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## PUBLIC SAFETY WRITERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER WINTER 2012 ISSUE

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This is your newsletter, please contribute articles, your news, book reviews, or anything else you think might be of interest. It is also open to the public, so it's a great place to share your expertise.

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### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hope the new year finds you all with renewed enthusiasm about your writing projects and goals. Your PSWA board has met recently and has a lot of exciting plans for the membership. Although the organization has operated as a club since its founding in 1997, we are now in the process of organizing as a 501 (c) 3 non profit, which should provide a more formal structure and allow us to receive tax deductible donations for our upcoming projects and activities. As any of you who have written organizational bylaws can appreciate, we took on that task with trepidation, but are pleased to announce that this hurdle had been completed, so as soon as the various government bureaucracies that need to weigh in are satisfied, we will be formally incorporated.

Thanks to the great input from those of you who have been entering our annual writing contest, we've made some changes to categories and awards that should allow for even more participation and even more and better awards. Check out the [writing contest page](#) on this website for all the details and enter early and often.

The [2012 conference](#) promises to be the best ever with an outstanding schedule of speakers and panels, as well as ample opportunity to network with both writers like you and experts in the subjects most interesting to you. We even have some surprises

planned that are guaranteed to keep you guessing. As always, there will be a lot of materials to take home, a bigger than ever bookstore stocked with books by your fellow PSWA members, the ever popular door prizes and tasty lunches. There are always discounts for early registration, so check out the [conference page](#) on this website for details.

If you're a member and you haven't signed up for the List Serve, be sure to do so. The lively discussion is both enjoyable and full of ideas for writers of all genres and experience.

Whether you are still in the "I really should get started on that book" stage or you are putting the finishing touches on your great American novel, membership in PSWA can provide the advice and encouragement we writers all need. If you haven't yet joined, click on "Join" today. If you are already a member, be sure to peruse the website now. We've made a lot of changes we hope you'll find interesting.

We look forward to welcoming our new members and hearing from our current membership. Visit this website often, join the List Serve and keep in touch. We always like hearing from you.

Marilyn Olsen  
PSWA President

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#### **FIRST TIMERS EXPERIENCES AT PSWA CONFERENCE**

When I walked into my first Public Safety Writers Conference I was nervous and intimidated. I'd only had my first book, *A Case of Infatuation*, put in my hands and now meeting with well-known professionals and experts in the field. I could barely speak. I didn't know anyone and this Midwestern girl was in the middle of Las Vegas for the first time in her life.

Those feelings quickly faded as I met some really fun people and many I still call good friends today. I joined tables at the host-free mixer and was welcomed. The next day when the conference officially started was even better.

All those professionals and best selling writers were just like normal people. They introduced themselves, asked me questions like a colleague and shared their knowledge.

That first time I met a private investigator, a hand writing analyst, an FBI agent and tons of fun-loving cops, firefighters, dispatchers and many others. I've returned two more times and always met great professionals who willingly shared their knowledge without egos or hidden agendas. It is a great conference! --**Wendy Gager**. Author of Humorous Whodunits: *A Case of Infatuation*, *A Case of Accidental Intersection*, *A Case of Hometown Blues* <http://wsgager.blogspot.com/>

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Okay, in reality the term 'first-timer' is a little misleading. I've actually been a member of the PSWA since 1997 but had never attended a conference. Why? Well, the answer would have to be part intimidation and part motivation. I had published articles before, but had never considered myself someone who could match the dynamic prose of published novelists such as Holli Castillo, Roger Fulton, R.J. Haig, Marilyn Meredith, Steve Scarborough and the ever talented John Wills. Not to mention the editorializing expertise of the likes of Tim Dees, Marilyn Olsen and Michelle Perin. Further, I wanted to use this intimidating line-up of literary achievers as a source of motivation—determined to attend a conference for myself only upon completing the draft for my first novel.

