



Home
Join
Newsletter
Conference
Writing Contest
Manuscript Review
Tips & Ideas
Resources
Feedback
Member's Pages
Links
Cop Tales 2000
Mailing List
Contact Us

## PUBLIC SAFETY WRITERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

### VOLUME X FALL 2008 ISSUE

Editor: Marilyn Meredith, [mmeredith@ocsnet.net](mailto:mmeredith@ocsnet.net)

This is your newsletter, please contribute articles, your news, book reviews, or anything else you think might be of interest.

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

[MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT](#)

[MESSAGE FROM THE CONTEST CHAIR](#)

[MESSAGE FROM KEITH BETTINGER, PSWA CONFERENCE SITE](#)

[MEMBER ARTICLES](#)

“Writing the Convincing Villain” by Melanie Atkins

“The Truth of Fiction” by Sunny Frazier

[QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE LISTSERVE](#)

[MORE ON PROMOTION](#)

[MEMBER NEWS](#)

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#### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear PSWA members,

Wow! Where has the summer gone? Even though summer here in the Pacific Northwest doesn't really start until July when it stops raining, the last two months have really flown by.

I had a great 10 days in Alaska in July. If you've never sea kayaked next to icebergs, it's an experience you won't soon forget. Be sure to wear layers of everything you own.

Hope all of you have had a productive writing summer. The lack of activity on the list serve lately I'm assuming is due to the fact that you've been busily typing away on your manuscripts and, hopefully, taking at least some time to sit in the sun and read all those books written by your fellow PSWA writers.

When you do, by the way, write a short review and send it to Marilyn Meredith for the newsletter. Also, remember that the deadline for the cheapest rates for the annual conference is coming soon, so get your reservation in now. The cost goes up October 1. See the Conference page of this website for details.

As you'll also see, we kept the conference in Las Vegas for 2009 in the hope that Las Vegas will have the most economical airfares. We do everything we can to keep the conference costs down (so you'll have extra cash to buy more books by your fellow PSWA writers, of course!)

Meanwhile, enjoy what's left of the summer and keep in touch!

Marilyn Olsen  
Your President

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## **MESSAGE FROM THE CONTEST CHAIR**

### **2009 PSWA Writing Competition**

Michelle Perin

It seems like only yesterday, I had the privilege of watching PSWA members' faces light up as I read the names of our annual writing conference winners. As always, the job of determining the winners is difficult but announcing the names makes the work well worth it. This is especially true due to having spent three wonderful days with many of the contestants getting to know them personally and professionally at the annual conference. Of course, it's always hard to keep a serious face when I'm meeting and greeting our members, some old and some new, and I know who won what. Alas, I have taken on the tedious job once again of having to keep my thoughts to myself for half a week. And, for those of you who know me, keeping my thoughts to myself is probably not my strong point. Regardless, it is time again to start sending me your work so I can dole it out to our judges and PSWA can again make "award winning authors" of many of you.

#### **What Do We Want?**

Published and non-published works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, technical writing and training material all have separate categories, each able to place in the contest individually, as well as, vie for the Grand Prize. This is one thing which makes our contest unique. We value everyone's contribution to public safety writing. We have a very diverse membership with Marilyn Meredith's Deputy Crabtree novels set beside Sarah Cortez' steamy cop poetry alongside John Bellah's technical pieces and the list goes on and on. (I drew papers to see who I would mention for those of you who want to know why you aren't listed. I did think of each of you long enough to write a name down.) Book-length work, short stories, articles, etc are all welcome to enter. And, if there is a category you would like to see added, please let me know. Our membership and contest strives to be as inclusive as possible.

#### **Who Do We Want?**

At the risk of sounding lewd, we want everyone--Anyone who writes from or for public safety. Firefighters, police officers, EMT, security personnel and, as always, the all important civilian personnel are welcome to become members and enter the contest, as well as, anyone who writes about public safety in any genre (except of course that guy who wants to ramble on and on in his blog about how he was pulled over erroneously and detained maliciously and convicted wrongfully. We all know about him.) So, if you write about public safety in any way, you are encouraged to enter the contest.

