

PUBLIC SAFETY WRITERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER VOLUME V FALL

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Now that summer seems officially over, at least here in the Pacific Northwest, it's time to be looking ahead toward a busy and eventful fall and winter with PSWA. There's a lot going on.

Thanks to the very hard work of Keith Bettinger, we've now contacted everyone who has ever belonged to PSWA or its predecessor organization the Police Writers Association. We're pleased to report that quite a few of those we contacted have renewed their memberships. If you're one of them, welcome back! Now that we can offer online membership application and payment via PayPal, it's easier than ever to become a member. And many are.

Our writing competition chair, Michelle Perin-Callahan, is beginning to receive entries in the popular annual contest. The deadline will be here before you know it, so get your entries in ASAP. See [here](#) for exact details. If you're thinking of entering an unpublished manuscript, remember that as part of your membership, you're entitled to a free manuscript review. Again, the details are on this website. And, last, but certainly not least, be sure to register for the annual conference.

Conference chairs, Marilyn Meredith and Keith Bettinger, have found a very exciting new location for us in Las Vegas and have lined up a terrific three days of speakers to inspire, educate and, hopefully, even entertain you. Our writing competition awards banquet, as always, will also be a great event. There are a lot of ways to be involved in PSWA, including the opportunity for ongoing one-on-one discussions via our list serve. Hope to hear from you soon!

--Marilyn Olsen, President

PSWA CONFERENCE

Whatever you do, don't miss this conference. We have a big surprise in store. We can't tell you what it is. Shhhh!

FRIDAY LUNCHEON SPEAKER



Stephen "Pista" Nasser was thirteen years old when the Nazis whisked him and his family away from their home in Hungary to Auschwitz. Stephen's memories of that terrifying experience are still vivid, and his love for his brother Andris still brings a husky tone to his voice when he remembers the terrible ordeal they endured together.

Somehow, miraculously, some people did survive, and Stephen Nasser is one of them. He was brought to Canada by the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1948, and in 1958 he immigrated to the United States. In 2003, Stephen Nasser wrote and published *My Brothers Voice* in order to tell the truth that could allow us to save ourselves from ourselves. His story is painstakingly unembellished so that we will know what really happened.

Nassers's account, told in the refreshingly direct and optimistic language of a young boy, will help every reader understand that the Holocaust was real and that if you have enough love, determination and will power there is always a better tomorrow.

Stephen Nasser resides with his wife, a former nurse, and remains as dynamic and creative as ever.

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MEMBER ARTICLES

Writing the Book Review

by Sarah Cortez

Whether writing for a newspaper or a magazine, there are certain concepts that hold true in writing book reviews. As with all work-for-hire, be sure to ascertain the word length and deadline date from your editor. If you are unfamiliar with the publication's audience, ask the editor about the readership. This information will help you gauge the vocabulary and tone of your review. (In work-for-hire projects, the publication who pays you for your writing will own the piece once it is published or once it is submitted, depending on the contract.)

Even though the book reviewer is expected to express an opinion of the book reviewed, the opinion is expected to be educated and reasoned, rather than naive and self-serving. In fact, a mark of an incompetent reviewer is unsupported opinions. Do not use simplistic prose, such as "This was a great book!" or "I liked/disliked this book." In other words, expect that you will place your educated opinion in a format that helps to educate the reader as well. You are expected to notice components of the literary form, e.g. in fiction, you might comment on tone, pacing, structure, narrative, characterization. With this said, editors tend to pick reviewers who already have expertise in the area that will be utilized in writing the review. So, for instance, a fiction writer will review fiction, a poet will review poetry, etc. Often, the bio of the reviewer will have copious amounts of information that

show why that reviewer was chosen by the editor.

So, what can you expect when you write a review? Expect to be tactfully honest. A dishonest review does no one any good. You are being paid for an educated opinion that will open doors into understanding the book, the genre, the history of the genre, the form, etc., for the readership. Expect to be limited to a word count. Expect to spend time reading, and perhaps, re-reading, the book you have been given to review. The editor who hired you will probably supply you with a review copy of the book. Polish your prose as you do with all your writing in order to produce a professional product. Do not contact the author before the review is published for the obvious potential conflict-of-interest issues. Get your review to the editor by your deadline.

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MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA APPROVED PUBLISHERS LIST

In order to be an active member of Mystery Writers of America, an author must be published by a publisher their Board of Directors has approved. To be approved, your publisher must have paid a minimum of \$1000 during the preceding year to at least five authors with no financial or ownership interest in the company. The publisher must pay royalties, take returns, and have an original 500 print run (dumb during the age of print-on-demand technology) and a few other hoops.

Supposedly their intent is to keep out self-published and vanity published authors (that's what several members of MWA have told me)—and it also is keeping out many of the smaller, independent publishers who have published authors with some dandy books. Plus, there are some authors who have published their own books that are also excellent. And on the other side, I have read some New York published books that weren't so wonderful.

I've been an active member of MWA for years and no one asked my opinion about these rules. Right now I'm published by a small press who applied for approval, was given said approval and then two months later, the approval was taken away. There is a side issue to all this. Some of the mystery cons are using this approved publisher list by posting only authors published by MWA approved authors will be allowed to participate on a panel. Since an appearance on a panel is the only way an author attending a mystery con can let readers know about his or her book, there isn't much point in attending the con. Left Coast Crime did this for 2008. Mayhem in the Midlands has the statement right on their website that only authors with MWA approved publishers will get to be on panels. Bouchercon did not use this criteria this year, but no telling what will happen next.

