

LEVEL UP

*Sisters
in Crime*[®]

inSinC Spring 2021



Reaching for new achievements:
What do you have to lose?

Table of Contents

*Sisters
in Crime®*

3 Letter from the president

4 A grateful farewell

This issue's focus: Leveling up

6 A few questions can lead to new heights

9 Questions to ask your manuscript

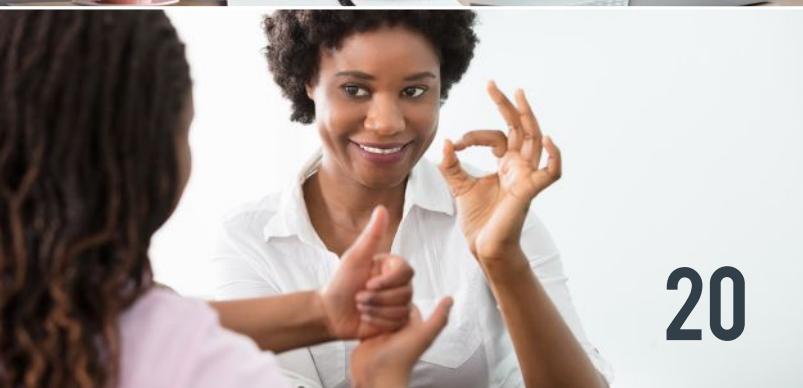
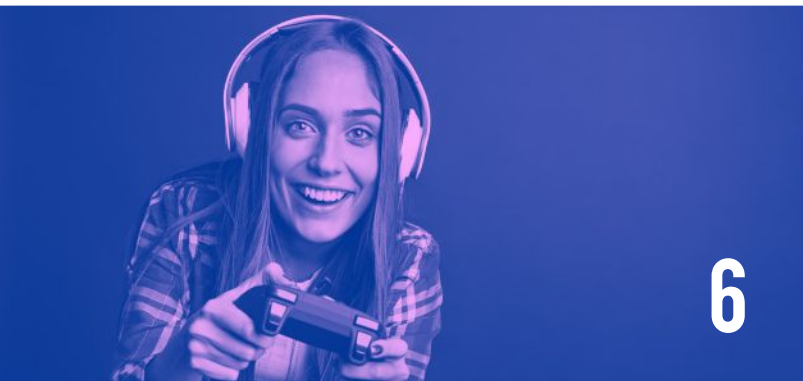
12 Reach beyond fear of change

14 Balance within uncertainty

17 Next level expertise for your stories

20 Living our values: Writing characters who are deaf and hard of hearing

24 The crime scene: News and happenings in our community



inSinC is the official publication of Sisters in Crime (SiC) and is published three times each year. One-year dues are \$50 for professional US and Canada writers and \$40 for non-professionals; lifetime, \$500 and \$400. Email address changes can be made by members at our website, www.sistersincrime.org. Information in *inSinC* is submitted or reprinted with permission. Publication in *inSinC* does not constitute an endorsement of products or services offered. No material may be reprinted without written permission from Sisters in Crime. For reprint rights contact the editor at inSinC@sistersincrime.org. Propose submissions to *inSinC* at www.sistersincrime.org/page/insinc-submissions. ©Sisters in Crime 2021

Mission Statement

Promote the ongoing advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers.

2020 – 2021 Board Members

President

S.G. Wong

Vice President

Stephanie Gayle

Secretary

Faye Snowden

Treasurer/ACA Representative

Jacki York

Grants & Award Coordinator

V.M. (Valerie) Burns

Membership Development Liaison

Tracee de Hahn

Member at Large

Kellye Garrett

Education Liaison

Edwin Hill

Monitoring Project Liaison/ ACA Representative

Cynthia Kuhn

Publicity Liaison

Vanessa Lillie

Chapter Liaison

Alec Peche

Library & Bookstore Liaison

Shari Randall

Web Liaison

Barbara Ross

Immediate Past President

Lori Rader-Day

inSinc, official publication of SinC

Editor

Lori Rader-Day

Designer

Kelsey Schaible
Next Wave Group, LLC

Editorial Content

Gigi Pandian
Julie Hennrikus
Kelly Brakenhoff
Lori Rader-Day
Lynette Eason

Get Social With Us!

Facebook: @sistersincrim
Instagram: @sincnational
Twitter: @SinCNational
YouTube: @SistersInCrimeInc

Sisters in Crime®

550M Ritchie Highway, #271
Severna Park, MD 21146



Spring 2021

Letter from the president



Dear Siblings,

Last spring, when my teenaged children had to switch to online learning for the rest of their school year, I was so proud and impressed to watch them navigate the newness of asynchronous learning and self-guided assignments. Together, we agreed on guidelines for homework, chores, and exercise, including indoor/outdoor activities. By the time June hit, we were a well-oiled machine. My teens were mentally and physically sound, and we all spent a safe and healthy summer, even with some blue days when we missed our various larger communities.

Then fall semester began and it's been a slow downward slide ever since. Forced to adhere to a style of online teaching that doesn't suit them, my kids' former sense of pride and independence have plummeted—as have their grades. It's been difficult watching them dread school every morning and to get nothing but defeated shrugs when we ask about their days over dinner.

There are innumerable reasons for any of us to feel disheartened during these times of pandemic and social/physical isolation. I talk about that a lot with my kids. We share the things we feel at the mercy of, and the things we think we might be able to improve. In times of adversity, the mere idea of 'upping our game' might seem foolish, but we include it in our conversations, too. Not as a must-do, but as a possibility.

Because what we're talking about, is hope. Hope, and the importance of looking forward to something to keep us going.

Writers know this in a profound way. We hope this scramble of letters can somehow translate the grand stories in our imaginations. We hope our characters come alive on the page the same way they do in our heads. We hope we've filled those pesky plot holes that plagued us in the first, second, umpteenth drafts. We hope someone—many someones!—will love what we've written.

Writers know the misery of hard writing days as well as the exultation of nailing that one pivotal scene. Sometimes, the former blocks us from seeing the possibility of the latter. Sometimes, life happens, as I like to say, and our writing time disappears like smoke between our fingers.

How do you hold onto the hope that it will get better? That you will get better, in your writing or otherwise?