Along the way and over the years, I was fortunate enough to have many on-line conversations with PSWA members about writing, including skills development, critique

groups, and personal growth; not to mention motivational advice and the esoteric connection you can only share when interacting with truly passionate people. These connections also helped me to connect with editorial visionaries who developed projects that allowed me to publish a couple of short stories. All of these things kept me motivated and dedicated to personal growth as a writer, but I was about to learn that I had been missing out on one big opportunity—the annual conferences.

In 2010 I finally flew to Las Vegas to meet the creative crew of the PSWA. I was immediately greeted by the two Marylins (Meredith and Olsen of course), and I instantly felt like family. Next I was introduced to Tim Dees and Keith Bettinger; I couldn't wait to let them know how much I admired their writings. Their appreciation was short and humble as they acknowledged my writing as well. During the conference I met other successful writers including Michelle Perin, Holli Castillo and Steve Scarborough. I was also drawn into focus with interesting topics and the myriad speakers, including the most successful John Wills.

As my first ever conference came to a close I felt a tinge of depression setting in. The contacts that I had made had renewed my inspiration, not only with terrific advice and role-modeling but with the promise of future mentorship. Marilyn Olsen was soon to review my manuscript and impress upon me the need for dedication and historical accuracy. Billie Johnson spent some time elucidating relevant concerns from a publisher's perspective. And, as always—the writing competition proved to be not only rewarding, but lots of fun as I soon discovered that Michelle Perin is just as dynamic a speaker as she is a writer.

Due to family commitments I will not be able to make it to the 2012 conference—but I wish I could. And I wish that I had started going to these wonderful events much sooner. Take it from a (sort-of) first-timer; you'll love the experience as well as the people, you will instantly feel like family and you will no doubt learn more than you bargained for.

**Dave Cropp** is a retired sergeant with the Sacramento Police Department and an award winning writer of short stories including "Fear in Children," published in *True Blue* (2004) by Randy Sutton, and "On the Wagon," published in *American Blue* (2011) by Ed Nowicki

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#### **OTHER COMMENTS ABOUT THE CONFERENCE**

I used to go to a much larger conference, but I always felt like a foreigner there. It was sit, listen to others, talk with a single person during breaks and it was much more expensive. With PSWA there are group discussions at breaks, I even get to sit on a panel if I can add something of benefit and it is friendly. Now let's talk about the food. OUTSTANDING. That is all there is to say. Hope to see you there.

**Jack Miller**, USAF E-8 Ret, Author of *Cold War Warrior*, *Cold War Defector*, *The Medal*; *The Master Cheat* and *Operation Switch*. Soon to be released, *The Peacekeepers*.

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The 2011 PSWA conference was a major entry for my journal this year. Everything was A+. I felt welcome by everyone and was inspired by the wealth of knowledge in the group. It has given me plenty of ideas/information on writing and publishing. The friendly people, well-run presentations, pleasant surroundings and great food made my time spent there so rewarding. I'm looking forward to the 2012 conference and hope that everyone returns.

**Barbara Lloyd**, retired Nevada DPS Parole and Probation Officer

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One of the best aspects to recommend the PSWA conference is the lack of pretentiousness. I haven't been to a lot of other writer's conferences, but between the ones I have attended and the reviews I have read about them, there seems to be a lot of "bask in the presence of greatness" time, especially with conferences that feature celebrity writers. While I would really like to hear someone like Joe Wambaugh speak on writing the cop novel (don't hold your breath for that to happen at our conference, by the way), I wouldn't want to bring him in to the PSWA conference unless everyone understood that we is all just folks here.

It's one thing to share your expertise, and another to create an atmosphere that this expertise somehow makes you a superior being as compared to the others present.

This ethos is repeated in the listserv information bulletin you automatically receive on joining and on the first of each month: we are an association of colleagues; no one is better than another. I think it's important to preserve this atmosphere as long as we can.

Tim Dees  
[tim@timdees.com](mailto:tim@timdees.com)

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### **SIGNING AN AGENT OR PUBLISHING CONTRACT**

Legal issues can crop up any time you sign a contract, whether it's to obligate yourself in a cell phone contract, finance a major purchase, or sue your neighbor for putting his fence on your property line. And if you're a published author, you've already signed a contract. If you're with a big house or a small press, you've signed an agreement between you and your publisher. If you're with an agent, you have already signed an agency agreement. Even if you self-publish, you've entered into some type of contractual agreement with a company who will publish your work.