The good news is PSWA has no such rules. Any author published or pre-published can be an active member. There are no levels of membership. At the coming conference there will be an opportunity for every published author to give a five minute elevator pitch about his or her book. Any author with a book who wants it to be sold at the conference will have that opportunity.

--Marilyn Meredith

(Editor's note: So you don't have to keep reading articles I've written, do write send articles

to me at mmeredith@ocsnet.net. We'll publish them—and it'll give you more writing credits.)

* * *

MY TRIP TO ALASKA

My head is still spinning from my eight days in Alaska. To get there, hubby and I first spent the night in Fresno so we didn't have to get up quite so early for my 6 a.m. flight. From Fresno, I flew to Seattle, Seattle to Anchorage. No hotel shuttle so had to take a taxi. My roommate, fellow author and friend, Victoria Heckman, arrived in Alaska a few days earlier and left me a note that she'd gone off to Seward sightseeing. Bouchercon was being held in a convention center two blocks away and after unpacking, I headed there to get registered.

Bright (well not really because it stays dark so long in the a.m.) and early on Thursday morning, Victoria and I headed off to the convention center. It was raining and a bit chilly. We were on a panel together in the morning about ethnic detectives, signings followed, and a little later we had author one-on-ones. From that point on we were both free to go to whatever panels we wanted.

Some of the panels I attended were Books to Film; then I learned about DNA and how they are really using it to crack cases; Baker Bob, Alaska's first serial killer (gruesome); Cold Cases; Forensic Pathology. The three most exciting and entertaining speakers were first, Rescue Swimmer, CPO John Hall, a real life "Guardian"; Fish and Game Biologist, Rick Sinnott who described wildlife encounters; and Mr. Whitekeys who told about the dumbest criminals. There were others, but those were my favorites.

The Special Guest of Honor was Diana Gabaldon and she was a treat to hear. I skipped the next evening's guest of honor and went to dinner with fellow author and friend, Gayle Wigglesworth and her husband to a great restaurant with a spectacular view of Cook's Bay and the Sleeping Lady mountain.

Barbara Peters, owner of the Poisoned Pen Book Store and Publishing Co. Talked about publishing and bookstores. Most enlightening.

I went to the Awards Banquet and was thrilled when Simon Wood won an Anthony for his short story. The last day I watched Alaska Search and Rescue Dogs perform, and attended the closing ceremony and a Pamyua Concert.

One of the best things about these mystery conventions is renewing friendships and meeting new people.

Now I have to tell you about the really exciting part of my trip. For some reason, no one had figured out what school I was to visit in Wasilla. Also, they wanted me to drive a rental car, which I didn't want to do. One morning while walking to the convention center, I was complaining and a woman I didn't know asked me where I was going. When I told her, she said she'd take me wherever I wanted to go in Wasilla because that's where she lived. I took her up on her offer. Her name is Pat Park-Fisher, a wonderful lady.

She drove me to Wasilla and to the home where I was staying. Several years ago, when I came to Left Coast Crime, I met two Native women, Katina and Amber. Katina invited me to visit her when I came back to Alaska and we kept in touch over the years. I stayed with Katina, had dinner with her family twice, and lots of wonderful visiting time. Her mom told me stories about her childhood living in a remote village and being taken to a mission school to live.

Finally, a school was arranged for me to visit. In the meantime, Pat took me sightseeing in Wasilla including a visit to the Iditarod Headquarters and a reindeer farm. (I learned reindeer are domesticated caribou.)

My visit to Wasilla Middle School began at 7 a.m. when school starts. I was there all day in the library talking to 6th, 7th and 8th graders. I loved every minute of it. We talked about how to write a mystery. The kids were imaginative, excited, and wonderful. Sometimes I had about 50 kids in a group.

The town of Wasilla is medium-sized and has most of the stores you'll find in the lower 48. What is different is the scenery. The town is in a high valley and surrounded by huge snow-capped mountains. The snow was lower every day, reminding the people who lived there that winter is on the way.

My hostess, Katina worked every day, but we spent our evenings together. The last day, she got off early and took me to the Anchorage Museum and we had our last dinner together. From there she took me to a hotel close to the airport as my plane left at 6 a.m.

What a wonderful adventure for a great-grandmother! (And one of the perks for being a published mystery writer.)

Marilyn
<http://fictionforyou.com>

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THE STATE OF PUBLISHING

Notes taken at Bouchercon from a talk given by Barbara Peters, co-owner of The Poisoned Pen Book Store and Publishing Co. in Arizona.

Fiction on only about 20% of what is published. Of that, 50% is romance. What's left is divided up among the other genres. At the moment, thrillers are the hottest in the mystery genre.

Getting books into the bookstore is the most difficult part of publishing. A publisher must pay the author, follow common industry practices and have a means of distribution and marketing.

Within the conglomerate publishers, communication is not so good. Often there are turf wars and the author becomes the victim. Small independent publishers are more apt to take care of their authors, but the authors have to get out there and promote no matter who publishes them.

Book stores are more and more customer driven. A good book is one that reader's read.

The world is divided between readers and non-readers. Books are becoming more of a product.