Your SinC Siblings are here for you. Reach out. Get on your chapter listserv, forum, or social media feed and share what's going on for you. Maybe you feel stuck and foolish about it. Maybe you're ready to level up, but don't know how. Chances are high you'll find others ready to support you with a kind word, a funny anecdote, or a useful tip. Visit the SinC webinars page and the archives. See what's upcoming that might help you get over that hump in your WIP, or the slump in your reading list. Review past sessions where SinC Siblings overwhelmed the chat box with humour, support, enthusiasm, and love. Share when you can, to uplift others. Let others know when you're the one in need of that jolt of camaraderie. Remind yourself that hope lives in community.

Take care of yourselves, Siblings. We write alone, but it doesn't need to be lonely. There's a cheering section here, ready for you when you need it.

With hope,

Happy retirement to Molly Weston

After ten years, the editor will focus on her own projects.

WRITTEN BY SHERRY HARRIS



Molly Weston with Sherry Harris

Photo by Bob Harris

Sisters in Crime is full of strong, dedicated Siblings, but I'd be hard pressed to name someone that has been more dedicated than Molly J. Weston. Molly was in charge of our journal, *inSinC*, for ten years.

I first met Molly when she was sitting at the SinC table at one of the many conferences she's attended over the years and felt an instant kinship. Molly is smart, funny, charming, and talented. But don't take her

southern charm for her being a pushover, because Molly will set you straight! She wrangled all the different contributors to *inSinC* and had a new boss every year when a new SinC president came on board. She handled all of us with grace. Molly was even patient when someone (ahem, me) was late with an article they'd promised her—more than once.

Molly's very first issue as editor was in March of 2010. Her first column was titled "Be Your Own Shill." The advice from that article is still sound—know your audience, keep your website up to date, carry business cards and bookmarks with you. I did chuckle when I saw that along with Facebook and Twitter, Molly mentioned using MySpace—how quickly things change. (Members can read past issues of *inSinC* on our website.)

I was lucky enough to work with Molly on her last issue of *inSinC* (December 2020) when we announced my legacy project, the Pride Award for Emerging LGBQTQIA+ Crime Writers. Molly's sharp editing eye made the article better.

Molly worked through hard times and personal tragedies, but no one reading *inSinC* would ever realize that because Molly never missed a beat. Molly is retiring from *inSinC* to work on a memoir. I can't wait to read it because I know it will be full of bits of wisdom and humor. Molly, thank you for all the years you devoted to Sisters in Crime and *inSinC*. You've become a mentor and friend, not only to me, but to so many SinC Siblings.

Molly Weston in her own words

Did you know?

...Molly took over *inSinC* back when it was print only, rolling with changes in technology and focus as SinC has evolved. "When I first began editing *inSinC*, there were a fixed number of pages—and I seem to remember the issues were only in black and white," she said. "The issues were all mailed... Then, we moved to color PDFs sent via email, but continued with the black and white version for mail. Finally, we moved to the 'flip book' version sent to all members."

...Molly credits the generosity of members for making her job easier. "Probably the best thing [about editing *inSinC*] was the people who did the heavy lifting," she said. "It was unbelievable how people emailed me with ideas for columns who then proceeded to write them, often series."

...Molly is a writer, too. She's working on a couple of collections of pieces she's written over the years, including one she's typing up for the true author, her dog. The other keeps a promise to her family. "Because the small town where I grew up blossomed with so many families from across the US, I contacted the local paper and offered to write a biweekly article, 'Looking Back,' about growing up in Apex during the 1950s," Molly said. "This year, our historical society asked me to write a similar article for its newsletter. I dug out an old one and, after revamping it, realized it was time to fulfill a promise to my daughter and gather these for a memoir."

...Molly looks forward to seeing you soon. She's looking forward to future mystery conferences where she plans to "Grab and hug old friends! I've been going to conferences so long—well before involved with *inSinC*. I usually get in a few hugs in the airport!"

SinC Remembers

MARGARET MARON (1938-2021)

Sisters in Crime notes, with sadness, the passing of Margaret Maron. Her role in Sisters in Crime was instrumental. From the Sisters in Crime history: "Margaret Maron recalls, 'After Phyllis Whitney's letter to MWA and what many considered their dismissive response, Sara Paretsky sent a letter to every mystery writing woman she could find, asking if we were interested in forming a networking group. I thought it was great for someone of her caliber to take this on for all women; and although she hadn't asked for money, I sent her a roll of stamps to help with mailing costs.'"

Margaret did much more than send stamps. "Although all Sisters consider Sara their founding mother, Nancy [Pickard] was the first elected president. [Nancy said:] 'I had to work up my nerve to call Margaret Maron to ask her to be my vice president—she said yes, and boy, was I ever the luckiest president ever! Besides being a wonderful writer, Margaret is the world's best organizer, correspondent, and paper-keeper; she deserves all the credit for keeping the organizational part of SinC alive and functioning that year. That was the beginning of one of my most treasured friendships. Thanks for saying yes, Margaret! I was delighted to hand her the gavel at the end of my year.'"

Margaret served as SinC's third president from 1989-1990. In addition to her work with SinC, Margaret served as national president of Mystery Writers of America in 2005 and in 2013 was named an MWA Grand Master.



Her books won the Edgar, Anthony, Agatha, and Macavity awards—in the case of her novel *Bootlegger's Daughter*, all four Best Novel awards in the same year, one of the few novels to have ever achieved this feat. Maron wrote 20 novels in the Deborah Knott series, in addition to several standalones and additional popular series books.

Margaret died February 23 from complications of stroke. She is survived by her husband, son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren.

TO LEVEL UP
IS TO UNLOCK
A NEW ACHIEVEMENT.
ARE YOU LOOKING AHEAD,
PLANNING A NEW MOVE?
GAME ON.

LEVEL UP

A FEW QUESTIONS CAN LEAD YOU TO NEW HEIGHTS

WRITTEN BY LORI RADER-DAY



The first time I met my editor, I spent some time dithering about a scene that had sneaked into my novel in progress. (This is how I write, scenes sneak in.) I was fretting about whether the scene changed the tone of the book too much, even though I loved the work it did for my character who I now *finally* understood. My editor looked at me and sliced through the hemming and hawing with a question: "Lori," she said, "who do you want to be?"