#### **How Do We Want It?**

As always, the information for how to submit entries is listed on the website at <http://www.policewriter.com/writingcomp.htm>. This year, we are asking for an electronic copy of the work along with the hard copy. Unfortunately, we had some issues with manuscripts going missing in the U.S. mail, so we decided to go high-tech as well. (See, Tim, I wasn't sleeping during your presentation).

#### **What Do You Get?**

Besides being able to list yourself as an award winning author, we send out press releases with the winners' names after the annual conference banquet. These go to many different media sources. Several prizes, including the Grand Prize are offered and include many cool, writerly (I know that's not a word, but I like it) gadgets. Also, unlike many contests, you will get a copy of the judge's critique letting you know what was good and what could be improved. So, not only can you win a prize, hang out with a bunch of awesome people in Las Vegas to pick it up, but you get a critique—ALL for just \$10. Enter as many works as you wish. PSWA members this is your contest and we want it to work for you. (Okay, no more coffee for me.)

If you have any questions, or are interested in being a judge for a category, please let me know at [michelle@thewritinghand.net](mailto:michelle@thewritinghand.net). I look forward to receiving your work and seeing you in Vegas.

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### **MESSAGE FROM KEITH BETTINGER, PSWA CONFERENCE SITE CHAIRPERSON**

I hope you're planning on attending and participating in our 2009 Conference in June. Once again we will be staying in the Suncoast Hotel and Casino on Alta and Rampart. There is everything you could ask for at this hotel or in the near vicinity.

Our hotel has beautiful guest rooms, 60+ bowling alleys. It has a 16 theater movie complex. It has 5 star restaurants as well as a great buffet, coffee shop, snack bars, swimming pool and a gift shop. The gift shop has some of the best priced liquor in town, just in case you know someone in need of a taste of an elixir.

The hotel is holding 50 rooms at a conference rate for our attendees. They have extended the rate for 3 days prior to the conference and 3 days after so you can make a great vacation out of your trip. Our conference will be held in the Madrid Rooms, right off the escalator near the bowling alley. Attendee Tip: Before coming into the conference stop in the bowling alley and pick up an excellent cup of coffee to get you through the morning. If you need coffee late at night and you don't want to go to the coffee shop, play a penny slot machine and ask the cocktail waitress to bring you a cup of coffee fixed the way you like it. There is also a public golf course right behind the hotel. Bring your clubs and play a round.

Las Vegas has a lot to offer beside casinos and you should really take advantage of the sightseeing to Red Rock Canyon, Valley of Fire, Lake Mead, Hoover Dam, Mount Charleston, the Liberace Museum and The Fremont Street Experience to name just a few. There are helicopter tours of the Grand Canyon or all day bus tours.

You will be staying right across the street from the Boca Park Mall. They have many nice restaurants including Cheesecake Factory and Gordon Biersch Brewery to name a couple. There is also a Von's Grocery Store to pick up supplies for your room.

There is another shopping mall across the street from Boca Park with Claim Jumpers Restaurant, Barnes and Noble (like there won't be enough books to buy at the conference). There are also some great restaurants on Charleston Avenue (a large block away from the hotel) if you want to eat away from the hotel. I recommend Carrabas for quality Italian food. If you want to take a cab to a restaurant they are always outside the hotel.

You will be coming to Las Vegas later in the year than the attendees did in 2008. We will not be having the warm spring breezes you experienced in April. You will be arriving during our summer. Summer is one of the 4 seasons we experience in

Southern Nevada. We have: "It's warm today I'll wear shorts to church." "Are we Catholic because this must be Purgatory?" "Oh my God! My shoes have melted and I'm stuck to the sidewalk!" "Its only 95 degrees, I think I'll wear a sweater to work today."