Branding is when the titles of the books disappear and the author's name becomes the brand. Authors have to help sell books by being visible on places like My Space and Blogs.

Some small bookstores are failing, but so is the chain store model. Barnes and Noble can't compete with Wal-Mart and Costco, and they are unable to do the things the small, independents can do.

--Submitted by Marilyn Meredith <http://fictionforyou.com>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Cullotta

By Dennis N. Griffin and Frank Cullotta

In his newest book, **Cullotta**, Dennis Griffin paints a vivid picture of the life and times of a career criminal and Las Vegas mobster by the name of Frank Cullotta.

What's so intriguing about this fascinating account is every word of it is true, as told to Dennis by the real Cullotta. Once started, you will find it impossible to put this book down.

Well researched and artfully crafted, this is a must read for all who ever wondered if, and how, the mob got its hooks into the lucrative Las Vegas casino scene. Dennis chronicles in vivid detail the burglaries, robberies, extortion, and murders that were the everyday business of the "Outfit". From the psychotic to the honorable, you will meet them all.

Fact is stranger than fiction, and this factual account is a must read. Dennis weaves a solid, interesting story that will hold your attention from start to finish, and I highly recommend this intriguing tale.

Five out of five stars!

Review by John R. Schembra

Retired Police Sergeant

Author of ***M.P., A Novel of Vietnam***, and ***Retribution***

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE PIT

by Michael Berish

"Mike Berish's stories in his Reflections from the Pit stun you by their portrayal of the daily perils a cop faces as he confronts danger, deceit,

and distrust in upholding the law in Miami. Mike spent twenty-two years on the city's police force. His book's powerful fiction vividly illustrates the corruption and fury endlessly stewing in the pit. Its relentless intensity possesses an authenticity, honesty, and directness that obliterates TV shallow TV shows."

--Syd Bradford Editor and Publisher of *Enigma Magazine*, Philadelphia, PA

To learn more about Mike and his book, visit: www.realmiamivice.com

The book is available at these online sites:

www.amazon.com

www.barnesandnoble.com

www.booksamillion.com

www.iuniverse.com/bookstore

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PUBLISHED! NOW SELL IT!

Monti Sikes, an Oak Tree author, and several of her colleagues wrote this book which gives a lowdown on promoting from the trenches, the authors' own experiences. There is lots of good solid advice and some time tables and suggestions on printed materials to support one's marketing. This book was not published by Oak Tree, but it is available via oaktreebooks.com, and also amazon.com.

—Billi Johnson, Oak Tree Press.

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THE OVERLOOK

Michael Connelly

If you aren't reading Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch series, you're missing some of the best detective fiction on the market today. He writes Los Angeles noir, fifteen riveting novels in the Bosch series so far. Titles like *CITY OF BONES*, *ECHO PARK* and *ANGELS FLIGHT* give readers an impression of the LA that has nothing to do with Hollywood or Rodeo Drive. The seedy side of the city is seen through the eyes of an aging LA detective, a renegade in the police force and a misfit in his private life.

Connelly's most recent book, *THE OVERLOOK*, falls short of what I expect from the author. It's a fast read and the plot suggests a terrorist plan to blow up Los Angeles with stolen radioactive material. After a goose chase through the city, the actual crime is far more mundane.

As a reader, this smoke and mirror act just doesn't cut it. I learned a lot about cesium and how it's used in the medical profession. I also had to wade through the sparring of Bosch and the hot FBI agent he had a fling with in a previous book. But, when an entire plot hinges on a single word misinterpreted by a witness, I feel cheated.

As it turns out, the novel was originally created as a 16-part serial for the *New York Times Magazine*. Connelly's publisher expanded the story enough to fill 225 pages.

Unfortunately, there was no attempt to flesh out the characters to satisfy loyal readers and forgive a weak plot.

The title says it all: This is one book to be OVERLOOKed.
– Review by Sunny Frazier

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MEMBER NEWS

One of Sarah Cortez's poems was chosen to be published in the *Texas Poetry Calender 2008*, and specifically, this same poem was award "Honorable Mention" by the judge, noted poet Kathleen Peirce.

John Schembra's book, *RETRIBUTION*, received a silver medal from the Military Writers Society of America for their 2007 writing awards. Congratulations, John!

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TIM'S COMPUTER TIPS

Got File?

by Tim Dees (tim@timdees.com)

If you are like most of us, at some time you have created a document or other file, and then can't find it later on when you need it. This kind of thing can range from annoying to pull-your-hair-out frustrating, depending on what was in the file and how easily it can be replaced. There are several strategies to resolve these dilemmas, some of them proactive, and some reactive. I'll start with the proactive ones first.

Using Subfolders

Open your "My Documents" folder. If what you see is a long list of files with no subfolders, you need to read this carefully. "My Documents" is intended to be the computer equivalent of a filing cabinet. If you have no subfolders in it, or if your only subfolders are the ones that Windows typically creates by itself (usually starting with "My": My Pictures, My Music, etc.), you are just randomly throwing papers into the filing cabinet. You need to get organized.

You can have an unlimited number of subfolders under any "parent" folder, and you can have up to 255 levels of nested folders, as in a subfolder of a subfolder of a subfolder of a folder within "My Documents." Each subfolder, like file names in Windows, can have up to 255 characters and spaces. Thus, there's no reason to give your folders (or files) cryptic names. In fact, when I store articles written in Word, the file name is the name of the article. The only exception is that certain characters (\ / ? : * " > < |) can't be used in file or folder names.