As a rule, answering a question with a question instead of an answer isn't my favorite thing, but this one made all the sense in the world to me. It answered not just the question I had asked but also the silent question I hadn't realized I was asking, something like... *As good as I have it right now, do I want to stay the writer I am, or can I keep moving on from here?*

In the past year I've had several conversations with many writers which all boil down to some form of the same essential question. Is it OK to want something more from ourselves? And if the answer to that is yes, how do we get there?

Time to talk about leveling up.

New attitude

As writers we give our characters desires because it makes them human. But we don't always afford ourselves, actual living, breathing people, the same permission.

It's human nature to want something just out of our grasp, to scramble up onto the countertops and immediately reach for the next, higher shelf. Within a group of writers, people who are expected to be hard on themselves, it won't take long for the phrase "moving the goalposts on yourself" to be uttered. But isn't there an upside to moving your attention further along, once you've reached a milestone? Isn't that upside simply... progress? Who doesn't want progress?

There's certainly nothing wrong with blissing out where you're happy. If you're happy. And if the current times have you overextended, there's *really* nothing wrong with giving yourself a break and congratulating yourself for keeping your head above water.

But if you're not satisfied, and you have the energy and attention to take on Project Next Step? What do you do about that?

In a world that is suffering real problems, that demonizes ambitious women, the real, unspoken question may be... *Am I allowed to want more than I have?*

Let me answer that question with a question: What do you have to lose?

New goals

So what does it mean to "level up?"

The phrase itself may have its origins in video gaming, where the goal is to survive early game levels so that your character rises to a new challenge, hopefully with prizes to claim at the end. (Merriam-Webster is monitoring "level up" as an entry.) In a writing career, leveling up can mean any achievement that inches the writer closer to where they want to be. Punch through a book launch, dodge bad reviews, collect that new contract—or, finish another paragraph, gather the courage to show someone else pages, have a breakthrough with a baffling character. What does it mean to level up? The answer is another question, I'm afraid: What do you want to achieve?

When **Jess Lourey** started writing a novel based partly on her own childhood, she didn't set out to game any system or break through any ceilings in her career. "I'm a driven person, so I've always had and will always have one eye on leveling up," she said. "I was fairly convinced the book would never find a publisher... but chasing the market hadn't worked for me, so I wrote the story only I could write. And holy

hell it worked." In its first year, her thriller *Unspeakable Things* sold over a quarter of a million copies and garnered Lourey her first Edgar Award nomination.

This is the stuff dreams are made of, the stuff we don't even admit we want, because we aren't in control of things like awards or sales. As goals, they're candy fluff. We can't to-do our way into them because we can't anticipate success without factoring in luck or timing or, drat, the public's quicksilver tastes. All we can do is locate that higher shelf and calculate what it will take—take *from* us—to get our hand within striking distance.

New angles

Calculating the work required to level up is what Sisters in Crime national board member **Kellye Garrett** is doing after her first publishing imprint closed down, leaving her award-winning Detective by Day series unfinished. Instead of wallowing, she went to work on a new book very different than her first two, humorous cozy mysteries. "I've definitely been more strategic when working on my current manuscript by stepping out of my comfort zone to write domestic suspense," she said. Garrett's not changing everything, of course. "It still was important for me to stay true to myself, though, in creating an #ownvoices black woman main character."

Strategic thinking about the kind of books she'll write is how **Kitty Felde**, author of *Welcome to Washington Fina Mendoza*, is pivoting, too. "I changed the emphasis from pure kid-lit mystery to using my books as a teaching tool for elementary school civics."

Personally, I'm taking on a project I've dreamed about trying for years, and that's the sort of thing I'm hearing from friend after friend, that they are not putting off dreams any longer. Trying a new subgenre, finding a new agent, risking some skin in the game—for their own, internal, win.

15 Questions to ask your manuscript to level up in craft

- ✓ Have you started the story in the right place?
- ✓ Is your protagonist doing something interesting when we met them?
- ✓ Does your character want something?
- ✓ How soon before your pages hint at trouble or discord?
- ✓ How long does it take to introduce the main story problem?
- ✓ Have you included significant details about characters and settings?
- ✓ Is your point of view consistent and the voice of your narrator strong?
- ✓ Are there any moments hinted at that should be told in scene?
- ✓ Are there scenes that could be told instead of shown?
- ✓ Does all the backstory do work for the story?
- ✓ Is the dialogue compelling—authentic but efficient?
- ✓ Can you tell the characters apart when they speak?
- ✓ Does each scene progress the story?
- ✓ Do your chapters end well, leaving readers wanting more?
- ✓ Have you read your story aloud, listening for rhythms, varied sentence structures, overused words, and accidental rhymes?

IN A WORLD THAT IS SUFFERING REAL PROBLEMS, THAT DEMONIZES AMBITIOUS WOMEN, THE REAL, UNSPOKEN QUESTION MAY BE... AM I ALLOWED TO WANT MORE THAN I HAVE?

What do we have to lose? Well, what if we don't try?

"After writing for most of my life—and doing very little about publishing—2020 pushed me into taking my writing-self more seriously," said **Frances Sheldrick**. "Since last spring, I have written a complete novel (about to begin the submission process) and am about three-quarters of the way through a second. And I have plans for a third. Probably the most interesting thing about all of it is that I am nearing my eighth decade. A 'late bloomer' indeed."

New ideas

Knowing what we want isn't enough. We have to do something about it, and that takes a course correction. I asked Sisters in Crime members about how they're leveling up.

"I've done a better job at setting a schedule," reports SinC past president **Leslie Budewitz**, author of *The Solace of Bay Leaves*. "The mornings are for writing and the afternoons are for promotions and personal business."

Joanna Vander Vlugt, author of *The Unravelling*, is also tweaking her use of time. "My husband's shifts have changed and

he's home more," she said. "I miss peaceful writing time. So, I've started waking up earlier, and when he leaves, I have 30 to 40 minutes before the day job, when I can sit in the quiet and work out any issues or problems in my novel."

Delia C. Pitts, author of *Murder My Past*, took a look at her writing practice for opportunities to up her game. "I have strengthened the editing phase of my writing process," she said.

Or perhaps a new tool is the inspiration you need. **Zara Altair**, author of *The Vellum Scribe*, started using Plottr. **A.M. Ialacci**, author of *Diamonds, Teak, and Murder*, adopted a quarterly planning method. **Carol Newhouse**, *The Word Is Murder*, engaged a storyboard to keep organized. **Constance Meccarello-Gerson**, *French Cruises Can Kill You*, subscribed to an online editing program for help.

