried and true antidote for writer's block?

Cathi: I have what I call writer's delay as opposed to writer's block. Which means that I tend to think about where the story should go for a while before I move onto the next chapter, which sometimes takes longer than I would like. I often walk around the city (sometimes talking to myself) while I mentally work out what's going to happen next. I usually make notes so I won't forget, and in the end I may change what I'd planned if the writing takes me in a different direction.

Jill: When I find myself unable to write, I put everything away. I usually give myself a few days or a week of not thinking about the project. This gives me time to think without pressure. After a couple of days, I find walking and thinking about the story helps me push at the block. I tend to read other works at this time, just to get out of my own head. When I get a thread of an idea, I start writing different scenarios to

get around the block. I always have a notebook for each project I start and I put all my ideas into it, especially when I'm not inspired to write anything. I take it everywhere with me. Another method that works for me is music. After a couple of days of not writing, I put on music to get me in the mood (anything 1960s Motown), sometimes dancing is involved, along with a lot of bad singing. If nothing works, I have another writer friend who is great at brainstorming. She's usually my last recourse.

Mariah: Not to get it? Things I do to avoid writer's block: write every day. Limit the amount you have to write every day. Be super comfortable putting something bad on the page. Have faith in rewrites; certain scenes and development take time. Remember the check that comes when you turn it in. If there is no check, know absolutely why you are writing this story. And finish it. Take your work seriously enough to see it through.

Dawn M. Barclay, writing as D.M. Barr, is proud to be on the board of Sisters in Crime's NY/Tri-State chapter, heading up programming. Her latest domestic suspense novel, Saving Grace, will be published by Black Rose Writing in October, 2020.



The Inquisitor, aka author [D.M. Barr](#).



Author [Jill Brock](#)



Author [Mariah Fredericks](#)



Author [Cathi Stoler](#)

THE POLICE BLOTTER

Member News

The third book in **Mariah Fredericks's** acclaimed Jane Prescott series, *Death of An American Beauty* will be released on April 14th. "A winner"—PW

Triggers by **Alexa Recio de Fitch** is now published. *Triggers* is a dark, modern, Agatha Christie-style mystery, set in NYC

Constance Meccarello-Gerson has a new book on Amazon.com. It is the second book in her cozy series, *Summertime Murder at Hassle High*.

Elizabeth (Liz) Zelvin has sold three short stories to *Black Cat Mystery Magazine*, including one in each of her two long-running series, **the Bruce Kohler Mysteries** and **the Mendoza Family Saga**. Pub dates tbd.

MEMBERS ONLY

The members only section of our website has been updated with publishing and social media resources. More author resources are coming soon! Make the most of your chapter membership and visit!

Is your book featured in our website book carousel? If not, make sure you get in touch with a JPEG of your book cover.

And don't forget to connect with us on social media! We love to share member news.

Pinterest: [@NYSinC](#)

Instagram: [@NYTriStateSinC](#)

Twitter: [@NYSinC](#)

Facebook: [@NYSinC](#)

Interested in joining our chapter? Visit www.nysinc.org to learn how. Remember, you should also be a member of Sisters in Crime National.

DISTURBING THE PEACE

Upcoming Chapter Events

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Author Carol Goodman discusses Psychological Suspense

Join us via Zoom

(Zoom invitation to be sent via email)

Meet and greet: 6:00 pm, Program: 6:30 to 8:00 pm

Carol Goodman is the author of twenty-one novels, including *The Lake of Dead Languages* and *The Seduction of Water*, which won the 2003 Hammett Prize, and *The Widow's House*, which won the 2018 Mary Higgins Clark Award. Her books have been translated into sixteen languages. She lives in the Hudson Valley with her family, and teaches literature and writing at The New School and SUNY New Paltz.

Thursday, May 20, 2020

Writing and Selling Short Mystery Fiction

Join us for a panel discussion on writing and selling your short mystery fiction with:

- **Jackie Sherbow**, managing editor *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine* and *Ellery Queen Magazine*
- **Nick Kolakowski**, contributing editor, *Shotgun Honey* (magazine division of Down and Out Books)
 - **Johanna Ingalls**, managing editor Akashic Books
- **Jen Conley**, writer/editor for *Shotgun Honey*, who also mentors many up-and-coming writers and helps run the Noir at the Bars in NYC

**June 2020
PARTY!**

NY/TRI-STATE SISTERS IN CRIME MEMBERS:

TO JOIN THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF *BLOODLETTER*, OR TO CONTRIBUTE AN ARTICLE, PLEASE CONTACT NINA MANSFIELD AT NYTRISTATESINC@GMAIL.COM. PLEASE INCLUDE

“BLOODLETTER” IN THE SUBJECT LINE.

TO HAVE YOUR NEWS LISTED, PLEASE LOOK FOR INFORMATION IN AN UPCOMING MEMBER EMAIL.