Create a folder for each project, or logical groups of projects. For instance, if you write articles for magazines or web sites, create a subfolder under My Documents called "Articles", a subfolder under "Articles" for each publication name, and maybe even a subfolder under that for each article. This last might unduly complicate things, but if you

have multiple files that pertain to that article, such as photos, notes, reference lists, etc., then it's a good idea to put all those in the same folder.

Naming and Re-Naming

As I pointed out above, it helps to give your files and folders truly descriptive names. In the old DOS days, we were limited to an 8+3 naming scheme, like article1.doc, but that hasn't been the case for quite a while now. Still, you can make your files easy to locate by naming them strategically.

If you know that a series of files should appear in a certain order, one easy way to get them to appear that way is to start each file name with the file's number in the sequence. Thus, instead of

February article.doc
January article.doc
March article.doc

which are going to line up alphabetically, you could name them

1-January article.doc
2-February article.doc
3-March article.doc

and so on. Be consistent with the numbers, separation characters, and spacing, because an unwanted space or using two dashes instead of one can have undesired results.

If you have documents that you want to appear in date order, but grouped together, then name them alike but include the date, in the format yyyy-mm-dd. For instance, I have a folder for each of my contributing editors, and within that folder may be subfolders for each of their articles, especially if they often include photos or other supplementary files. But I also have to keep track of the invoices they send me, and be able to locate an invoice for a particular date. Thus, the invoices get named like this:

Invoice-writername-2007-10-22.doc

In the alphabetical file list (the default), all of the invoices will be together, sorted by date, most recent last. The advantage of this system is that it will work forever, or until we adopt the Galactic Federation Standard Calendar, whichever comes first.

Renaming Files

This borders on the reactive, but if you're still in the mode where you're trying not to lose track of things as opposed to having already lost them, you can rename files to suit your new filing system. Open Windows Explorer (or hold down the key with the Windows symbol that is on the lower left corner of your keyboard – bet you always wondered what that was for, didn't you?) and press "E". This will open Windows Explorer.

Navigate to the folder that has the files that you want to rename, right-click on a file, and choose "Rename" from the context menu. The file name will appear in a editable box, and

you can use your arrow keys to move to where ever in the file name you want to make your edits. If you just start typing, you will erase the entire file name and start over. Make sure that you include the file name extension (the three letters that appear after the period or "dot", like filename.doc) and that you don't change it from the original.

You can hold down the Shift or Control keys while clicking a list of files (Shift-click selects the file you're on, and everything in between that one and the last one you clicked; Control-click selects one file at a time, but you can select a contiguous or non-contiguous list), and once they're selected, rename all of them by right-clicking. This will produce names like

Filename(1).doc
Filename(2).doc
Filename(3).doc

in the order they appear, which you might not want.

Moving Files

If you've created a bunch of new folders and now you want to stuff them with files that are currently unorganized, there are a couple of ways to go about it. If the folder and the files that you want to put in it are visible in the same window, you can click on the file you want to move and just drag-and-drop it on the new folder. If the destination folder is in a different window or you have a lot of files to move, there's a surer method. Use Shift-click or Control-click to select the files you want to move, and with them highlighted in the window, click on Edit in the Explorer menu bar, then "Move to folder..." Another window will pop up that you can use to navigate to the destination folder. Once you've found it, click on it, then on the "OK" button. The files will be moved.

But If You've Already Lost It...

Try these steps in order, because they get increasingly more complicated.

1. Open the application you used to create the file. Click on "File" or whatever is the first choice in the Menu Bar. You will see a list of your most recently edited files. If it's there, open it and then re-save ("Save As...") it in a place where you can find it later. If you only see a few files listed there, look for an option (under Tools|Options|General tab in most MS Office applications), and set the "Recently used file list" to whatever the maximum number is.
2. Click on "Start" and then on "Recent Documents". See if your file is there. If so, open it and then "Save As" to get it where you need it.
3. Use Windows Explorer to open a window showing the folder where you most likely stored it. If you have no idea where you stored it, look in My Documents and Desktop, the two most likely culprits. Under the "View" item in the Menu Bar, choose "Details" if it doesn't already have a black dot by that choice. You should see a long list of folders and files in the window. The listing will have some headers with names like "Name", "Size", "Type" and "Date Modified". Click on the "Date Modified" label and the list will sort from oldest to newest. Click again and the list will invert, with newest at the top. See if you can find it in this list, looking especially close in the date range when you can last remember using the file. Repeat for any other folders

- that might contain the file.
4. Click on Start|Search. Play around with the search options to narrow the search to the date range and file type (indicated by the three-letter file extension) you need. If the file is revealed, double-click on it and then use "Save As..." to get it where you need it.
 5. Go to <http://desktop.google.com/> and download the Google Desktop. Install the Desktop, then leave the computer alone so the tool can index the contents of your hard drives. How long this takes will depend on how much stuff you have on the drives. Right-click on the Desktop icon near the clock in the lower right of your display (it looks like a circle with yellow, green and red squiggles), choose "Search Desktop", and type in the file name of your lost file or a few words from the file, if it's a document. The Desktop tool will instantly show you all the likely candidates.