The tool could be something you build for yourself, like the monster to-do list **Mary Burgess**, author of *Bad Karma*, keeps, or the list **J.E.S. Hays**, author of *Down the Owlhoot Trail*, started for magazine and anthology submission dates. "I have a firm deadline for most stories," she said, "which keeps me grinding away every day."



New avenues

Sometimes, though, the change we have to make is bigger than a one-percent pivot. Sometimes we have to go back to the drawing board.

"I am unpublished and started querying a manuscript. After ten rejections, I received one that told me the writing didn't pull them in," said **C. Smith**. "It hurt, but I went back to basics. I'm digging in and reading/working through craft books, asking questions at writer groups, and reworking and rewriting. Virtual meetings have allowed me to rejoin SinC Iowa and Columbia River SinC where there is expertise and advice to guide me."

We can decide to blaze a new path, though, at any stage of our career. **Eileen Rendahl**, author of *Women of a Certain Rage*, registered as a ghostwriter to take on side gigs. **Sheila Lowe**, author of *Dead Letters*, requested and received the rights to her books and started her own imprint to re-issue them.

New answers

The truth is that publishing is a hard business. Surviving as an author might require some Donkey Kong-like zigs and zags from us—or we might take a sharp turn in a new direction because that's what we want to do.

In good times and in bad, it never hurts to ask the tough questions. To hear the victory music as the next achievement is unlocked, you first have to play the game.

"I've started the year with a plan, the first time I've done this," said **Kate Parker**, author of *Deadly Travel*. "I don't know if I'll finish everything in 2021, but I know what direction I'm taking."



Lori Rader-Day is the immediate past-president of Sisters in Crime. Her next novel—the outlier—is *Death at Greenway*, set at Agatha Christie's holiday home during World War II.



I KNEW, THEN, THAT I NEEDED TO WRITE THE STORIES I WANTED TO TELL, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT THERE WAS A MARKET FOR THEM. IN A TWIST I DIDN'T SEE COMING, I LEARNED THAT A MIRACULOUS THING HAPPENS WHEN YOU MAKE A DECISION TO TOSS ASIDE FEAR AND GO ALL IN FROM THE HEART: YOUR BOOKS GET EVEN BETTER.

A Story of Reaching Beyond Fear

WRITTEN BY GIGI PANDIAN

It's been nearly a decade since I became a published author. My writing journey has taken me on an incredibly winding path, made all the more enjoyable because of my SinC Siblings. I was not an overnight success, but I've experienced clear turning points in my writing career that propelled me to the next level, including two leaps forward this past year: I both won an Anthony Award and sold a new series at auction. I didn't realize it at the time, but looking back, I can see a pattern in *how* I made the leap from one level of success to the next.

I began writing my first novel 20 years ago, in 2001. I finished a draft years later,

after discovering NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), which helped me let go of my inner editor and self-doubt. I was so thrilled to have reached "the end" that I submitted my manuscript to the Malice Domestic Grants competition for unpublished traditional mystery writers. I was gobsmacked to win their 2007 grant, which led to meeting my fellow Sisters in Crime and taking my writing seriously.

I signed with a wonderful agent in 2009, but... publishers didn't know where my book fit. This same feedback continued for more than a year—until a cancer diagnosis right after my 36th birthday. It's the type of unexpected

news that makes you think about your priorities in life. I decided that after the year of cancer treatments that lay ahead of me, I would self-publish my debut novel and throw a big party at a local independent bookstore to celebrate both completing my cancer treatments and publishing my novel, *Artifact*. (The dual celebration was awesome.)

Our books will never please *everyone*, and that's OK. But I never thought *anyone* would want to read the new series I created during chemotherapy—a living gargoyle and a vegan alchemist, really? I was writing the book for myself as therapy while stuck at home with no immune system (writing a story about an alchemist who accidentally discovers the Elixir of Life while I going through chemo; no, my subconscious is not very subtle). I was surprised to learn that my agent adored my pages, as did a publisher.

In yet another twist, after I finished writing the second book in my Jaya Jones Treasure Hunt Mystery Series, in which I strayed even further from cozy mystery conventions, I received an offer from a publisher to pick up the series, based on the strength of that genre-bending second book. I'd learned that life was short, so I'd gone all-in with the stories I wanted to write, and now I was slowly finding my audience.

For the next few years, I was happy with slow and steady progress: publishing a book a year, writing locked-room mystery short stories, finding community with my fellow

mystery readers and writers, watching my writing income grow a bit each year, and winning Agatha, Derringer, and Lefty Awards along the way.

Then came the book I nearly didn't finish. I had an idea for my fourth Accidental Alchemist mystery I wasn't sure I could pull off. But I had to try. I loved my twist. Could I do it? (As my husband and my writers group will tell you, for long stretches of time I didn't believe I could.) That book, *The Alchemist's Illusion*, was nominated for the G.P. Putnam's Sons Sue Grafton Memorial Award and won the Anthony Award for Best Paperback Original.

In between all of those projects, I attempted two failed experiments to tell a story that had been rattling around my brain for the last five years. Something different. Again, I nearly gave up. But Tempest Raj wouldn't be silenced. I knew I'd regret it if I didn't at least try to get her story right. This year, I finally abandoned how I *thought* the story needed to be told and went with how I felt it should unfold. I'd finally figured out how to tell Tempest's story—and my agent sold my new Secret Staircase series at auction.

Have you picked up on the pattern? I hope you won't wait for a cancer diagnosis to convince yourself to toss aside fear and go all in writing from the heart instead of your head, even if you don't know where your books fit. Regardless of what happens that's beyond your control, you'll have fun writing—and live your life to the fullest.



Gigi Pandian is a *USA Today* bestselling and Anthony Award-winning mystery author, breast cancer survivor, and accidental almost-vegan. She lives outside San Francisco with her husband and a gargoyle who watches over the garden. She writes mysteries that are a cross between Indiana Jones and Agatha Christie, and loves Sisters in Crime so much that she's served on the boards of SinC National and her local SinC chapter.





Finding Balance During Uncertainty

WRITTEN BY JULIE HENNRİKUS

I worked in the performing arts for over 30 years and have seen that sector, which I love dearly, devastated over the last few months. But I've also seen artists and organizations adapt to the moment. They're doing work online, creating plays that people can access while walking or socially distanced. The why of doing the work remains the same, but how the work is done has changed.

