



Mystery Press

Mystery Writers Ink

Volume No. 2 Issue No. 4

June 2004

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President's Message

by Suzanne Stengl

On October 25, 2001, a few romantic suspense writers talked about setting up a mystery writing group. On November 8, 2001, I chaired our first meeting, which was at Brenda Collins's house. Eleven writers attended; eight of them are still charter members of this group. By May 16, 2002, INK was incorporated as a society. And on Sept 12, 2002, our first official meeting was held. It has been an exciting three years.

Last March, Detective Peter Bellion, from the Major Crimes Unit, gave us an informative and humorous presentation on the management of a bank robbery file. In April and May, our own member Mahrie Glab, from Buck Lake, taught us about mystery structure and crime scene.

Over the past two years, we've heard from various "content experts" about topics ranging from shoplifting to forensic pathology. We've learned about guns and computer hacking and police life in a small community. And we've started a library of how-to-write mystery books that now has more than 20 titles.

We now have 35 members, an excellent quarterly newsletter (special thanks to Penny Grey) and a very professional website (special thanks to Sherry Wilson McEwen), and our first critique group has formed.

And, most important, we've found a network of supportive writers who are learning about the mystery genre together.

This is my last President's Message. It's been a great three years of starting this organization. I've met a lot of new writers and we've accomplished a lot together. There are still a few openings on our board. Let me know if you are interested in being involved in policy and planning. We're still a very new organization with a lot of potential.

Join us at our AGM on June 10. We'll welcome our new board, do some death-by-chocolate socializing, and listen to readings by some of our members.

I wish you all the best in your writing careers and look forward to sitting in the back row in September, and continuing to learn about our craft.

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Mark Twain



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Proposed Changes to Bylaw

The following motion will be made at the AGM on June 10, 2004 to change Bylaw 1.05 as noted below:

Present Bylaw 1.05

1.05 New members
New members shall be accepted into the Society from Sept 1 to Oct 31 of each year. This is to ensure all members have a basic understanding of writing techniques via new-member orientation.

A prospective member may be eligible for full membership at any time if proof of published work is submitted to the Membership Chair and approved by the Board .

The membership window does not apply to former members of the Society who have allowed their membership to lapse. Previous members, either full or associate, may rejoin at any time by paying the membership fee for their appropriate category.

Previous full members need not resubmit the writing requirement.

Proposed Bylaw 1.05

1.05 New members
New members shall be accepted into the Society at any time during the Membership year.

Previous members, either full or associate, may rejoin at any time by paying the membership fee for their appropriate category. Previous full members need not resubmit the writing requirement.

Rationale

The original purpose of the "membership window" was twofold: (1) everyone would be on the "same page" as far as the Program went, and (2) there would be less work for our volunteers since there would only be a membership intake once per year.

We have since discovered that we aren't a "school" where everyone starts the grade at the same time and we are more like a "lecture series" where if a lecture is missed,

it's not likely to be repeated. As far as volunteer work goes, the window creates a need to keep track of prospective members during the year.

Riddle Me This!

by Sherry Wilson McEwen

This brainteaser was used on 11-year-old students in the UK to determine what type of secondary school they should attend.

Fill in the last three blanks in the series:

OTTFSS _ _ _

Answer: **ENT**

The series stands for the initial letters in the numbers one to ten.

Simple, huh? (Diabolically so, heh-heh). Although this was designed for 11-year-olds, a lot of adults fail it, the theory being they try to make it too complex.

"I was brought up in the great tradition of the late nineteenth century: that a writer never complains, never explains and never disdains."

James Michener



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Book Review

by Peter O'Brien

Dynamic Characters by Nancy Kress

The literary tripod is considered to consist of character, plot, and theme. In crime fiction, the three stabilizers involve character, place, and story. In each instance, the central role of character development to the success of the story is clear.

In Nancy Kress's text, various aspects of developing character are examined, following the underlining of the above point. Character development is essential and will be a critical device in moving the story forward. Although the idea of "first impressions" may be considered a cliché, it has relevance in the details that Kress goes into in examining the ways in which an author can establish and develop a character.

Imagery, dialogue, attitudes, background, motivation, and what is standing in the way of the character achieving his or her goals are all methods of character development. As well, a fatal flaw in any main

character needs to be set out early in the story. In addition to main characters, there can be villains, secondary characters and archetypes who embody universal human traits.

