



Mystery Press

Mystery Writers Ink

Volume No. 2 Issue No. 3

March 2004

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President's Message

by Suzanne Stengl

A lot has happened since we last met on this page.

Seventeen members attended our New Member Orientation in December. Donna Tunney instructed us in Manuscript Format, Grace Panko intrigued us with a glimpse of the Synopsis, and Janet Hunter entertained us with her comments on the Query. Add that to coffee and dessert, a

Bingo of clues, and Mystery Writers Ink comradery and you have an enjoyable evening of networking with other writers.

In January, retired RCMP Staff Sergeant Joe Nolan told us about his twenty-five years of work in small towns and rural Saskatchewan. In February, Sergeant Jim Edwards gave us a slide show leading us through investigative techniques and a crime scene.

INK members have been busy with parawriting activities. Jayne Barnard, Donna Wickens, Fiona Pennell, and Peter O'Brien have formed our first critique group. Sherry Wilson McEwen, Lorraine Paton, and Anne Jayne have started construction work on INK's website.

And, we have a free Reader Reward card for this year. Special thanks to our Public Relations chair Donna Tunney who has arranged this with the McNally Robinson bookstore.

Write on!

INK Who Am I?

My husband and I own an indoor climbing centre.

Answer on page 5.

Free Reader Reward Card

Special thanks to McNally Robinson Bookstore (120 8 Ave SW) for giving MWI members a FREE Reader Reward Card.

The card allows 10% off regularly priced books, audio books, giftware, and toys, and 10% off in the restaurant. (Please note that magazines, bargain books, and short discount books do not apply.)

The regular price of the card is \$25, but as an MWI member you get it for free this year. And if you like it, you can renew it next year for just \$10. The bookstore has a list of all current members. Just tell them who you are and you will receive your card.

Tory McNally of McNally Robinson says that they want to recognize the richness that writers, and writers' groups, add to the community.

"Fiction writers of every stripe have a great deal more in common than the disparity of our work might suggest. The fact that we write unites us far more than the nature of what we write separates us." *Lawrence Block*



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Dead Men Do Tell Tales

by Jayne Barnard

Almost every mystery story has a corpse in it somewhere. Most mystery readers have some familiarity with phrases like "rigor mortis" and "post-mortem lividity." Few mystery writers, however, have first-hand experience with dead bodies; many of us are content to keep it that way. However, mystery writers eventually spend precious hours searching the Internet, hoping to find those key differences between, for instance, a victim of drowning and one smothered first and later immersed.

Go ahead, call the Community Policing Line. Someone there will surely know. But be prepared for probing questions, stonewalled answers, and lingering suspicion. There is a better way: register for the University of Calgary's extension course, "Dead Men Do Tell Tales." It's a 10-week evening class that covers corpses from the moment of death down to the last, flaking fragment of weathered bone. Fortunately, the odour of decay is absent.

In October of 2003, my forensic journey began. I was, somewhat to my surprise, the only writer among twenty crime-show fans. Handling human skeletons from the university's specimen collection, we learned to distinguish gender, calculate height from an incomplete skeleton, and estimate the age of the deceased. It's not as precise a science as the TV shows pretend.

Slides and charts showed the order, rate, and variables of human body decomposition: wet/dry, hot/cold, fully immersed (in cold, warm or salt water), fully exposed, and fully or partially buried. Even soil type affected decomposition rates. We examined photographic evidence of a grave that was inadvertently located by the murderer in just the right conditions to ensure excellent preservation of all the forensic evidence—a how-not-to lesson that any prospective murderer would find useful.