You will be here during the melted shoes period. Believe me after a couple days you won't even notice the heat. Just drink lots of water and wear sunglasses and light hats when out in the sun. Be sure to enjoy the swimming pool at the hotel and wander around the famous Las Vegas Strip at night when 90+ degrees truly feels very comfortable. We are missing something here in Las Vegas that other people have become used to – humidity. Without humidity the heat is bearable.

Almost everything in Las Vegas is casual so there is no need to over dress. You can attend shows in very casual attire - shorts and jeans. Bring comfortable clothes and shoes made for walking. Don't forget your sunscreen for relaxing by the pool and for sightseeing in the daytime.

The PSWA board works hard to bring you a great conference every year. Las Vegas remains one of the most cost effective travel destinations in the country. You will surely get your money's worth from the conference and Las Vegas.

--Keith Bettinger

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## MEMBER ARTICLES

### "Writing the Convincing Villain" by Melanie Atkins

Villains are characters we all love to hate. They raise our blood pressure and keep us on the edges of our seats. They can also make or break a story. When I hear the word *villain*, I think of *evil*, followed closely by *vicious* and *cunning*, and I immediately picture Hannibal Lector, the king of all villains, and Ralph Fiennes' creepy, convoluted character in *Red Dragon*, a man whose utter brutality puts Jack the Ripper to shame. To me, those two signify the epitome of evil; they are both sick, twisted men with an inherent drive to kill — and in Lector's case, to taste his victims' flesh.

Of course, all villains aren't psychopathic serial killers. Many are mob bosses, drug lords, lunatics, dirty cops, evil co-workers, ghosts, or even demons (in paranormal mysteries or suspense) ...whatever works for each particular story. No matter the nature of the villain, however, his or her character must be just as deep and well-developed as that of the hero and/or heroine.

#### Important points to consider:

- **All characters have a history.** Why does a psychopath kill? Did the mob boss takeover the "family" by force, or did he inherit his position? What single event shaped the villain's life? Does he despise his mother because she locked him out of the house night after night so she could spend time with an endless stream of men? Did he watch his sister die? Or did he find his brother's body after he overdosed on crack cocaine? One must know the answers to these questions and more before starting to write. Making a villain shallow and lifeless or using a caricature in his place can kill a good book.
- **Do your research.** If your villain is a psychopath, make him believable. I highly recommend reading Roy Hazelwood's *Dark Dreams* and *The Evil that Men Do* and *Mind Hunter* by John Douglas. If your villain is a mob boss, learn about the Mafia — but don't impart too much information. You want to make your story real, but dropping in too much detail will slow the pace and bog

down the plot. Keep it simple.

- **Villains may be inherently evil, but they still possess good traits.** The serial killer stocking shelves at the local drug store might love dogs or enjoy watching flowers grow. The mob boss intent on taking over the hero's business may also love opera. Or the drug lord importing cocaine and funneling it into a major city might be doing so in order to allow his wife to travel once they retire. Don't forget to make your villain a complete person...it will deepen them and make their character much more interesting to the reader.
- **Evil characters also have principles.** The best villains draw a line and refuse to cross it. A serial rapist in one of my books attacks women, but also states that he doesn't do children. Another villain feels sorry for his captive and gives her water when she's thirsty. His empathy for her grows even deeper once he learns she's a rape victim like his sister, and he's tempted to let her go. Still another kills to uphold his family's honor and breaks down when forced to shoot his own brother. Villains are people with emotions...just like you and me. Make them real, and reap the benefits.
- **Looks can be deceptive.** Evil often wears a pretty face — think Ted Bundy. The handsome, cheerful boy-next-door who mows lawns for extra money might also be a knife-toting, anger-filled serial rapist who stalks women late at night when the moon is full. Or the assistant chief of police could be using his job as cover while importing heroin into the country to sell to the very people he's sworn to serve and protect. Or the smiling, perky do-gooder in the office down the hall who secretly covets your hero's job might do anything to get it, including falsifying records and setting your hero up as the bad guy. These scenarios are intriguing and make the villains seem real.
- **Even evil men need a goal.** Give your villain something for which to fight, such as a strong desire for notoriety or admiration, a need to right a wrong, either real or perceived, or the urge to gain a feeling of self-worth. He may seem to only be after money, but his need for it must go deep. Give him a good reason to kill, steal, rape, haunt, or stalk.
- **Villains must engage the hero and heroine in a battle of wills.** He must be a worthy opponent who grows more cunning as the book progresses. In order to ratchet up the suspense, one must put good vs. evil in an escalating battle that results in the ultimate climax. A shootout, a fight to the death using hand-to-hand combat, or maybe even a frightening car chase filled with chills, danger, and excitement. You and I both know that good will prevail, but it's important to keep the reader guessing.
- **Romantic suspense requires a happy ending.** Make sure that good prevails and that the villain pays for his crimes — maybe even with his life. Be sure to avoid melodrama and make his demise believable. If he doesn't die, send him to prison or make him suffer in some other awful way. Don't let him simply disappear. You want to give the reader closure. (Unless, of course, you plan to write a sequel and decide to allow your villain to escape, like in *Silence of the Lambs*).