Kress also notes that people often read to identify with characters or to enjoy the story and adventure in a vicarious manner. Although this idea can have ominous overtones when we consider that most mystery stories will involve a corpse and murderer, the main point seems to be that the author should take this into account when developing a character.

Overall, I thought this was a good reference text for details to consider when developing characters in a story.

Upcoming CARWA Workshop

Date: Sat June 5, 2004
Speaker: mystery writer
Eileen Dreyer
(from St. Louis County,
Missouri, USA; see
www.eileendreyer.com)

Topic: Suspense, Tension and Pacing
Place: Parkdale Community

Centre (3512 - 5th Ave NW)
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
(pot luck lunch)

This workshop is open to non-members for a cost of \$55 each.

Please contact Judy Amerl at jamerl@telus.net for info or to register.

eMystery!

The INK Web Site
Committee
Anne Jayne
Sherry Wilson McEwen
Lorraine Paton

INK is now online. Type www.mysterywritersink.com in your browser address bar and follow the links on the home page. For the Members Only section, you will receive a User ID and password by email.

We're looking for content contributions (writing tips, relevant links) and suggestions about what you'd like to see on the site. And we want to post news about our members (guidelines for submission will soon be posted on the Bios page.) Clue in to your organization and make it work for you!



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Presentation Review

by Donna Tunney

Life with the RCMP

Joe Nolan is a great storyteller. And, having served in the RCMP for twenty-five years, he's got a lot of stories to tell. He was kind enough to come to our January Mystery Writers INK meeting to share some of his insights and anecdotes with us.

Charles Walter "Joe" Nolan joined the Mounties when he was eighteen and retired as a Staff Sergeant. During the course of his service he worked in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon. For him, the best part of the job was the variety of the work involved—there was always something interesting happening. The worst part was having to notify people when there was a death in their family. That, and the stress the job caused for his own family. It was very difficult for his wife and children to move around so much.

In Joe's early days, an RCMP officer was often a one-man

show. In remote parts of the country, he might be the only law around for hundreds of miles. The job required resourcefulness, patience, self-motivation, and common sense. And not just for the male officer. His wife was often expected to pitch in as well, even cooking for the prisoners, though this work was never acknowledged.

One of the most memorable cases Joe was involved in took place in Shell Lake, Saskatchewan. There, a family of two adults and seven children were murdered. Using forensic evidence—shell casings and a bloody shoe print found at the scene—officers were able to track the killer to his home just forty miles away. The twenty-one-year-old, mentally ill man had a history of violence. His confession was recorded and admitted into evidence—a new procedure at the time.

As far as insights into the criminal mind, Joe said a survey was run once at the jail in Whitehorse, asking those incarcerated, "Why do you think you're in jail?" The prisoners blamed everyone

but themselves for their crimes. They did not accept responsibility for their actions.

After retiring from the RCMP, Joe worked for Canada Post and Agriculture Canada, helping them with their security investigations, and has great stories about his work there, too, from cleaning staff stealing clothing out of packages bound for charity groups, to smugglers sneaking exotic birds across the border.

If you're thinking of writing a mentor for your cop hero or heroine, Joe is the perfect man to talk to. He has graciously agreed to be a resource person for our INK members and has provided his email address: cwnolan@telus.net.

"We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection...We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth."

Anais Nin



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Presentation Review

by Garth Benson

File Curiosity

I sat in an RCMP sergeant's office eager to interview him about murder. He cancelled the original interview because there was a murder in his jurisdiction overnight. When I came into his office, I noticed a large, brown cardboard box with the murder victim's surname and a file number inked on it. I looked at the box; the Sergeant looked at me. Curiosity about the organization of the files almost forced a question, but I thought it better not to ask.

Police files are designed not only to organize and retrieve information but to do two more things. One, to create a complete, detailed account of the crime so that the Crown prosecutor may present the court case. And two, to maintain secrecy about specific aspects of the crime.

Detective Peter Bellion, Major Crimes, Calgary Police Service, provided the essentials of a case and how it is managed in a presentation to MWI March 11, 2004. All of this was done through an example of two Calgary bank robberies. Although Peter's talk gave us many laughs about the behaviour of robbers and bankers, throughout the presentation there was an underlying ethical point of the importance of gathering appropriate evidence to ensure those guilty of the robberies are convicted.

A case file is given an operational

name that must be new, different, and descriptive. For his case, Peter Bellion used Operation Bluebeard because one of the robbers had a scruffy beard with a slight blue tinge. Some of Operation Bluebeard's subfiles were LAYOUT (Crime Scene), SUSPECTS, INTERVIEWS, EVIDENCE, and INCIDENT COMPARISON, where information for each aspect of the case is recorded.