Regardless of what type of agreement you've entered, it's important that you understand what you're signing. Even simple contracts can be misconstrued and misunderstood, resulting in hard feelings or worse, a lawsuit. If you understand what you're agreeing to before you sign on the dotted line, you may save yourself a lot of problems in the future.

There are two big issues that tend to come up with writers and contracts. The first involves payment of royalties. Every writer wants to know when and how much they're getting paid. This is probably the area of the most misunderstandings between writers and agents or publishers. Even contracts with no small print, written in clear, easy to understand terms can be difficult for non-lawyers to understand.

While it's tempting when being offered a contract to have a book represented or published just to sign without bothering to read what the terms of the agreement are, you should make sure you're fully aware of what is included in the contract.

The contract should state how often you will get paid, whether it's quarterly, monthly, or some other term. Parties can contract whatever payment schedule they wish, so you need to read carefully to determine the payment schedule that sets out how often you should expect to receive a payment.

The contract should also state how much, or what percentage of each book sale, you will be paid. It may be 5 to 20 percent of hard copy sales or more, and for e-books, especially for self-published authors, may be 40 percent or more. Writers need to look at the numbers provided and make sure they understand what they mean. Five percent of the sale price will be different than 5 percent of the price the vendor pays for the book, so writers need to make sure they understand exactly what the numbers represent to determine how much they will make from each copy sold.

There are also additional numerous provisions that will likely be included in the contract

which are exceptions to the other provisions, the second issue writers frequently face when deciphering contracts. For instance, while the regular provision may state that you will receive monthly payments, the contract may contain a provision that royalties may roll over to the next month if they do not exceed a certain dollar amount.

Most contracts will also have provisions for returned books, as in the case of book stores that purchase books, fail to sell them, and then send them back to the publisher. In those cases, if you have already been paid for the sale, you will owe the money back and it will probably be deducted from your next royalty check. Thus while you will be paid for all sales, you may be deducted for returned books. Again, the contract should set out the specifics of any such agreements, and it's up to you as the writer to read and understand these extra rules.

Contracts may also have a provision as to what will happen if a disagreement occurs, such as what state lawsuits must be litigated or if the parties agree to attempt mediation before filing suit.

Different rights will also be contracted. A contract may include not only English-version writes, but foreign rights, movie rights, merchandise rights, e-book rights, etc. While most of us will never be lucky enough to have to worry too much about contracting away most of these rights, it is good to know what you're giving up and how much you're getting in return so there are no disputes in the future if your book suddenly becomes the next biggest Harry Potter, True Blood, or Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.

In general, agents and publishers are not out to cheat their clients. It would be highly illogical for agents and publishers to risk their reputations and careers trying to cheat a writer out of royalties, especially with the little amount of money most of us make.

Nearly all of the legal issues between you and your agent or publisher can be eliminated by having an attorney experienced in agency or publishing contracts read over your contract and explain it to you before you sign. If you are not inclined to hire an attorney or are unable to pay to hire an attorney, you should at least have someone else you trust read the contract with you and discuss what you think each provision means. If you and your trusted friend fail to agree on what even just one of the provisions means, it may be you don't truly understand what you're contracting for, and you should ask the agent or publisher to explain it in a letter or email.

While contracts are generally construed against the party who wrote them, meaning if there is some question as to what was meant, the issue will likely be ruled against the agent or publisher who wrote the contract, if the terms are clear and you just didn't understand them, you may end up on the losing end in the courtroom. Not to mention you could lose your agent or publisher because of something that could have been prevented.

**Holli Castillo**

[www.hollicastillo.com](http://www.hollicastillo.com)

[www.gumbojustice.blogspot.com](http://www.gumbojustice.blogspot.com)

Jambalaya Justice now available

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## **YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING PLAN**

What's your brand? In most cases it's your name and what kind of books you produce: Cozies, Straight Mysteries, Thrillers, Romance, or in the case of non-fiction, whatever type you specialize in. But always remember, your name comes first.