If you've tried all of these things and still haven't found your file, then you were probably only imagining that you created it. ;- }

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MEMBER INTERVIEWS

SUNNY FRAZIER

Who are you and where do you live?

I'm Sunny Frazier, I live in Lemoore, CA. It's a small farming community of 20,000, 40 miles from Fresno There's a huge Navy air base nearby. I grew up there as a Navy brat (as well as San Diego, Alameda, Patuxant River and Midway Island).

What do you write?

I write amateur police procedural/paranormal.

Tell me a little bit about your novel.

FOOLS RUSH IN: A Christy Bristol Astrology Mystery is based on the first case I worked when I was assigned as a secretary to a ten-man undercover narcotics unit with the Fresno County Sheriff's Department. We worked out of a double-wide trailer in a nectarine orchard.

The story centers around a methamphetamine gang on the downslide because their leader is using too much of his own product. He's also making business decisions based on astrology. To catch him, a narcotics office convinces his former girlfriend and astrologer, Christy Bristol, to cast the man's horoscope. As a result, she is kidnapped and has to use astrology to manipulate gang members in order to stay alive. Sometimes she tells the truth of what she sees in the charts, sometimes she fudges, and sometimes the horoscopes confuse her. The reader doesn't always know which tactic she's chosen at any given point. It becomes a cat-and-mouse game within the story and for readers.

What inspired you to write your novel?

I wanted to present the rural drug world as I knew it, not the Hollywood version. I also wanted to give readers a background in how methamphetamine developed to the crisis point we deal with today. Knowing that my target audience would be primarily female, I explained the evolution in terms that would be understandable without dumbing down the knowledge.

I also created a young astrologer who does not advertise her quirky gift because she works in law enforcement. I've set out to dispel preconceived notions people have of the practice of astrology, as well as loosely explain how it is done and how it can be a tool for daily life (NOT like the horoscopes in the newspapers!). The book is not an instruction manual on how to cast horoscopes, but it doesn't dumb down the process.

Is the heroine really you?

I gave Christy some of my family background. I have been doing astrology for 35 years, so I gave her that part of me as well. Plus, we both love books and Diet Dr Pepper.

The difference between Sunny and Christy is that Christy is a wallflower and underachiever. She's looking for a safe life, something I've never sought. She's plain, judgmental, introverted, unlucky in love, and she's obsessively tidy. She is not your typical mystery heroine, but she's much like the women I worked with at various jobs. I wanted to give readers a character they might relate to. Plus, I wanted to create a character who could grow with each book. By the end of **FOOLS**, she's realized her life has value and is willing to fight back.

If this is going to be a series, is there a second one in the works?

The second book, **WHERE ANGELS FEAR**, is done. Unfortunately, I have to find a publisher acceptable on the Mystery Writers of America list in order to get on panels and sell at the major mystery conferences. Getting a publisher for a second in a series is difficult.

In the meantime, I'm taking the workshop I premiered at the 2007 PSWA conference and creating a workbook that I will sell at speaking engagements and on my website. I've "performed" the Write To Win workshop at several events and received outstanding response. Thanks, PSWA, for giving me the off-Broadway run.

How can we buy your book?

FOOLS RUSH IN is available on [Amazon](#), [Wolfmont Publishing](#), and my [website](#). There is a Natalscope form in the last page of the book for a discount chart.

Do you have a website?

Of course! It's www.sunnyfrazier.com I share the same webmistress as Marilyn Meredith.

(Ed. Note: And now PSWA has the same webmistress.)

Besides PSWA, what other organizations do you belong to?

I belong to the Central Coast Sisters in Crime, National Sisters in Crime, the San Joaquin Valley Sisters in Crime Whodunits, the Kings County Writers Support Group, and the Lemoore Chamber of Commerce.

PS: I'm starting to teach mystery short story writing. I believe in one-on-one sessions, via email, because I know every writer has to be approached in a different way to flick on the light bulb. So far, my methods are working. Every writer I've worked with have won contests, often beating me out of the running with their stories. One writer has a story in an anthology. If anyone is interested in working with me, contact me at sunny69@comcast.net .

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DENNY GRIFFIN

I was born and raised in Rome, New York. I enlisted in the Navy in 1962 and returned to Rome upon being discharged in 1966. After the copper mill I was working in closed down in 1969, I tried my luck at selling insurance and cars. These were my first jobs requiring me to talk with strangers and obtain information from them. I needed to learn the potential customer's family, employment and financial status. I had to learn to tell when they were lying to me, and how to handle their objections. I believe that this experience helped to develop my interviewing skills and set the stage for my career in law enforcement and investigations.

In 1975 I was hired by Pinkerton, Inc., as an undercover investigator. My first three years with them were spent working in various factories that were experiencing problems with theft, drug use, and/or poor management. The length of the assignments ranged from a few weeks to several months. I subsequently conducted overt investigations, primarily dealing with insurance fraud.

In 1979 I was hired by the Madison County (New York) Dept. of Social Services as a Sr. Child Support Investigator. My primary duties were locating absent parents and conducting financial investigations related to court ordered child support. In 1981, I transferred to the Madison County Sheriff's Department where I attained the rank of sergeant.

