



APRIL 18 MEETING: This month we have a change of pace. We haven't had a session where you get to read your work (in progress, on the rounds, whatever) in a long time. This is the month! Bring a chapter, a scene, a problem or not, an example of your best or more recent or most difficult problem, and read it to the group. In the past we have had some great examples of the sisters' efforts, including a scene Larry Karp cut out of one of his Music Box Murder books because it didn't work there (but could have somewhere else), poetry by Nan Robkin, chapters from Karye Cattrell and Roxanne Dunn. Unlike the flash story night we do in October, this read has no strict word limit; we should keep to a single chapter or scene, though. If you are a reader, not a writer, you can still participate! Bring a scene or favorite chapter from a book or story you find worth sharing. Don't be shy!

MEMBER NEWS:

Carol Thiel Resigns as Co-President

Hi to all,

This is to let you know that, as things are changing in my life, I am going to be pursuing some different areas of interest. Therefore, I will be resigning my role in Sisters in Crime.

I will always fondly remember the Christmas lunch at Crab Cracker, last summer's lively picnic discussions and the many fun meetings, including the very informative demonstration at the gun club!

Good wishes to all of you!

Carol

LAST MONTH: We were treated to a lively talk and reading by Elizabeth George, promoting her latest book, *With No One As Witness*.

Elizabeth began by explaining that when she begins a book, she usually knows where it will take place, but usually doesn't know the crime or solution. However, this time she knew she wanted to write about a serial killer, and to put her own particular spin on it.

The usual way to deal with a serial killer is to let the reader know who the killer is, and the suspense comes in whether the detective will stop the killer before he gets a favorite character. In her book, Elizabeth says, the killer has a dual personality, so you don't know who it is until the end.

She was asked about her methods, as a non-native, of vetting her locations. When she goes to London to search for ideas, does she think like a tourist? She said she doesn't, but she does look at a tourist guide (her favorite is *City Secrets* about London) to see where she wants to go scouting. She looks for places where a murder might occur, where to hide bodies. She takes photographs to look at later to build her scene. For this book, she found a place she had never heard of, Queen's Wood, and when she saw it, she knew a murder had to happen there.

Asked about how she creates the dialect of her characters, Elizabeth said she watches a lot of British television, talks to a lot of people, listens to different social strata, different ways of speaking. She takes notes, tries to get the flavor of the dialect, and uses select words, not exact transcriptions.

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Elizabeth finds it relatively easy to come up with the sub-cultures she uses in her books. She keeps in mind that no matter how weird it seems, there really is someone out there doing it all. She uses her imagination, and reads newspaper cuttings in the Library. British Tabloids are a treasure trove; she looks on the internet for these.

Someone asked about her first novel; Elizabeth had called it *Something to Hide*, and, she said, that's what she did with it. Her second book, *A Suitable Vengeance*, became the fourth in the series, after it was completely rewritten.

Where does she get the titles? She has always been good with titles, she has never had them changed on her. She waits awhile before giving the book a title, looking for a key word to start with, then plays with it until she comes up with the exact words.

She loves England and has been going there since 1966. She ate it all up, Mary Quant, all the fashion statements, everything. Writing is a very solitary thing to do, so it helps to really like every part of where it takes place.

Elizabeth gets some information from the police, but the more you learn the more you go nuts trying to keep it exact. She takes Colin Dexter's advice to know as little as possible about police work as you can, to avoid getting bogged down. For police contact, she likes to talk to them on the street; they are very friendly to her: "People like to talk about their jobs," she says. Arson investigators were uncomfortable with her at first, afraid she may have been gathering info for her own fire starter career, but were very helpful once they were reassured on that score.

Asked about the length of her books, Elizabeth quipped that likes to think of herself as the Charles Dickens of the mystery. *Playing for the Ashes*, for example, is two whole novels. She cut a whole novel and two subplots from *With No One As Witness*, though, as she thought over a thousand pages was a bit too much. She likes to develop characters in subplots, where she can explore them in more depth.

When did she start writing? When she was seven, Elizabeth wrote short stories, but got serious about it when she was in High School. She was more interested in writing than anything else. Her parents wondered why she wasn't dating, but were very supportive. Her mother was a strict Italian lady, and Elizabeth attended a Catholic girls school, so, she asked, "Who would I date?"

For a detailed account of her writing process, Elizabeth suggests reading her book about that, *Write Away*, which describes it in an engaging and informative manner.

Elizabeth begins with research, most of it in England. Her second step in writing is to come home from England, flush out the plot, killer, victim, motive. She makes a list of characters, everyone she thinks will be in the novel, then names them. The names have a lot to do with the social class they are in. She doesn't copy her characters from any real person, but creates them from scratch. That takes her two to three weeks, after which Elizabeth ends up with a document of 200 pages. Next

she creates a step outline of for 15 usually related scenes. She does a kind of narrative, using third person shifting point of view, where each scene has to have something that goes into the next scene. Then she expands this into a running plot outline.

For the rough draft, Elizabeth goes back and forth, shaping the scenes into her novel. The second draft goes to her panel of cold readers for feedback. Her third draft goes to her editor.