With the identification of a potential suspect, detectives start asking more pointed questions of informants, and if the additional information strengthens the case, then the investigators develop an OPERATIONAL PLAN. This part of the case file requires a great deal of precise, detailed planning because the cops are going to invade someone's privacy.

According to Bellion, "The [Canadian] Charter of Rights and Freedoms guards our privacy most jealously," and thus, the plan is scrutinized by a judge to decide if warrants will be issued to let the cops bug your home, office, vehicle, or telephone, or follow you and record still and video images, and totally invade your privacy for the next sixty days. If the warrants are approved, the cops hook you up and bug you silly. They will introduce you to beautiful women or the hunkiest men—all depending upon your taste—drinking, golfing, or backgammon playing buddies, or whatever it takes to get you to spill your guts. In other words, the cops do anything to get evidence. This goes around the clock, seven days a week.

Bellion said, "We don't want to listen to you snoring, so we step up the pressure. We find out what time you go to bed and there will be a phone call, fifteen minutes later, "Oh, this is Detective Bellion. Sorry about that, but I forgot to ask about...." The intention is to get you so upset that you start ranting, raving, talking to your spouse, or the walls, and spill everything. Of course, the bugs pick up your fateful words and send them to the van parked down the street, to be recorded as evidence.

The OPERATIONAL PLAN of a case file grabbed me as a writer. Here is tantalizing police procedure full of potential mystery, action, humour, and conflict. Imagine Bellion's description of a cop from the Sneaky Pete section, dressed in white coveralls and toque, belly crawling across a snow-covered field, when a coyote mistakes him for a chunk of carrion. Or, Peter standing at the open door of the suspect's house when he spots two sets of Rottweiler eyes coming down the hall. Peter turns, the dogs attack and tear at his jacket as he sprints for the unmarked car that his partner, thoughtfully, parked 50 metres down the road. Peter barely gets back to the car to slam the door before the snarling, snapping dogs dribble snot all over the windows.

As writers we could do much worse than focus on case management, because it offers authentic procedure and drama, and it let my imagination plot a fiend recorded in that RCMP murder box.



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Book Review

by Sherry Wilson McEwen

"L" is for Lawless

by Sue Grafton

Sue Grafton is much further down the alphabet now, but having just read *"L" is for Lawless*, I wondered how many of the elements outlined in the INK New Members handout does this bestseller fulfill? The handout lists 10 clues for a successful mystery, and Grafton meets or exceeds them all.

#1 Play fair with the reader.

Grafton relays all clues the first person narrator would be aware of.

#2 Raise the stakes.

Grafton makes things uncomfortable for her protagonist when Kinsey Millhone must tail a suspect with \$40, a credit card that's almost topped up, and no clean underwear to boot. Things get more complicated and Kinsey faces bodily harm, a fire, and being threatened with a gun. Each event raises the stakes.

#3 Control the pace.

Grafton starts out with the pace of normal life, and during the action sequences

things speed up, then slow to allow the reader a breather and to introduce new characters. Dialogue and action are nicely balanced.

#4 Threaten characters.

An old woman, Kinsey, and a thief and his daughter are all threatened with death and/or bodily harm—threats galore.

#5 Challenge characters' ingenuity.

Examples of this abound: the daughter hides the loot in a pregnancy belly harness. Kinsey dons a maid's uniform to gain access to a hotel room.

#6 Allow characters to make mistakes.

Kinsey gives her location away by trusting a friend. In her personal life, Kinsey is twice divorced.

#7 Limit detective's options.

When in Dallas, Kinsey has only two choices, neither of them ideal: go home and forget the case and remain unpaid for her work, or continue on to Kentucky with a couple of thieves.

#8 Isolate detective physically.

Kinsey goes to Dallas and has to lie low in her hotel room.

#9 Isolate detective psychologically.

Kinsey is broke, away from home and friends, alone, and can't communicate with anyone.

#10 Impose a deadline.

Grafton uses two: one, Kinsey has to return before she runs out of money and credit, and two, Kinsey has to be home for a good friend's wedding within the week.

The tone of this book is light and humorous, interlaced with moments of high tension. A fun and lively read. The violence is not extreme and is largely off-stage, which is in line with a soft PI series. The protagonist is a loveable loner whom readers can relate to. Language is conversational, with very good descriptions and unusual but apt similes, such as "The ticket dispenser buzzed and a parking ticket emerged from the slot like a tongue." Grafton's imagery is precise, as in "The overhead lighting made us all look jaundiced." Clues, including a few red herrings (such as a false WWII intelligence trail) are scattered about, so it's not too easy to guess the outcome.