Then there was the class involving insects: how and where and when they enter the body, what their presence (or

absence) reveals, how their activity affects the cause-of-death investigation. One of the world's leading forensic entomologists lives here in Alberta, in Edmonton, and consults with the Provincial Medical Examiner's office there. Our class toured the Calgary Medical Examiner's Office, saw the autopsy suite and the body-sized fridges, handled a variety of horrific instruments, and "solved" a crime staged for visitors. The next week, we were treated to a slide show and talk by Dr. Ann Katzenburg, who has consulted on bones for the Calgary Medical Examiner since the mid-1980s. Slides seen in this course were far less disturbing than the murder scene photos shown at a recent Ink meeting.

Aspiring mystery writers can get the inside scoop on just how plainly Dead Men Do Tell Tales by checking the University of Calgary Extension website, or the guides found in freebie racks at grocery stores, for details of the next class.

"The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose."
Oscar Wilde, in Pen, Pencil and Poison.



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Book Review

by Brenda Collins

The Dreaded Synopsis by Elizabeth Sinclair

Phew! I finally put that baby in the mail. My manuscript. At a recent writers' conference, I was one of the lucky ones to receive a request-for-submission. As an experienced business woman, it didn't take me any time to whip off the query letter to go with my first three chapters, but then I hit a snag—the dreaded synopsis.

After almost two years of self-study and workshops on point-of-view, character arcs, the hero's journey, and Goals-Motivation-and-Conflict (GMC), I thought I had the mechanics of writing figured out. Somewhere in my subconscious, I vaguely understood that a synopsis was part of the submission. Embedded along with that thought, was the impression that a synopsis is really hard to do. Maybe that's why I left it until the very last minute.

I floundered through five separate drafts, each receiving feedback such as "Good try, hon, but this is all backstory," and "Isn't this supposed to be a romance?" I was in trouble. Finally, as in any good story, my mentor—in this case our RWA Chapter President—swooped in at the final hour with a gem of wisdom: "Read *The Dreaded*

Synopsis by Elizabeth Sinclair." And so began the sixth, and final, version of my short synopsis. To quote the vernacular, that is some book! Sinclair takes a pragmatic but light approach to building a synopsis.

First, do you have the content you need? She walks the reader through the fundamentals of novel development, making sure that you have the key pieces for weaving your synopsis. I read a chapter each day and applied it to my work through her assignment at the end of each section. Sinclair asked me to review my character worksheets to make sure I knew my characters—their mission (goals), incentive (motivations), and obstacles (conflicts). My confidence grew as I confirmed that my characters were well rounded. I also confirmed, albeit with much greater understanding, that I had nailed tone and setting. Then she hit my weakness: scene structure. I had the plot all figured out; in my head it flowed perfectly: each turning point, through black moment on to resolution. However, I had not drilled down to the progressive and sequential scenes that are so essential to the tension and flow of the story. I had skipped that all-important step of writing down my story in a structured outline. Her table interlinking the emotional and physical journey was a real

revelation and is the key to content in a synopsis in my opinion. As we worked together, Sinclair and I, we moved from the plot arc to the emotional arc. Then on through climax, resolutions, and rewards, the satisfying ending. She didn't stop there; she pushed me on through the three phases of editing.

Each step was introduced with a concise explanation of the concept, followed by examples, and a working chart to help you organize your thoughts. Her appendices are not to be skipped either. She includes a Word Exchange to help you tighten up your work; adjectives that can be exchanged with nouns, stronger active verbs to replace those weaker adverbs, and even words that could replace phrases when word count is important. With Elizabeth Sinclair's help, I wrapped up a tight, cohesive synopsis in my package to the editor.

Rumour has it that Elizabeth Sinclair will be coming to speak to the Calgary chapter of the Romance Writers of America (CARWA) in the coming months so you can experience her insights into the craft first hand. Believe me, I'll be the first in line to see her!

See page five of this newsletter for CARWA's Speakers list.