As writers, we've comforted ourselves with the idea that we work alone, but the pandemic has still affected us. Publishers are working from home, so decisions take longer. Paper production changed, so some books were delayed. Bookstores have been impacted, as have libraries. Book launches have moved online, or tried to.

But the impact wasn't only on the business side of writing. As writers, many of us feel unsettled. As one friend put it, "I always thought I was an introvert, but I realize now

that I'm an extrovert who does introverted work. I need to be with people." I am still an introvert, but I do miss in-person events and meetings and spending time with other writers. I miss eavesdropping on conversations, and doing tactile research.

This question has risen up for me: how do we, as writers, find balance during uncertain times? Those uncertain times aren't only found during a pandemic. Taking care of family, changing jobs, moving, loss—all of those things impact our ability to balance. So how can we manage them, and maintain our writing practice?

First of all, **take care of yourself**. Your physical body requires rest, food, movement, reflection. There are times when we have to push ourselves, but that can't be sustained. What systems do you have in place to support your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health?

Next, **take care of your creative self**. Carve out time to write, yes. But also find time to daydream. To get inspired. Visit a museum virtually, or take a walk in a sculpture garden. Turn on music that warms your soul, and play it loudly. Read books you love. Take out your paint brushes and go. Our creativity is a muscle that requires exercise. Like all exercise, different forms are required for wellness.

Explore your process, and own it. It doesn't matter if you are early career, or an established writer, self-doubt always sits on our shoulder. During times of uncertainty, find routes that work for you. A friend told me that since he was working from home, when he sat at his computer to write, nothing happened. But when he went to bed or took a walk, the ideas came, so he used his phone to write. "I know that's not the best way to do it," he told me. My response? If you're getting the words written, then that is the best way. For years people told me to wake up early to write before work. I tried it, but all that happened was that I was tired and cranky. Years of working in theater makes my best writing time after seven o'clock. I no longer fight that. If something isn't working for you any longer, figure out a new way. *Your creative process is yours.*

Build your community. As a member of Sisters in Crime, you understand how community can support your career. But our community is more than that. I blog with

five women, and we support each other's launches, share ideas, and swap marketing plans. We also check in regularly, cheer each other on, listen when things aren't going well, and spend time together as friends who share a passion. Having people in your life who don't look askance when you wonder aloud if that plant is poisonous or whether a large ball made of elastics could be a lethal weapon is a wonder. Make sure that you find the joy of community. In person is wonderful, but online works, especially if folks live a distance away.

Finally, make sure to **be willing to reroute your journey**. When we set a goal, too often that end is all we focus on. But here's the thing. There are a lot of ways to get there. Explore the side paths. Learn about different routes. Consider pit stops along the way. When you're on a writing journey, goals are brief stops. *The journey is the point.* When things don't work, stop, reflect, and figure out a new path. Keep building your craft, learn more about the different sides of the business, and persist. During times of uncertainty, you may feel particularly stuck, and that's understandable. Please, take care of yourself. *But keep moving.*

The best advice I have to dealing with times of uncertainty boils down to this. Be kind to yourself, find friends who share your passion, and keep exploring. Let the joy of your writing journey be the ballast you need.



Julie Hennrikus is the acting Executive Director of Sisters in Crime and runs Your Ladders, a coaching program for writers and artists. She's also the author, under the name Julia Henry, of the Garden Squad mysteries.



BOLO for Experts

Rounding up know-how that will take your stories to the next level

WRITTEN BY SHANNON BAKER

Write what you know, sure. But no one knows everything.

If getting it right takes more than a few minutes on Wikipedia or a quick Google search, how can you find the experts to supply the details you need?

Let's start with the easiest and, yet for many of us, the toughest way to find an expert source: A cold call to the person who holds the knowledge. Yeah, it's hard. It seems like

a risk to reach out to people you don't know. Will you look stupid? Intrusive? Be annoying?

If any of you have ever been to therapy, you know this drill: Ask yourself the worst thing that could happen. Maybe they'll hang up on you and you'll need to find another expert. Maybe they'll call you a name and then hang up. They won't kill you or arrest you or poison your dog. You might cringe or be embarrassed but here's the best advice I can give you: Cowgirl up and do it.

Try associations.

Just like there's Sisters in Crime for crime writers, almost every expertise has its own association, which can help direct you to local practitioners. Search [your interest] and "association," and drill down to state or local chapters on the association website.

When I wanted to write an Arizona Ranger character, I found the AZ Ranger website, drilled down to my county, and found the commander's number. I hate to admit it took several days to build up my courage to call. I don't know why. As my mother would have said, though, "No one ever died from making a phone call."

No surprise, the commander was happy to speak to me, and what's more, connected me with a woman ranger who gave me the perspective I needed. **Lori Regan Prodorutti** has had the same experience. "I usually just email or cold call the expert I'm looking for," she said. "Most people are happy to talk and answer questions."

This hits the main point we should remember: PEOPLE LOVE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY DO. Think about how gratified you are when someone asks about what you do.

Kelly Braffet had the same experience. "I basically cold-called a Western Pennsylvania DUI lawyer to talk to me about drunk driving law." She went on to say the lawyer was "...wonderful and incredibly helpful."

What if you can't figure out how to contact the expert you need? Start asking around. **Lisa Thompson** said, "The tapestry of friends and family, people who know people, are an amazing resource."

I needed to know all things Border Patrol and through their website contacted their public relations liaison. I got crickets in response but through his pilot's group, my husband came into contact with a couple of agents. Again, they were glad to talk about what they do...as long as I didn't use their names in the acknowledgments.

So many SinC members responded by saying their neighbors, in-laws, spouses, and friends of friends are their expert go-tos. **Ellison Cooper** finds her contacts from their research. "I wrote about a really obscure ancient Egyptian time keeping/calendrical system so I emailed the woman who wrote a bunch of research papers on the topic."

Priscilla Paton has some great ideas about tapping into academia. "Campus security is a place to start because many campus security officers were police officers first. Also, psych, sociology, and criminal justice departments have contacts."



If you've got the time and resources, I, among others, suggest a stint at The Writers Police Academy or any of the citizen academies run by local law enforcement. A quick Google search gave me a couple in my area. Online sources, such as crimescenewriter2@groups.io, can be a big help. **Joe Walker** said, "There are numerous Facebook groups for cops and writers. Super useful." Also, don't be shy about asking for experts on your social media posts or blogs.