Use effective online and offline marketing tactics to increase sales potential.

You need a website. This should have your books, links to buy the books, book trailers, reviews of your books, your in person appearances. Have your email address on there

and a link to your blog.

You need a blog, the blog should have your name in the title. Decide how often you are going to post, do it at least once a week, pick a certain day to post and do it.

Get reviews for your book. Reviews are really what make a book into a success.

Guest blog—have guests on your blog and be a guest for others.

Leave comments on other blogs.

Use book trailers. If you can't do it yourself, hire someone to do it for you. Once you have one, post the link on your webpage and tell everyone via all the online possibilities, your listserve and all your social networks.

Though you definitely should post about your book on twitter, Facebook, Linked In, etc., talk about other things too, you want to an accessible and real person to all your friends. Use ping.fm to make postings on a lot of places at once easier.

Goodreads and Library Thing are great places to talk about your own books and others that you've read.

Everyone should have a business card to hand out everywhere. It should have the cover of your latest book on one side and pertinent information on the other, your name, title of book, publisher, webpage, blog, and email address. I like Vistaprint for these.

Bookmarks are nice, but I prefer business cards.

Press releases on line. When you have a new book make a press page for your webpage.

Set up an Amazon Author Central page. You need an author profile. You can check on book sales, but it doesn't cover them all.

There are Kindle Boards for you if your book is on Kindle, just be sure to post on the right board if you're promoting your own book.

Be nice, be friendly, be someone who people who read our posts or blogs would like to meet—and you might one day at a writers conference or book festival.

**Marilyn Meredith** author of *Bears With Us*

<http://www.fictionforyou.com>

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#### **A SARDONIC QUOTATION**

**Writing is like prostitution. First you do it for love, and then you do it for a few close friends, and then you do it for money. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673) French Actor, Playwright and Writer—Stage name MOLIERE.**

Here's a question with which to search our souls. At which stage of writing am I? This mischievous quotation by Moliere catches the eye because it highlights an eternal truth.

If we write, we are at one of those three stages. When the Muse seizes us, she forces us to the pen and paper or the keyboard, often both. We frequently begin to write about something we love, or in some cases to exorcise a demon that has perched on our shoulders from time immemorial.

We write initially to put our thoughts in readable form. The next impulse is to share them. In the beginning, we ask only those close to us to read them, never daring to disclose something so personal to casual friends or strangers.

Once however, in the grip of these inexorable influences, we take up the self-imposed challenge. Driven beyond the borders of our own reticence, we sally forth, asking distant and hyper-critical strangers to read, evaluate, and dare I say, publish this fragile child born of our imagination and hard work. We are driven then, to suffer the bitter slings and arrows of rejection, even outright scorn.

But now with the bit in our teeth, we plunge ahead. Revise, rewrite, polish, edit, and revise again. Will anyone, at last, see the merit in our art? The joy, however, of acceptance is unequaled. It is an affirmation of our very souls. Every moment dedicated to assuage that burning desire that flames within has been justified.

Finally, should someone actually pay us for our cherished work of prose or poetry, we are truly fulfilled. Then, alas, back to the keyboard, how can we stop now?

**John Bray**, Retired LT.NYPD, retired criminal defense attorney, published author

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#### **HOW THE PSWA LISTSERVE HELPS AUTHORS**

(You must be a PSWA member to be on the listserve, but just to show you how useful it is read the following.)

The Question:

Asking for help--again! I've just written a scene where a California county (fictional name) Sheriff received an APB put out by the FBI on her computer. Based on my research so far, I think the FBI can put out a nationwide APB??? But in what form (computer software program, email, fax, all???) Am I correct on the FBI APB issuance, and the dissemination method?

For me, it's these kind of details (if they're wrong) that can throw a reader off.

Thanks!