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A Publisher's Perspective

by Pamela McDowell

On November 14, 2003, the Alexandra Writers' Society presented a publisher's panel. Ruth Linka (NeWest), Dennis Johnson (Red Deer Press), and Anthony Cooney (Kate Walker & Company) offered the publishing perspective on the business of writing. Here are some of their tips:

- Do your homework before submitting anything. Johnson estimated that 25% of the manuscripts in his slush pile wouldn't be there if the writers had taken the time to research what Red Deer publishes.
- Submitting a manuscript unsolicited is a crapshoot. Suggestions include get to know the "gatekeepers" of the industry (independent booksellers); tightly craft your cover letter into a short, punchy pitch; get published in magazines, anthologies and journals first and note this in your cover letter; and get an agent.
- What consumers will want in the future is a mystery, but 37% of the North American

population are baby boomers, the most well-travelled, best-educated generation in history. Boomers resist growing old and plan for active retirement, so it follows that adventure travel, travel education, history, and biography may continue to do well.

- Walmart will become the next major market, bringing with it a different consumer demographic. Chapters/Indigo and Costco continue to demand deep discounts from publishers, which then are passed on to writers in deeply discounted royalties. Linka relies heavily on a regional market including non-bookstore retail.

Some writers left the discussion disheartened and resentful, having heard too much about the difficulty in getting published. Within each point made, though, there were suggestions in how to succeed, with PERSISTENCE stressed by each of the publishing representatives.

INK Who Am I?
Answer: Fiona Pinnell

CARWA Speakers

date: Sat Apr 17, 2004
speaker: **Deb Hale**, Halifax NS, www.deborahhale.com
topic: The Character Arc
place: Cardel Theatre, 6010 12 St SE
time: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

date: Sat May 8, 2004
speaker: **Marge Smith** (aka Elizabeth Sinclair), St. Augustine, Florida, www.elizabethsinclair.com
topic: The Dreaded Synopsis
place: Cardel Theatre, 6010 12 St SE)
time: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

date: Sat June 5, 2004
speaker: **Eileen Dreyer**, St. Louis County, Missouri, www.eileendreyer.com
topic: Tension, Suspense and Pacing
place: Parkdale Community Centre, 3512 5th Ave NW
time: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

These workshops are open to non-CARWA members for a cost of \$55 each. Potluck lunch.

Please contact Judy Amerl at jamerl@telus.net to register and for info on where to mail your cheque.



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Thanking the Little People

by Sharon Wildwind

I'd like to thank all the little people. But, believe me, they aren't so little. "They" are the people who work hard to come up with obscure information no mystery author can do without. People like the Irish librarian who mailed me the complete 1919 to 1922 curriculum for Celtic Studies at Dublin University, or the stock car enthusiast who pegged down the exact date Fireball Roberts died, or the group that translated dialogue into Scots Gaelic.

We're talking acknowledgements here, and the time to start your acknowledgement page is the day you start your book. So I won't forget anyone a year from now, when the book is finished, I set up a file, labelled Acknowledgements. When someone helps me, I put a copy of the e-mail message or, at the least, his or her name and contact information into the file, entries like

- "Cli - Na Gaidheil Ura" <cli@cli.org.uk> (June 10, 2003): Scots-Gaelic

ranslations

- John Reader; #803, 109th Street; Edmonton (October 2003): Information on TENS machine use in 1978.

Once a year, usually when I do my business plan in January, I send out updates to these people. All it takes is e-mail, for people whose only contact information I have is an e-mail address, or a box of note cards. The note reads something like. "In October of last year, you provided me with information about TENS units available in Canada in the late seventies. I just wanted to let you know that I have finished the third draft, and hope to have the book at my agent in a few weeks. Thanks again for your help."

When the book is finished, I contact the people again to tell them I'm mentioning them in the acknowledgements, and to ask if they want their name used. Some people do and some don't. For the latter, I include a generic reference like "Special thanks to the Edmonton company that provided information on TENS machines."

Finally, if you can afford it,

it's a nice touch to send everyone on your acknowledgement page an autographed, free copy of the book.