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Exceeding My Goals

by Nina Evashkevich

People start their writing careers for many different reasons. I knew I enjoyed writing and I wanted to arrange my own hours around my family. As a freelance writer, both of my desires were met. I write mostly non-fiction, so I'm learning fiction writing through three different writing groups that I belong to, Mystery Writers Ink being one of them.

My ultimate goal is to write only books. The freelancing is building my portfolio of published works, hones my skills as a prolific writer, and helps me learn to meet deadlines, write tight, and have a cash flow. My writing company is called Blue Quill Industries and is a legally registered partnership between my husband and I.

Here are some tips for anyone wanting to write professionally:

Make sure you make yourself some business cards. Business card blanks are available at stationery stores like Staples. This makes you look more professional,

even if it is just your name and address on it.

Remember to keep a copy of ALL writing credits. I photocopy my articles so I have a copy that won't yellow. Local newspapers are a great place to start freelancing, then move on to magazines (or other publications), which usually pay better. Each time you are published it is a credit to your portfolio, and all your publications add up to make a publishing house look at you as a "real" writer.

Equipment-wise, if you are going to freelance, you will need a good camera. When your photos are published, make sure they give you the photography credit as well. You can write off the investment through your company. A tape deck with a remote microphone is also invaluable. Buy a good quality one. I think my AlphaSmart 3000 is the best investment I've made in my writing career. I have had it everywhere: on an airplane, at the beach, and in the playground. I love it!

Remember that writers' market guides are updated

every single year. They include the names of publishing houses and editors, what they are looking for, when they are accepting manuscripts, and other important information. NEVER buy a market guide that isn't the current year—it is totally useless. The market changes too quickly. You can buy magazine market guides, book market guides, and other similar sourcebooks.

The downsides of freelancing include no guaranteed paycheck, lots of leg work to get jobs, especially when you first get started, and discipline to get the work done on time. I sometimes take my AlphaSmart and get out of the house. There are fewer distractions and I get more work done.

Last year, my goal was to be published 52 times during the year, once a week. I was published 71 times.

Set your goals, aim high and work hard.

"Writing books is the closest men ever come to childbearing."

Norman Mailer



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Mystery Writers Ink Society

223 - 12th Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0G9
Canada

Mission Statement

Mystery Writers Ink shall support writers of mystery fiction by providing networking opportunities and by educating and informing writers about writing techniques, publishing, and marketing.

Newsletter Submissions

Mystery Press is published quarterly, in September, December, March, and June. Original material only please. Articles may not be reprinted without permission of the authors. MWI reserves the right to edit submissions.

The deadline for the next newsletter is August 20, 2004.

Please send requests for guidelines, as well as submissions, to jaynbarn@telusplanet.net.

Program Schedule

Thursday, June 10, 2004

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
AGM
Social: Death by Chocolate
Readings by members Sherry Wilson McEwen, Fiona Pinnell, Donna Wickens, Peter O'Brien, Lorna Schultz Nicholson, and Sharon Wildwind.

Thursday, Sept. 9, 2004

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Welcome Back!
Topic: Enneagram
Presenter: Gayle Laird
Learn about this ancient system of personality types to create your characters.

Lug a Mug

We don't have a storage area at our meeting place, so please bring your own coffee cup. Styrofoam cups are available to the forgetful!



Enjoy a bottomless cup of coffee for only 25 cents!

Mystery Writers Ink Society

2003-2004 Board of Directors:

President	Suzanne Stengl
Vice President	Cathy Welburn
Secretary	Sherry McEwen
Treasurer	Donna Wickens
Membership	Janet Hunter
Facilities Mgmt	Anne Jayne
Library	Sherile Reilly
Program	Sherile Reilly
Public Relations	Donna Tunney

Newsletter:

Editor	Penny Grey
Layout/Design	Penny Grey
Distribution	Sharon Wildwind
Database Mgr	Brenda Collins

Webmaster: Sherry McEwen

Memberships:

Memberships are accepted between Sept 1 and Oct 31 of each year.


Published authors and past members may join at any time.

Full membership:
\$35, which includes newsletter

Associate membership:
\$45, which includes newsletter

Newsletter only: \$10

Got Questions?

Drop us a line: 
mysterywritersink@hotmail.com