In 1987, I transferred my service credit to a position with the New York State Dept. of Health. I was Director of Investigations for the Wadsworth Center, and the unit I headed was part of a task force set up to combat fraud involving clinical laboratories. We worked with the NYS Deputy Attorney General for Medicaid Fraud Control and the Medicare Inspector General. There was some undercover work involved, but most of the investigations were overt. This was my favorite job. We were involved in a number of high-profile cases and could bring criminal or civil actions.

In 1994, my wife Faith, was diagnosed with a rare but nasty rheumatoid disease. Her condition required that she not spend the winter months in New York's cold, damp climate. I took early retirement and we moved to Las Vegas. We currently are able to spend the summers in upstate New York.

I began writing my first manuscript in 1994. My motivation at that time wasn't money or fame. It was solely to tell the story of a medical examiner's office run amok. It was based on the last investigation I did prior to my retirement and was a story I felt needed to be

told. I plunged ahead with my project without doing any research on the writing business. I didn't know traditional publishing from self-publishing. I had no idea what a POD book was. I only knew I had a story that I wanted to get out there.

The Morgue was completed in early 1996, and that's when all the things I had failed to do came home to roost. There I was with an 110,000- word document and was clueless about what to do next. Belatedly springing into action, I researched publishing options and commenced sending our queries, followed by sample chapters, followed by the entire manuscript in some cases. Each attempt ended with a rejection. As the copying and postage expenses mounted, along with the frustration, I was about ready to pack it in. Suddenly, out of the blue I was thrown a life line. A company called 1stBooks (now AuthorHouse) contacted me to announce they were expanding their services to include printed and bound books as well as e-books. Was I interested in being one of the first authors to have their manuscript published in POD format for only a \$75 setup fee? I still didn't understand what POD was all about but without any attractive alternatives, I couldn't sign fast enough.

I had the book in my hands in a fairly short time — a couple of months as I remember. After the euphoria wore off, I was confronted with yet more realities. I was responsible for marketing and promoting my book. The publisher didn't do it — they didn't even offer a promo package at the time. And book stores, especially the chains, weren't anxious to schedule events for self-published and/or POD authors, or stock their books. It was crunch time for me. I had to decide if I wanted to write any more. And if I did, in order to have any chance for personal or financial success, I'd have to develop a readership beyond family and friends. So, did I want to establish myself as an author and was I prepared to put forth the effort to develop my writing and marketing skills? I decided to go for it.

The road since then has been long and not always easy. In spite of my increased marketing efforts, five more fictions — three self-published and two with a royalty paying POD publisher — had failed to get me very far up the career ladder. I wasn't getting the necessary name recognition to propel sales. It was decision time again. Should I give it up, be satisfied with the status quo, or try something different? I'm not big on quitting, and couldn't be content with just staying in the same rut. I opted to change gears and try my hand at non-fiction. That decision ended up being the turning point in my writing career.

At a Police Writers Association (now PSWA) conference in Florida in 2001, I met Marilyn Olsen, who had written the story of the Indiana State Police. I purchased a copy of her book and read it cover-to-cover. At the time I was still searching for a subject for my first non-fiction effort, and doing a police history book appealed to me. I had been living in Las Vegas since 1994 and thought doing a book about my new home town's police force would be fun to write and might sell fairly well in Sin City. With Marilyn's guidance, I prepared a proposal and submitted it in person to Undersheriff Dick Winget of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (Metro). In less than an hour my plan was accepted.

With Metro having signed on to the project, I prepared a proposal and presented it to Las Vegas publisher Huntington Press (HP). Huntington is a small press owned by well-known gaming expert Anthony Curtis. They publish a handful of books per year and don't handle fiction. Their titles all have Las Vegas or Nevada connections. After a few weeks, HP informed me they'd publish my book if the manuscript lived up to my proffer.

What a different and refreshing experience it was working with HP. A professional editor worked closely with me as I prepared the manuscript. Help was always only a phone call or e-mail away. HP's attorneys rendered opinions on any legal issues that needed to be addressed. A marketing person gathered the information necessary to pitch local book stores and other venues. And when ***Policing Las Vegas*** was released, the publicity director arranged radio and TV interviews for me.

Did HP send me on a national book signing tour? No, they didn't. Did I have to set up my own signings and other events? Yes, I did. But prior to this I'd had virtually *no* support. I had been almost solely responsible for doing the writing, editing, and marketing. What a feeling it was for me to now have assistance in all those areas.

Other good things happened, too. When I approached the Community Relations Manager of a book store to discuss a signing, I seemed to be treated with a lot more respect. I wasn't told that I had to supply my own books or split sales with the store. And I didn't have to share my appearance with other authors. It was as though I had suddenly become a legitimate author.

I've published two more books with HP. They both deal with organized crime in Las Vegas. But unlike *Policing*, which was a local interest book, ***The Battle for Las Vegas – The Law vs. the Mob***, and ***CULLOTTA – The Life of a Chicago Criminal, Las Vegas Mobster, and Government Witness***, have national appeal.

In my book ***The Battle for Las Vegas – The Law vs. the Mob*** (Huntington Press, July 2006), I told the story of Chicago Outfit enforcer Tony Spilotro's Las Vegas reign. This is the era dramatized in the hit 1995 movie ***Casino***, in which actor Joe Pesci plays a character based on Spilotro. That book was told primarily from the side of law enforcement. So when I had the opportunity to meet Frank Cullotta — the last living and available member of Spilotro's crew — I was enthused about the possibility of getting a look at that same time period from the perspective of the bad guys. Frank had already been thinking about doing a book, making the timing perfect.