Romance/Suspense Book Club

Please join local author C.J. Carmichael for a leisurely Sunday afternoon book discussion enjoyed over coffee and dessert at McNally Robinson's own Prairie Ink Restaurant. We will meet monthly from 2:00 until 4:00 to share impressions on a selection of romantic drama, suspense, and mystery novels.

Bookclub members will receive the McNally Robinson's Reader Reward Card for \$10 (regularly \$25)!

Our schedule is as follows:
March 21: Joy Fielding's *Grand Avenue*
April 18: Tess Gerritsen's *The Surgeon*
May 16: C.J. Carmichael's *For A Baby*
June 20: Eileen Dreyer's *With a Vengeance*

Attendance is limited, so sign up soon. Contact C.J. at cj@cjcar michael.com, or call Donna Tunney at 803-9773.



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A Gut Feel for Murder by Brenda Collins

I've spent the last three years learning the mechanics of murder. Not that I want to commit one. But I have wanted to write one since cracking open my first Agatha Christie. I'm not sure what draws me to the genre. Is it the challenge of solving the puzzle, the fascination of the criminal mind, or just the thrill of a darn good story? I've graduated now from Christie's cozies to the grittier novels of authors such as John Sanford and Kathy Reich. I can't get enough of them.

I finally put pen to paper a few years ago to write my own. I have the requisite dead bodies, the appropriate police procedures and a shot of romance to relieve the tension. But something is missing.

Then I sat through a one-hour lecture presented to Mystery Writers Ink by Jim Edwards, a crime scene investigator with the Calgary Police Service. Murder will never be the same for me. Yes, I am still driven to finish the story I started, and more stories after that, but never with the same

innocence. And I think that may be the making of me as an author.

I have an active imagination and a way with plotting, but I was missing that nebulous "something," that teeth-grinding tension that draws the reader inextricably into my world of murder and mayhem. The "something" that makes the reader care about the victim, about tracking down every clue, about catching the breaks and surviving the setbacks in the investigation, and about identifying the criminal. Could it be that my characters, however rich and interesting I made them, were still just characters?

Jim Edwards changed that. He took us through the real thing—REAL crimes, REAL victims, and REAL murders. He showed us the face of the enemy and the face of the innocent. He not only spoke of the procedures for collecting the fingerprints and analyzing each whorl or island or ridge end. He spoke from personal experience of trying to match a glove print to a smudge on a patio door made by a savage killer. He

spoke to us of the ever-evolving technologies around forensics: DNA, bite mark analysis, tire track or footprint comparisons, the science of blood splatters, and other crime scene essentials.

Now, when I craft the scene when the body is discovered, it won't be drawn from some television show idea of a crime scene. I will forever in my mind's eye see the battered face of a woman whose husband was too stoned to protect her from an equally zoned-out friend. The destruction of that fragile body, her lifeblood splattered sixteen feet along a wall by the rage of a maniac, will fuel my writing and add emotion to my words in a way I could not have achieved before. I can bring to my readers the emotional truth that comes with murder. Maybe I can't bring meaning to the senseless murder of that nameless victim, but she will be in my thoughts, and in my gut, for a very long time.

Jim Edwards, Calgary Police Service, Crime Scene Unit, spoke to MWI Feb. 12, 2003.



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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 March newsletter is May 20, 2004.

Please send requests for guidelines, as well as submissions, to Penny Grey at pegrey@greygroup.ca.

Program Schedule

Thursday, Mar. 11, 2004

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Topic: Case Management of a Robbery File
Presenter: Detective Peter Bellion, Major Crimes Unit

Thursday, April 8, 2004

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Topic: Mystery Structure, Part 1 (promptly at 7:45)
Presenter: Mahrie Glab

Thursday, May 13, 2004

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Topic: Mystery Structure, Part 2 (Promptly at 7:45)
Presenter: Mahrie Glab

Also, our annual BOOK SALE at the break of the May meeting. Donate your old mysteries.

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
Webmasters	Sherry McEwen Lorraine Paton

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