Madeline Gornell

The Answer:

Actually, any NLETS subscriber agency (read: every cop shop in creation) can send out a nationwide APB, although it's discouraged. NLETS is the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, otherwise known as "the teletype" or "the wire." Dinosaurs such as myself can recall when these really were teletype machines that required users to first punch their message or inquiry into a paper tape (the little holes that were punched out were called "chad," and we knew what they were long before the 2000 election), then run it through the tape reader and have it sent out over "the wire." Now, everything is run from a computer display that looks more or less like the one you're using to read this.

APBs (All Points Bulletins), also called "BOLOs" (Be On the LookOut) are usually sent to agencies within a designated geographical zone. There are pre-coded destination addresses that transmit to (in ascending order of size) every agency in the county, the surrounding counties, that portion of the state, the whole state, the state and contiguous states, that part of the country, that half of the country, and the whole US of A. Users are encouraged to send to as few agencies as practical, as there are literally thousands of these transmitted every day. As a rule, the only time you'll see a true nationwide APB to everyone is for administrative messages ("files will be down for maintenance from X to Y on such and such"), for Law Enforcement Officer Killed Summaries that go out from the FBI every time a cop is killed, and, although it usually generates a nastygram, from well-intentioned agencies sending out Christmas greetings and joke sightings of Santa and his sleigh.

Of course, this does not mean that the sheriff of Possum Squat County is enjoined from sending out a nationwide BOLO for the truck that was stolen from his nephew last night. It's his call.

These messages usually come over the NLETS terminal assigned to the agency's records and/or communications division. When a supervisor is preparing the next roll call briefing, they will go through the printouts and decide which ones to read and which to round-file. Now that most cops have access to their own computer terminals in the car or the station, they may just be forwarded to a message queue there for reading or future reference.

Tim Dees [tim@timdees.com](mailto:tim@timdees.com)

And this brought up a new question:

If anyone knows and as an afterthought connected to Madeline's question, are Amber Alerts handled the same way as BOLOs? I know we'll get Amber Alerts from the whole country as an emergency broadcast alert on TV, flashing on billboards around town, and as alerts on the radio, and I was wondering if these are handled by the individual law enforcement agency and disseminated the same way as a BOLO, or is there a different mechanism in place to send out these alerts?

Holli Castillo  
Jambalaya Justice now available  
[www.jambalayajustice.com](http://www.jambalayajustice.com)  
[www.gumbojustice.net](http://www.gumbojustice.net)

With two answers:  
There's a from-the-horse's-mouth FAQ on Amber Alerts here:  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/newsroom/pdfs/amberfaq.pdf>.

Tim Dees  
[tim@timdees.com](mailto:tim@timdees.com)

Most County emergency Alert Systems now handle the Amber Alerts, hence television, radio, etc. The Changeable Message Signs (CMS) on highways are handled via the State Police or Highway Patrol (depending on your State) through your State Department of Transportation. (although the State Police or Highway Patrol can also put the messages up). The Amber Alerts can be local, regional or national depending on the situation.

As for the BOLO's, I've seen them come all the various ways and means. NLETS, CLETS, NCIC, etc. Since the smaller agencies don't always have the "new fangled" conveniences, faxes, and regular mail are also used.

No matter how you write it as long as it fits the agencies capabilities. A small "Podunk County" agency might not have the budget for the Mobile Digital Computer, Blackberries and such, then the mail or fax, coupled with the NCIC would work. A large metropolitan agency would have all the newest technologies.

Guy Painter

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#### **MEMBER NEWS**

**John H. Briant** reports all six of his Adirondack Detective Books are now for sale on NOOK.

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**Kregg P. J. Jorgenson** retired in late August from Customs & Border Protection and is

staying busy with a Tactical Tracking organization. In fact, he just got back from Camp Pendleton where his group helped train Marines in Explosive Hazardous Detection. He said, "It was an honor to help teach the Marines who'll soon be facing another tour of duty in Afghanistan and hope that we offered some tools that will be of value and use to them."

His advice about writing: "My theory on writing is to stay busy, learn a few new things, and see how I can implement them into a future writing project."



**The End**

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