During my initial meeting with Frank, he committed to discussing his life of crime starting with his days as a juvenile thief and tough guy in Chicago, through his time as Tony Spilotro's lieutenant in Vegas, and his stint in the federal Witness Protection Program. He also agreed to talk about his role as an adviser to ***Casino***, in which he appeared in several scenes as a hit man. Frank promised to talk candidly about the myriad crimes he'd been involved in for which he'd received immunity or the statute of limitations had long since run. They included murder.

Shortly after the meeting I approached Huntington Press with a proposal outlining what Frank's story would contain and the amount of detail he would provide. As an illustration, the proposal included Frank's description of the facts behind the so-called M&M murders. They were the basis for one of the most memorable scenes in ***Casino***, the one in which Pesci's character places a man's head in a vise and squeezes until the guy's eyeball pops out. Huntington saw the book's potential and agreed to publish it.

I'm currently finishing a fiction called ***Vegas Vixen***. For my next non-fiction, I'm mulling over three appealing true crime projects. I plan to start work on one of them after ***Vixen*** is off to the publisher.

* * *

JOHN SCHEMBRA

(These are the answers to an interview John did elsewhere—I don't think you need the questions.)

I think the greatest influence on my becoming a writer was my mother. She instilled in me a love of books and reading. As a young child- I'm talking 6, 7 years old- she took my brother and I to the library every two weeks where we could check out up to five books. At times I was upset because she only let me take out five!! I would have liked to get more, but though she always encouraged us to read, she also made sure we paid the proper attention to our schoolwork, and spent time with our friends. Often, she would read to us, and other times would have us read to her. She encouraged us to read what we wanted, but I think she also managed, without my knowing it, to steer my reading interests in the right direction. I think that may be why I like non-fiction history so much (clever woman!)

My very first story was called "Larry Bubblebones" and won my fourth grade class writing contest! It was the story of a fish in a lake that got lost and his adventures during his journey home. I remember how proud of me my mom and dad were that I wrote the story and actually won the contest, and how my teacher made such a big deal over the story. I also remember my older brother giving me a hard time over it, as brothers are wont to do!

I think I am most proud of my first book, M.P., since it was my first serious effort at writing a novel length manuscript, and since it is based in part on my personal experiences as a combat military policeman in Vietnam. It took a long time, and at times was difficult to write, but getting it published gave me a great feeling of accomplishment and self-pride.

Who am I? Just an ordinary guy who has had some extraordinary life experiences. I grew up in San Leandro, California, a middle class blue collar neighborhood, somewhat sheltered from the more unpleasant aspects of society. I led an "American Graffiti" life through high school and for a year or two after that, attending the local community college. Then in 1969 I received a letter from Uncle Sam asking for my help with a little problem, and I was drafted into the Army. A very eye-opening experience! I quickly learned about the side of life I had no experience with- prejudice, cruelty, war, death, fear, and dealing with life's pitfalls. I learned that life is not always pleasant. The truth? I believe it made me a better man, more able to cope with society and life's adversities.

After completing my military obligation, I joined the Pleasant Hill Police Department, retiring as a Sergeant after 30 years service. Again, an eye-opening experience, dealing with the worst, and the best, of our population. Being a cop was a very rewarding and fulfilling experience. I retired still loving the job, and left with a sense that I had helped many people through some rough, sad times in their lives. I know of times I made a positive difference in people's lives, both through extending a helping hand, and through locking up some very bad, dangerous individuals.

Along the way, I married and we had two wonderful children. We are still happily married after 35 years, and the kids are grown and on their own. My wife is my best friend, and the biggest influence in my life. She is my life. Now I am semi-retired and am enjoying

life. We travel a lot, I write, and still work part time as a police driving instructor at the police academy. Life is good!

I actually had a pretty painless experience in getting published. I had submitted my first book to two traditional publishers and had received two rejection notices. I then attended a writer's conference and met a couple of people who had been published electronically. After listening to them, I thought I would check into it, and did quite a bit of research on the internet about electronic publishing. I was impressed with the quality of the publisher's websites and after reviewing the sample contracts, talking with a few others who had been electronically published, decided to give it a shot. I had also talked with a few other authors who said their experiences in getting traditionally published was a long and sometimes painful, discouraging process. Since I don't take rejection well, I submitted my book to Writers Exchange and was fortunate to have it accepted for publication.

My first book is a war novel while the second is a murder mystery. For now, I plan to stick with crime/thriller type genres, since that is what I know the most about, and am most comfortable with.

I usually write at night. Around 10 p.m. I go to the computer room and do my book research, send and answer e-mails, and write. I may be up until one or two a.m. During the day, I may have a class to instruct, or, if not, I run errands, do yard work, visit with friends, go to the gym, etc. All the normal stuff we do in our busy lives. I don't spend a lot of time in the house during the day, unless its time I put aside to read a book. My wife works full time as a teacher's assistant, so we spend our time together in the afternoons after she returns from work, and on the weekends. I try to write at least 3 or 4 evenings a week. The amount of time each evening usually depends on how creative I feel.