One of the best resources for crime experts is right here. Sisters in Crime. **Mary Keliikoa's** experience is common: "I met a cold case detective at a SinC meeting. I just went up to him after and asked if I could be in touch if I had questions. He's been my go-to ever since." **E.M. Kaplan** agreed about befriending speakers at SinC meetings. "I made a lot of contacts chatting with them." Remember:


the experts wouldn't be at your meeting if they didn't want to talk to you. Writing a book might be as interesting to them as their job is to you.

If you still can't find the resource you need, don't be afraid to ask your local SinC chapter program chair to seek out a speaker on your topic. One chapter has boasted speakers on a variety of topics including, crime scene clean-up, a handwriting expert, 911 call center, ER nurse, police officer, storm preppers, and a coroner. Consider the public virtual meetings held by other chapters, too, or join a second chapter to capitalize on all that expertise.

Finding the right expert can be rewarding. My Nebraska sheriff contact has become a great friend and sometimes we call each other just to chat. Be brave. Be bold. Happy expert hunting.



Shannon Baker is the award-winning author of *The Desert Behind Me* and the Kate Fox series. She is the proud recipient of the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers 2014 and 2017-18 Writer of the Year Award.



Writing Characters Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

WRITTEN BY LYNETTE EASON
AND KELLY BRAKENHOFF

Books and Stories that Get it Right

- *A Maiden's Grave* by Jeffery Deaver is a great resource. Made into a movie, *Dead Silence* (1997) with Marlee Matlin.
- *Switched at Birth* is a wonderful TV series that depicts accurate deaf everything.
- *Not a Sound* by Heather Gudenkauf. I was impressed with how well she handled a character losing their hearing in the story.
- *Baby Driver* (2017 movie): The main character is hearing but has severe tinnitus and wears headphones with music all day to cope. Also features a deaf actor and ASL. Bonus: awesome soundtrack and it's a heist movie.
- *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* (NBC Season 1, Ep 9): The plot line features deaf characters and includes Deaf West's musical production of "Fight Song" in ASL. Worth watching!
- *A Single Light* by Tosca Lee (2019) had a good example of a deaf character.
- *Children of a Lesser God*: The book and later the movie that won Marlee Matlin Best Actress in 1986 at the age of 21.
- *A Silent Terror* by Lynette Eason. Yes, this one is mine. I wrote it with a Deaf school as the setting and the lead character is a deaf teacher.
- *The Cassandra Sato Mystery* series by Kelly Brakenhoff. Yes, all of my books have deaf characters who use ASL.

Tell us about your connection to the Deaf Community?

Lynette: I've had a connection to the Deaf Community since I was eighteen years old. I got my first pair of hearing aids at 17 and headed off to college where I joined a church with a strong deaf ministry. And they had free sign language classes! From that point on, I started hanging out with the deaf, learning the language, the culture, and forging friendships that have lasted until today. In 1993, I took a job at the South Carolina School of the Deaf and Blind and taught there many years until I quit to write full time. I still have a number of deaf friends who I hang out with on a regular basis.

Kelly: I learned ASL in high school so I could chat with deaf friends I met at summer camp. After years of study, I became an ASL Interpreter. For 30 years, I've worked in any setting you can imagine like medical, legal, human services, and my favorite, higher education.

What should writers know about people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf/blind?

Lynette: Writers should know that deaf people don't consider themselves handicapped. They're not broken and they don't need fixing. Not all deaf people know

ASL. Not all deaf people can speechread/lip read. This, too, is a skill that comes more naturally to some than others. For me, I'm pretty good at it, but when I'm tired, have a headache, or just don't feel like expending the energy it takes to speechread...well, I'm going to miss more than I'm going to get.

Kelly: People who are born deaf or become deaf as a youngster have a lifetime of experience dealing with people who can hear. They are experts at gesturing, texting, using technology, and writing notes to help you understand their point when an interpreter isn't around. Deaf/blind people like Helen Keller are rare. Usually people have some hearing or some sight remaining and use tools, technology, or service animals to compensate for their sensory challenges. Not all interpreters are trained in tactile (hand over hand) signing.

Do deaf people really live in a "silent world"?

Lynette: Well, it depends on your definition of silent. For the most part, yes, truly deaf people live in "silence." But vibration goes a long way to making deaf people aware of their surroundings. A lot of people who live in the deaf world may still have some hearing at certain frequencies or decibels.

In my case, when I have my hearing aids on, I hear a lot of environmental noises and I can hear that people are speaking. I just can't understand what the words are. :) With my hearing aids on, I tested at 4% speech discrimination. That's testing without being able to see the speaker's face. When I had the visual cues of facial expressions and speech reading, my speech discrimination shot up to 98%! Can I just say I hate masks because they severely limit my communication abilities? Yes, I think they're necessary and I wear mine when I go out, but from a communication standpoint they're beyond frustrating for deaf/hard of hearing people.

Ways to include deaf and hard of hearing characters in your fiction

Characters with disabilities are one of the most underrepresented minority groups in literature. Anything you can do to include them will give your stories depth and variety.

- *We beg you:* please don't just take any hearing character, make them deaf, plop them into your story, and change the dialogue to written American Sign Language! Deaf culture includes the ASL language and our cherished history of deaf people in the United States. Just as you wouldn't change a white character to a person of color without considering language, culture, and history, the same thing goes for stories with deaf characters.
- Another option is a suddenly deafened character and the journey into the emotional trauma that character is likely to have, the denial, the anger, the frustration, etc.
- Use the character's deafness to create suspense. If you can't hear the bad guy sneaking up on you, that's pretty suspenseful.
- If you have characters who know ASL, they can communicate without the bad guys being aware. In one of Lynette's stories, a hearing aid fooled the bad guy which allowed the heroine time to get away.
- Make a deaf character a crime witness, interviewed by police using an interpreter, testifying in court. Is their visual memory better than the average hearing witness? Did they notice something a hearing person would miss because they paid more attention to their visual surroundings? Can they eavesdrop on other ASL signers from far away?
- An interpreter character who wrestles with their conscience about what's morally right vs. their professional ethics.
- An interpreter character who experiences vicarious trauma due to seeing horrible things at an assignment. (Similar to EMTs, firefighters, doctors, social workers, teachers.)
- A deaf professional in a regular high school, business, or high-level job. Imagine the unique conflicts and tension that would add to any story.