Keeping the above list in mind, write to your strengths and do whatever is necessary to keep the action moving and to make your story believable. If your serial killer has no soft edges, so be it. Not every person can be redeemed. Your story is just that: Your story.

Develop your characters, do your research, and create villains worthy of fighting your heroes and heroines — and you'll have stories people will clamor to read. Remember our friend Hannibal Lector, the villain everyone loves to hate? The man

is pure evil. Yet he makes that book all the more believable because he is so real. He'll never be forgotten, and neither will your villains — if you do your homework before sitting down to write.

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### **“The Truth of Fiction” by Sunny Frazier**

When I worked for the Sheriff's Department in Fresno, I created a saying and put it on a rolling banner as a screen saver: “A Writer Reinvents the Truth.”

This was never more accurate than when I wrote my first book, *FOOLS RUSH IN*. I took the first case I worked as a secretary for an undercover narcotics team and fictionalized it to include a kidnapping, two murders and a budding romance.

I was invited to speak to a book club. What was different about this event was that the detective I wrote about, “Wolfe” in my book, came with me. His mother was hosting the event at her house. She wanted her friends to meet her son just to prove he wasn't the cad I made him out to be in the novel.

The detective surprised me by compiling a photo album of all the characters in my book. Everything I'd written about, from the members of the meth gang to the heroin hype kit that nearly killed my heroine, was there for show-and-tell.

I had jogged his memory of details of the 1991 case. I was amazed by how much of the story I had retained while writing the book and how close my descriptions were of the drug dealer's compound. Seeing the photos brought back those memories.

Fictionalizing true events requires a writer to pick details that will make the story “real” to the reader, but it also means leaving details out. Truth may be stranger than fiction, but it can lose readers. The drug dealer I wrote about believed he was the reincarnation of the god Thor. There was no way that piece of trivia would show up in my novel!

When life gives writers great material, it's important to deliver a novel that is entertaining but also opens up the reader's world. The characters have to come alive, the dialog has to ring true. But, unlike reality, it is the writer's job to elevate the story to more than just a re-telling of events. Fictionalization means bringing in the author's unique and subjective viewpoint, a landscape of words to help readers find truth in their own lives.

I have approached Marilyn M. with the idea of a panel demonstrating this fact-to-fiction process for the next PSWA conference. Michelle has written many articles that would make excellent short stories. Johnny Saunders tale of Delaware cops lobbing rocks at a felon stuck on a rock in a river between jurisdictions begs to be written.

Many of our members have stories. Expanding them to reach a wider market is simple. All it takes is viewing the material through fiction-colored glasses.

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### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE LISTSERVE**

If you're a member of PSWA and not subscribed to the listserve you're missing out. For authors wanting to know the answers to law enforcement, forensic and any other questions, this is the place to ask. For example see the following question and answer below:

**Question:**

Here's something I've been pondering lately...how does a cop develop his intuition...that sixth sense that points him toward solving the crime? You know, that special something that TV dramas always overemphasize...like Monk or Columbo. Sure, it's hyped there..but I am guessing that there is some reality behind that, even if it is a little less glamorous.