I never dreamed I would be a writer when I was younger. I believe I was meant for something else, being a cop, which I wanted to be since I was very young. Nor did I just wake up one morning and decide to write a book. Writing came about at the urging of friends in the police department. Another sergeant and I, both of us being Vietnam veterans, would swap stories about our experiences. The younger officers would listen to us talking, and several told me I should write them down, that it would make a good book. After a while, I started writing with a pencil and pad, and one thing led to another. Before I knew it, I had written a book! What sense of accomplishment I had!

I always admired authors who could write so well that I would get lost in their story, become part of it. At some point, I think I realized that maybe I had a story to tell and could write like that. I thoroughly enjoyed writing my first book, and am proud of the result. Writing now has become a favorite pass-time. I get more pleasure from hearing how others enjoyed my books than from the royalties I receive.

My greatest ambition is to see a book of mine adapted to the big screen. Somehow, I've got to let Steven Spielberg know my book is out there and would make a great movie! I think my greatest work so far is my first book, M.P. though I am very excited about my new work in progress. I think it has the potential to be my "signature" work.

I would like to be remembered as being a great storyteller. If people get pleasure from my works, then I know I have been a success as a writer.

I have two works in progress. Another crime novel involving the same protagonist, Vincent Torelli, as in my first two books, who became a homicide inspector with the San Francisco Police Department after returning from Vietnam. In this book, a sniper is killing diplomats at consulates in San Francisco. There appears to be political reasons for the killings, and that's all I will tell you about the story for now.

I am working on a second book entitled "**Sin Eater**." It, too is a crime novel, but there are new characters, and it takes place in a smallish city in the central valley of California. Though the story is a murder/thriller, it has some supernatural aspects.

I hope to have both of them ready to go to the publisher by the end of this year.

Except for my first book, which is based in part on my personal experiences, the ideas for my stories just seem to pop up out of the blue. I may be reading something, or watching a movie, and something I read/see triggers a thought like Hey! That would make a great book! I really have no idea when the next idea may hit me, and I don't really spend any time thinking about book ideas.

As an example, the idea for "**Sin Eater**" came to me as a result of about a minute or two of dialog in a movie I was watching, a very brief a superficial reference to sin eaters. It fascinated me, so I did some research on the computer when I got home. The more I learned, the more I thought it would make a great theme for a book, and I am currently working on it.

I think research is essential to writing a good book. I do extensive research, as I don't want an obvious mistake in location or procedure to distract the reader from the story, as has happened to me. I was reading a book once, a supposed non-fiction account of a man's tour of duty in Vietnam. The location happened to be the same area I was stationed at, and the author made a few glaring errors as to the layout of the town and surrounding area that made me doubt he had really been in the area. He also made some errors when telling about some of the procedures and tactics used. Those errors made me question whether he actually had been in Vietnam, or had even been in the military. He lost credibility, and I lost interest in the book.

While writing **M.P.**, I did extensive research, even sending away for military maps of the area. The book is geographically accurate, and all military units mentioned are real units that operated in the area at the time. For my second book, I contacted friends who are with the SFPD to check that I was correct when describing their procedures and structure within the department. I sent for and received copies of their homicide investigation procedures and crime scene procedures, among others, and I also printed out maps of San Francisco so the locations, streets, and areas mentioned in the book were actual places.

Most authors write about what they know best, but good research is still critical in giving the story an aspect of realism that allows the reader to become connected to the story. In my opinion, an author cannot do too much research.

I am not the life of the party, though I do enjoy interacting with my friends. I am by no means shy, it just that I don't feel the need to be the center of attention all the time. In spite of enjoying myself, I do study others characteristics. I think it helps me to get to

know them better, and to discover what makes them tick.

What I would like to convey is that reading is the key to everything! If one reads well, I truly believe every thing else comes a bit easier, especially educational endeavors. So, my advice is to READ, READ, READ!!!

My books are: ***M.P., A Novel of Vietnam***, currently available both electronically and in print, and ***Retribution***, available electronically at for now. I expect the print version to become available in the next month or two.

My website url is www.jschembra.com and my e-mail is toto@pacbell.net. Please visit my site and say hello!

I chose Writers Exchange because I liked what I saw while doing research on e-publishers. I was impressed with the professional look of the website, and I liked the sample contract, plus what some of the WEE authors had to say about it. Even though Sandy had not published any previous books in the war genre, I thought Writers Exchange was a publisher I would like to have my book(s) with. I have not been disappointed.

I think e-publishing is just getting off the ground, even though the latest surveys show report increasing revenues every year. We have just scratched the surface and e-publishing has a long and very lucrative future ahead of it. It is the future of publishing. Just look at the number of "big" publishers who now offer their author's books electronically. One can go to any of the major e-book outlets and find that almost all of the best known, best selling authors have their books listed electronically. Think they are feeling the results of increasing e-book sales? You bet they do. Electronic publishing is cutting into their profits, and they recognize that this is more than just a trend. It is a fact that e-book sales are increasing every year.

I am very happy with my e-publishing career and I am proud to say that I am e-published. There is still a long way to go in educating the reading public about e-pubs, but we are making more and more progress every year. Latest stats show that e-book sales increased from a little more than \$8 million in 2002, to almost \$16 million for the first half of 2007.

I am not multi-talented- I used to play the piano and trumpet, but it has been so many years ago, I couldn't put two notes together now!

* * *

(Anyone who would like to be interviewed for the newsletter, just contact the editor at mmeredith@ocsnet.net)

The End

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