Kelly: One of my deaf friends says, “It’s not a world without sound. It’s a visual world.” For the average person who hears, we value hearing music, birds, movies, a baby crying, etc. Medical professionals, researchers, lawmakers, and educators often frame the world in terms of typical hearing being “normal” and necessary for intelligence, language acquisition, and communication. Anyone who doesn’t hear according to a medical model of typical hearing is “impaired.” Deaf people often find this approach offensive.

What does it mean when people talk about the Deaf Community or Deaf Culture?

Lynette: The Deaf Community is just that—a community of deaf people. That’s not to say there aren’t hearing people in that community as well, but most of the time, those hearing people are CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults). Or they’re hearing people who’ve immersed themselves into the deaf world and are fully accepted as part of the community. These people are known as NERDAs (Not Even Related to a Deaf Adult.)

Kelly: In the same way members of an ethnic group share language, traditions, social norms, and life experiences, people who grow up deaf share a culture related to their

common experiences. I have several friends who are the third generation of deaf people in their family. Their deaf identity is a point of pride for them (and that’s why the “D” is capitalized when referring to Deaf Culture).

Do you have any pet peeves about deaf or hard of hearing characters and interpreters in literature or movies?

Lynette: I guess the only pet peeves I have are actors who clearly don’t have a grasp of the language. If you’re going to represent an interpreter, at least find a real one. :) Interpreters are great natural actors anyway because of how expressive they are. If someone hasn’t been signing long, it’s impossible to pretend they have.

Kelly: My most frequent pet peeve is lipreading saves the day! The D/HH character solves the mystery by lipreading the bad guy. Or deaf people are superheroes because their other senses are hyper-amplified. Surprisingly, hearing people often believe the myth that deaf people are less intelligent because they can’t or don’t speak English instead of ASL. Lastly, I’m annoyed by interpreter characters who don’t follow our strict code of ethical conduct (similar to doctors, lawyers and priests.)



Lynette Eason is the best-selling, award-winning author of over 60 books including *Her Stolen Past*, which was made into a Lifetime Movie Network.

Kelly Brakenhoff writes the *Cassandra Sato Mystery* series, all of which include characters who are deaf and use ASL. She’s also a children’s picture book author of books featuring Duke the Deaf Dog.

The Kitchen SinC

In November, Sisters in Crime was a sponsor of NaNoWriMo,

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH,

and brought the SinC50K Challenge to our members with write-ins on Facebook, Twitter writing sprints, special NaNoWriMo webinars, and more. We hope you had a great time, no matter how many words you wrote.

LET'S SEE OUR 2020 SINC50K NUMBERS:

21 SinC50K board members and volunteers

295 Attendees at our SinC50K Kick-Off Event

550 Members of the SinC50K Facebook Group

670 People at our post-NaNo editing webinar.
You can watch the replay in the SinC archives!

1993 People at our post-challenge webinar with NaNoWriMo.
You can still watch it here: tinyurl.com/sincnano

7,325,961+ Words reported by SinC50K participants!



"I participated in NaNoWriMo for the first time in November. The experience was so worth the time and effort. For a loner and non-joiner like me, the benefits of writing in community were surprising. I loved the write-ins, the pep talks, the spirit of collaboration rather than competition. The most surprising aspect to me was that the writing prompts took me to places I would not have ventured on my own, and my novel is much richer for exploring without boundaries." — Reita Pendry, North Carolina



For their annual January social, the **Triangle Sisters in Crime Chapter** in North Carolina moved their activities to Zoom with an interactive murder mystery event, "The Great British Bump Off." Attendees, many in costume, solved the murder of an esteemed baking competition judge, Shaw G. Bottom. Participants didn't let the suspects have all the baking fun; many prepared recipes to enjoy at home during the event, and afterward the chapter compiled the recipes into a cookbook to share. The Triangle Social Committee is made up of **Sara Johnson, Karen Pullen, Gina Schmidt, Pamela Raymond, and Cathy Walsh.**



Before the lockdown, the **Desert Sleuths Chapter** was joined by Carmen Davenport and Marsha Jean Falco from Mark9, Maricopa Kg Search & Rescue, an all-volunteer, non-profit canine search and rescue organization located in Maricopa County, Arizona. The group assists law enforcement agencies in need of certified live find and cadaver search dogs. One of the dogs, a border collie, made friends among the attendees.



SinC members **Bonnie Wisler** and **Eric Larson** got into character for the Triangle Chapter's Great British Bump-Off; **Diane Kelly** baked up a storm.



SinC National Board Member **Kellye Garrett** spoke about writing for Sisters in Crime Grand Canyon Writers' Fireside Chat series.



Cheryl Head, Award-Winning Author and Pride Award Judge

"What an important contribution to our literary community to entice an emerging LGBTQ writer to join in our crime writing fun with this competitive prize."



www.SistersinCrime.org

Sisters in Crime launched its new Pride Award for Emerging LGBTQIA+ Crime Writers. Judges are **Cheryl Head, John Copenhaver, and Kristen Lepionka.**

Webinars calendar

March 6's SinC Into Great Writing was dedicated to writers facing setbacks. The live sessions featured SinC member Tess Gerritsen interviewed by SinC president Sandra SG Wong and a panel conversation between (top) Sujata Massey and Robin Burcell and (bottom left) Naomi Hirahara, moderated by (bottom right) former SinC president Lori Rader-Day. Attendees also received access to a recorded session on reverted rights with Jess Lourey. During her interview, Gerritsen talked about writing genre when few writers of color were, switching subgenres, and cycling through at least one very bad agent, among the many hazards of a publishing career. "As writers and creators," Gerritsen said, "we have to be able to turn on a dime."



LEARN AND CONNECT WITH SINC

In 2021, Sisters in Crime continues its popular webinar series. The Education Committee's goal is to connect Sisters in Crime members with content that helps them learn and grow as writers. This year, webinars will expand into a broad range of subgenres, increase offerings on independent publishing, and provide options for writers at all experience levels. Missed a webinar? Remember they're available in the archives on the SinC website.