So, is it experience? Training? Or a knack that some have and some don't? What alerts you that someone is lying or hiding a weapon? Or you just all of a sudden have to look in the trunk even though it was just a missing seat belt that first caught your attention...

(some people call me the WHY lady....!)

-- Billie Johnson, Publisher  
Oak Tree Press

**Answer:**

I have heard at least one police trainer describe this as the "ethereal sense." It's that unquantifiable notion that something is out of place and merits extra caution or investigation. Another way of describing it is cop jargon: JDLR (Just Don't Look Right)..

I think it's a combination of training and experience talking to you when you don't know it. Betsy Brantner-Smith wrote an article for me a couple of months back called "Women's Intuition." (see [www.lawofficer.com/brantner-smith](http://www.lawofficer.com/brantner-smith) and click on the "view articles" link at the end) She indicated that a woman's sense of danger was an expression of women's better skills at reading body language. Women are more easily victimized by men because of their typically smaller stature, so they instinctively learn to evaluate body language better. You may not know why you are feeling antsy, but you are, and there may be a perfectly good reason for it. It's a basic survival skill.

I think cops learn the same things, but don't always know how to articulate what they are feeling. When you can do that, you become a better cop because you can describe the elements that got your attention, building the necessary reasonable suspicion to stop and detain someone, or probable cause for an arrest. For instance, a man may be walking with a slightly odd gait because he's got a bum knee, or because he's compensating for the unfamiliar weight of a gun in his waistband. You know there's something wrong, but it's difficult to put your finger on exactly what that is.

Think about it: everyone can look at a drunk and tell they're drunk. Now, come up with a list of exactly what you see, hear, smell, feel, etc. that makes you come to that conclusion. It's harder than it seems.

I can tell the difference between my dog barking (from inside the house) at another dog walking down the street and someone approaching my door. I can't describe it, but I know. Those of you with children probably have the same sense about a baby's cry. You know whether the baby is wet, lonely, hungry, or terrified by the cry. They're all going to sound more or less the same to childless me.

To sum up: it's experience and training manifesting themselves non-specifically. Developing the sense is one thing-learning to quantify it is another.

In order to get on the PSWA listserv, if you are a member of PSWA, do the following:

Anyone who wishes to join, can eliminate the middleman (almost) by sending an e-mail to [policewriter-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:policewriter-subscribe@yahoogroups.com), using the e-mail account they want the list to use. The subject line and body of the e-mail are ignored, so you don't have to even enter anything there.

#### STATUS UPDATE FOR COP STORIES USA

The good news is that *Cop Stories USA* is going very well. Submissions have been received from PWSA author (and ex-cop) Victoria Heckman, creator of the exciting *K.O.'d in Hawaii* series, and from John Bellah, a thirty-year plus police veteran and our PWSA expert on all items pertaining to vehicles and fleet management. Well-known police author Laurie Drummond (*Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You*, HarperCollins) and famous author Dr. William July (*Understanding the Tin Man, Confessions of An Ex-Bachelor*) have promised to write pieces for this book from their own law enforcement experience.

I have also found quite a few exciting cop voices with a range of policing experience from the 1950's to now. Some of the stories are from district attorney investigators, FBI agents, deputy sheriffs, arson investigators, and urban patrol cops. Please join their ranks and write a piece for this collection of writing by law enforcement personnel across the U.S.

Please submit your piece by October 1, 2008. It must be fact, not fiction. The experience it reflects should be your own. You can write about an incident in your career, or you can write about a "bigger issue" that you've thought about through the years. For instance, justice, supervision, low-bid equipment, etc.

Email me at [copstoriesusa@gmail.com](mailto:copstoriesusa@gmail.com) for a set of complete submission guidelines. All pieces must be previously unpublished.

--Sarah Cortez

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#### MORE ON PROMOTION

There are so many places to promote on the Net these days and all of them free:

Twitter.com this is a fun one because you just tell what you're doing. Blogger.com is free and you can set up any number of blogs, the trick is to keep changing content. My blog there is: <http://marilynmeredith.blogspot.com/> I try to blog there as often as possible.