—Judy Morrison and Nan Robkin

WHIDBEY ISLAND WRITERS

CONFERENCE: Mystery and suspense was well represented at the 7th annual Whidbey Island Writers Conference (March 4-6, 2005). This is a multi-genre conference, but has had a strong mystery component since year #1.

This year's mystery and suspense presenters included SinC members Carole Nelson Douglas and Patricia Rushford as well as Steve Berry, Robert Ferrigno, Michael Gruber (who's ghost-written Robert Tanenbaum's mysteries), Mike Hawley (who's also our Island County Sheriff), and Steve Martini. Some of the presenters in other genres included Jane Yolen (fantasy, poetry, children's writing), Richard Lederer (humor, non-fiction), and Bharti Kirchner (cookbooks, non-fiction, fiction).

Whidbey is a rural island in the middle of Puget Sound. This not only gives this conference its unique setting, but because there are no large hotels or conference facilities, it limits the size of the conference and ensures a high degree of interaction between attendees and presenters. At this year's conference, there were 50 presenters, agents, editors and publishers for a bit over 200 attendees. It also gave the creators of this conference the opportunity to create something that separates their conference from other writers' conferences -- the Friday "Fireside Chats." Because the facility used for the Saturday and Sunday workshops and sessions isn't available on Friday, attendees are divided into small groups and spend most of Friday in private homes and small retreat facilities with, generally, three presenters per chat. The chats are organized by genre or focus areas such as "Mystery" and "Emerging Writers". At Mystery/Suspense Chat #1 (there were so many mystery/suspense presenters at this year's conference two chats were devoted to this genre) 17 attendees joined with Steve Berry in discussing "Keeping the Suspense in Suspense", Michael Gruber in discussing "Shaping Your Novel With Literary Quality", and Carole Nelson Douglas in discussing "Research Equals Plot: Finding Your Core Theme". Actually, the chat participants, including Carole, were so taken with some of the ideas presented by Michael Gruber, Carole modified her portion of the chat to further explore these ideas as they related to presenting the core theme.

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On the Road with the Women in Blue

by Pat Lunneborg

Last month the focus was on how great it is to be mentored. The other side of the coin is mentoring others.

City Master Patrol Officer: The first woman I mentored was a young college woman who was a ride-along with me and said, I want to be a police officer. I told her, Don't wait until you're 35 (like me). Do it now. She put in her application and flunked the physical. They decided she had curvature of the spine even though she'd never been diagnosed. She called me and I told her, Fight it. Don't take no for an answer. She fought it and she's in the department, married to an officer.

Suburban Patrol Officer: As an FTO, whether the person was a lateral transfer from another department or a newbie right out of the academy, my job was to teach them how to be a cop. You'd have them for two or three weeks and then they'd move on to another person. That way they could glean a little bit from each person and put together their own style. You wanted them to be themselves, picking up a little bit of good from each person they came in contact with.

Suburban Major: I have one woman who struggles in the interpersonal area. We all know she does, she knows she does. I'm probably the only one who would have given her corporal stripes when I did. But she had reached the point where she thought she was never going to get ahead. I gave her the promotion thinking that this will show her that she has a lot of great skills, but we have to work on her lack of interpersonal skill. If she talks to somebody and it sounds rude, I call her on it. I'll say, I know what you're trying to say, but here's how it came across.

City Lieutenant: Women need mentors, one-on-one during the testing process, and after they're hired. One thing I always did with the women was check in on them at the academy to make sure they knew I was available. One woman called me the day she was supposed to go through the testing with pepper spray. She was starting to panic so I went over to make sure I was there for her and helped her wash the stuff off. Another woman is in litigation with her agency. We talk weekly. She needs to

know that there's someone there who (a) knows what's going on, (b) supports her, and (c) knows what an incredible asset she is to her agency.

City Captain: I mentored several women and several minority males because they faced a lot of the same obstacles and sometimes had a hard time fitting in. Both my husband and I encouraged one woman with a lot of potential. Although she was being trained by another officer, I made myself available and said, If you ever want to talk, come see me. She went on to become a lieutenant and then captain.

University Campus Chief: When I hire a new female officer, I sit down with her and say, What you do at the very beginning of your career affects the rest of your career. I made the mistake when I came on, thinking I had to be one of the guys, talk like them, act like them, use foul language, go to the parties. Luckily I realized pretty early on that I could be me and still be a good officer. I encourage new females to think of what they will do, faced with certain situations. The message is, Think before you act.

Suburban Chief: I've been a mentor for a female who was just promoted to sergeant. Her first year was very difficult because it was a controversial promotion and she'd gone to a work area where people resisted her. We met once a week and talked about her experiences. She'd vent and then check with me about things she was thinking of doing. She complained, Nobody's inviting me for coffee and no one wants to go to dinner with me and I feel so isolated. I said, Then you need to show up on a call and say, Can I buy you coffee? I'd like to get to know you. She started reaching out to her staff that way and by the time she left the precinct after her probationary year, they did not want her to go and she did not want to go. She was able to turn her whole self around.

So, the "other side of the coin" has its rewards as well.

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