RECENT AND UPCOMING SESSIONS

March 23, 2021: Lady Killers and Con Women

Presenter: Tori Telfer, author and podcaster

April 13, 2021: Setting Your Manuscript Up for Success

Presenters: Mia Manansala, book coach; Lordes Venard, editor; Rebecca Burton (Sachiko), cultural sensitivity; and Terri Bischoff, editor

April 28, 2021: How to Create, Publicize, and Maintain a Podcast

Presenters: Authors and podcasters Layne Fargo, Daniel Ford, Alexia Gordon, and Shawn Reilly Simmons

May 12, 2021: Optimizing Your Amazon Page

Presenter: Author Susan Hubbard

June 17, 2021: How to Be Your Own Publicist—and When to Find Help

Presenters: Tori Eldridge, Julie Schoerke Gallagher, Marissa DeCuir, Ellen Whitfield, Brittany Kennell

And watch for a celebration of Pride Month in June!

Presenters: Authors John Copenhaver, Robyn Gigg, Cheryl Head, and Mia Manansala

Get the most up-to-date schedule and register at
www.sistersincrime.org/page/webinars

Conference calendar

Plans for some events may change. Sign up for event mailing lists to stay in the know!

April 29, 2021

The Edgar Awards (Virtual)

New York, NY

Follow Mystery Writers of America on Twitter @edgarawards to learn details as they are announced.

June 4-6, 2021

CrimeCon

Austin, TX

crimecon.com

June 28-July 10, 2021

Thrillerfest and Thriller Awards (Virtual)

New York, NY

thrillerfest.com

July 14-17, 2021

More Than Malice and Agatha Awards

Bethesda, MD

malicedomestic.org

July 22-25, 2021

Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival

Harrogate, England

harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/crime-writing-festival

August 13-15, 2021

St. Hilda's Crime Fiction Weekend

Oxford, England

st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/hildas-crime-2019

August 19-22, 2021

Killer Nashville

Nashville, TN

Killernashville.com

August 25-29, 2021

Bouchercon

New Orleans, LA

Bouchercon2021.com



Members of the **New York/Tri-State Sisters in Crime Chapter** toasted the arrival of a new year—on Zoom, of course!

Awards and Recognition

WRITTEN BY GAY TOLTL KINMAN

- Ellen Byron's *Murder in the Bayou* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Humorous Mystery Novel
- Susanna Calkins' *The Fate of a Flapper* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel
- Jennifer J. Chow's *Mimi Lee Gets A Clue* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Humorous Mystery Novel
- Tracy Clark's *What You Don't See* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Mystery Novel
- Matt Coyle's *Blind Vigil* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Mariah Fredericks' *Death of An American Beauty* is a nominee for the Mary Higgins Clark Award
- Dianne Freeman's *A Lady's Guide to Mischief and Murder* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel
- Susan Furlong's *Shattered Justice* was in the New York Times Best 10 Crime Novels of 2020
- Elsa Hart's *The Cabinets of Barnaby Mayne* is a nominee for the Mary Higgins Clark Award
- Rachel Howzell Hall's *And Now She's Gone* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Karen Hugg's *The Dark Petals of Provence* won third prize in the 2020 Pacific Northwest Writers Association contest.
- Mary Keliikoa's *Derailed* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Laurie R. King's *Riviera Gold* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel; and for the Sue Grafton Memorial Award
- Cynthia Kuhn's *The Study of Secrets* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Humorous Mystery Novel
- Jess Lourey's *Unspeakable Things* is an Edgar nominee for Best Paperback Original
- Elizabeth Mannion's *Guilt Rules All: Irish Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction* is an Edgar nominee for Best Critical / Biographical
- Paul Marks' *The Blues Don't Care* was in Crime Fiction Lover's top 5 books of 2020; and his short story "Fade Out on Bunker Hill" won 2nd place in the *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* 2020 Reader's Poll
- Catriona McPherson's *The Turning Tide* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel
- Walter Mosely's "Fearless" in *California Schemin'* is an Edgar nominee for Best Short Story
- Erica Ruth Neubauer's *Murder in the Mena House* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Sara Paretsky's *Dead Land* is a nominee for the Sue Grafton Memorial Award

- Ann Parker's *Mortal Music* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel
- Louise Penny's *All the Devils Are Here* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Kwei Quarthey's *The Missing American* is an Edgar nominee for Best Novel
- Lori Rader-Day's *The Lucky One* is a nominee for the Mary Higgins Clark Award
- Hank Phillippi Ryan's *The First To Lie* is a nominee for the Mary Higgins Clark Award
- Matthew Schwartz's *Confessions of An Investigative Reporter* was a finalist in the American Book Fest Awards for non-fiction (memoir); and won first place in the Arizona Authors Association in the same category
- Sisters in Crime members selected for the *How to Write A Mystery: A Handbook by Mystery Writers of America* featuring "70 of the most successful mystery writers in the business" include Beth Amor, Kelley Armstrong, Frankie Y. Bailey, Mysti Berry, Hal Bodner, Leslie Budewitz, Suzanne Chazin, Nancy Cohen, Deborah Crombie, Hallie Ephron, Tess Gerritsen, Rachel Howzell Hall, Bradley Harper, Charlaine Harris, Carolyn Hart, Rob Hart, Greg Herren, Naomi Hirahara, Rae Franklin James, Stephanie Kane, Laurie R. King, Gay Toltl Kinman, William Kent Krueger, Gayle Lynds, Catriona McPherson, Kris Neri, Gigi Pandian, Louise Penny, Gary Phillips, Hank Phillippi Ryan, Alex Segura, C.M. Surrisi, Art Taylor, Elaine Viets, Kate White and James W. Ziskin
- Joseph S. Walker's "Etta at the End of the World" in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine* is an Edgar nominee for Best Short Story
- David Heska Wanbli Weiden's *Winter Counts* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel; and is an Edgar nominee for Best First Novel by an American Author; and won the Western Writers of America Spur Award for both Best Contemporary Novel and Best First Novel
- Heather Young's *The Distant Dead* is an Edgar nominee for Best Novel
- James W. Ziskin's *Turn to Stone* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Historical Mystery Novel; and a nominee for the Sue Grafton Memorial Award; and his "The Twenty-Five Year Engagement" in *In League with Sherlock Holmes* is an Edgar nominee for Best Short Story
- Halley Sutton's *The Lady Upstairs* was nominated for a Lefty for Best Debut Mystery Novel
- Elisabeth Thomas' *Catherine House* is an Edgar nominee for Best First Novel by an American Author