Facebook.com and MySpace—these are not just for young people. Goodreads.com is another good spot. Crimespace.com is also okay, but you have to be careful about how you promote. Flickr is great because you only have to put in one sentence about what you are doing.

There are many, many more and the object is to get your name out there.

For my latest Deputy Tempe Crabtree mystery as I said in the last newsletter I'm headed to Crescent City where I'll have the launch at two luncheons in a Victoria Bed and Breakfast and a talk at a library the following day. I'm doing several book fairs and/or craft festivals. And I'm going to speak at two writer's conferences, Oak Tree Press' conference and the Wizard of Words conference. (Member Denny Griffin is scheduled for that one too.) In October I'm headed back to Las Vegas and the Cheesecake and Crime Bookstore and I'll be visiting Russo's Books in Bakersfield in November.

I've got a blog (virtual) tour scheduled and you can be sure I'll be blogging all over the place. Every Tuesday I do a blog for the Stiletto Gang <http://thestilettogang.blogspot.com/> That's an easier way to do a blog. Gather together some like-minded folks, give the blog a name and assign days. You can blog anytime and put down when you want the blog to appear, day and time.

--Marilyn Meredith, <http://fictionforou.com>

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## MEMBER NEWS

### From Melanie Atkins

I'm excited to report the re-release of my romantic suspense e-book novella, **EMILY'S NIGHTMARE**, on Friday, August 15, at Cobblestone Press. Prepare yourself for a roller coaster of emotion!

Blurb: Detective Emily Rawson has always considered fellow detective John Cutter a friend, until she finds herself falling head over heels in love with him. She's managed to keep her distance so far, even taking the huge step of changing squads so she doesn't have to work with him. Then she hears he's following her to her new unit, and they argue. Heat turns to heat, and their passion flames to life—which changes their lives forever. Will their intense attraction for one another keep them together, or break them apart?

Check out Melanie's Blog: <http://melanieatkins.wordpress.com/>

### From Marilyn Meredith

My latest Deputy Tempe Crabtree mystery, **KINDRED SPIRITS**, is now available from <http://www.mundaniapress> and all the usual online bookstores.

Blurb: Trouble in Deputy Crabtree's marriage is soon forgotten when the body of a murder victim is found in the wake of a forest fire. Sent to Crescent City in search of information introduces Tempe to the victim's Tolowa relatives and friends—and two stalkers. Upon her return home, a pig's heart on Tempe's front porch serves as a warning. Detective Morrison becomes an unusual ally, and the victim's spirit visits Tempe in the night. She and husband Hutch set off for Santa Barbara in an effort to flush out the murderer and is successful, but nearly dies at his hand.

Advanced Praise:

"Kindred Spirits by Marilyn Meredith is a fast-paced suspense novel that sheds light on the real life plight of the Tolowa Native American tribe. The novel is both exciting and moving, and it just might make you want to take a trip to Crescent City to meet Abby and Justine for yourself."

--Gayle Trent, author of **Murder Takes the Cake**

"Meredith gives the reader yet another great Tempe book filled with suspense, a glimpse into the lives of Native Americans, and a heartwarming love story between Tempe and Hutch."--Lorie Ham, author of the gospel music mystery series [www.LorieHam.com](http://www.LorieHam.com)

"Want to do some fun reading? If so pick up Marilyn Meredith's Tempe Crabtree series. I have read each novel and enjoyed every one of them. Marilyn has made her characters so different than those we are to reading about. Another great thing is there is no specific order you have to read them in. Each one is a separate story that doesn't depend on a previous Tempe Crabtree adventure. They are also a fast read. Marilyn's stories flow and you don't want to put the book down. I can't

wait for the next one to go on sale.”

--Keith Bettinger, Author of: ***Fighting Crime With "Some Day" and Lenny, or What Happens When Car 54 Where Are You Meets Dragnet***

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

**The End**

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