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President's Message:

Random Acts of Kindness (Writers' Division)

It's year-end, a time when people think about last-minute tax strategies, a potential election, and holidays—Winter Solstice, Christmas, Hannukah. In the spirit of the holidays, I offer a starter list of things we can do to be kind to writers (including ourselves).

1. Buy books!
2. Join the library. Sign up for an Alberta Library Card at your home library so you can take advantage of other libraries.
3. Borrow books. CPL purchases additional copies of popular titles. In addition, the Public Lending Right Commission takes library holdings into account when calculating the compensation paid to Canadian authors.
4. Suggest a title for library acquisition.
5. Go to book launches and readings whenever you can, even if you don't plan to buy the book.
6. Tell your friends about books you love, and then go one step further and tell the world. The new traditional way to do this is by way of a reader review on Amazon. As a book-buyer, I appreciate any review that is honest and civil.
7. Join an on-line community such as DorothyL (www.dorothy.com). I've discovered new authors, thanks to the recommendations of DL-ers.
8. Mention the benefits of registering with Access Copyright to writers who may be eligible to join, just in case they haven't heard about it. (Annual deadline: Dec. 31.) (www.accesscopyright.ca)
9. Be kind to yourself. Invest your talent, energy, time, and resources in your writing career, even if you haven't been published yet—indeed, *especially* if you haven't been published yet.

What else should we do to be kind to writers? Send suggestions to me for the next newsletter!

Anne Jayne

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September Program Review:**John Graden – Calgary Crime Reporter**

If you invented a police reporter for your next novel, you might make him a senior journalist, respected in his profession, with both editorial experience and “street cred”. He could start out at 17 years old as a cub reporter on the streets of a big city. You could give him strong family ties, deep-seated principles and an unshakeable belief that his job is an important one, never to be taken lightly. In short, you could model your character after John Graden.

Graden, who retired from The Calgary Herald just days after his presentation to MWI, began his career in Scotland. Through the years he covered divorces and politics, local law enforcement and big-time unions, racism and gangs, murders and train wrecks. The tales he shared with us are the stuff of legend as he honed his craft and became every bit the hard-working, hard-playing reporter we love to see characterized in books.

Asked to speak on the topic of *Being a Police Reporter*, Graden discussed the attributes and skills necessary to work in his profession. He said *cop reporters* have to be flexible but tough, compassionate and ethical. They must cultivate the local police contacts needed to do the job, but avoid becoming bosom buddies for the sake of objectivity. He noted that this is a fine line to walk: many cops have an innate distrust of reporters and vice versa. Reporters who don't deal with law enforcement often think every police force is corrupt and should be pursued for the dirt, but this is rare in Graden's experience. Some cops love the media and enjoy seeing their names in print; some reporters like and respect cops, but will go after them if necessary. In the end, said Graden, if a reporter is fair, the cops will come to like and respect them enough to cooperate. In turn, reporters and editors will hold stories at police request if given a good reason such as risk to a witness or an investigation.

Although police scanners are always on, good police reporters get tips from cops and eye witnesses. If they arrive on the scene early enough, reporters will take the opportunity to question onlookers and the initial responder (first police officer on the scene). Graden

believes a cop reporter should examine the scene objectively: where is the “wolf pack” – the bulk of the media? By stepping out of the pack and drifting away (mentally and/or physically), a good reporter may find a different perspective that others miss.

Of course, the hallmark of a fictional sleuth is the snoop factor, a quality cop reporters also possess. According to Graden, when reporters go investigating and knocking on doors cops get nervous, fearing that the reporter will find people they haven't found themselves or people they don't want found. If a witness tells a reporter something he/she hasn't told the police, the reporter might print this new information in consultation with his/her editor – it's a judgment call – but cops don't like to be embarrassed and that's something to keep in mind. On the other hand, no reporter wants to be scooped by the competition. If a cop wants something kept under wraps, the reporter might insist that the cop advise them of any contact made by the competition regarding the same story.

For me, Graden's most intriguing anecdote was of the disappearance of a mentally challenged young man. Both Graden and the police worked every lead they could find on the case, but eventually it went cold. Nothing new came to light until the day he received a tip from a psychic about the location of the young man's body. Graden went out to the site but came up empty. Realizing he probably shouldn't be out there without notifying the police, he called one of a very few close cop friends and they went back out together for another look. The two men examined the location as well as they could without results. Coincidentally, other sketchy leads indicated the same site as the body's resting place, but nothing was ever found. The case still gnaws at Graden.

As with all good speakers, Graden generated a lot of interest from our group. His passion for his work was infectious, his talent for story telling obvious. Will he truly retire? I think it's a safe bet that *retirement* will be a euphemism for *career change*. In fact, I wouldn't be a bit surprised to one day read the vastly entertaining novels of former cop reporter John Graden.

- Anne Rothery

October Program Review:

Marie Jakober – Creating Compelling Characters

This evening's guest was Marie Jakober, a local writer invited to speak about character development.

Marie said that one common pitfall is making our protagonists all-virtuous heroes and our villains stereotypically vicious, nefarious blackguards. As we all know, true human characters have some yin and some yang – seldom in balance, and never really static as people age and grow and learn (and forget, forgive and revise their take on the world around them). She cited an example of “courage” as usually being a positive trait, but that from a slightly different perspective the same actions would be considered “reckless”. The moral dimensions of a character are not determined by personality traits as such, but by his or her actions. A charming, personable man who provides a beautiful, safe home for his wife and family may very well earn his comfortable living as a political assassin. A hero may be cast as gutsy, clever and confident, yet he is still allowed to make several wrong choices along the way that place himself and others in danger – and these detours from the straight and narrow are integral to the development of the actual story.

She finds that, for her, several basic questions help breathe life into the cast of characters in a piece. Time and place are crucial in picking appropriate names for people; you just can't have a Brandi in mid-17th century anywhere. Telephone books, baby name books, and genealogy records are all great sources for character names. The social background of the character needs to be decided – affecting what he wants (and why), what actions he is willing to take (and why), and what will be gained (or risk being lost). For a historical novel, Marie researches the period, its music and literary works, architecture and politics. Dialogue and culture are important in making the characters believable, but can be so easily overdone or messed up; again, that Brandi better not be having trouble with a broken zipper or inclined to talk with a Bronx accent. The richer the background tapestry is woven, the more defined each detail will show. An underlying theme in all her works is power – who has it and how they got it, how it is used and abused, how

it changes people, and how it affects daily life and history in a person, a country, a world. She believes her books are plot driven essentially, but the characters affect how the story plays out – and if they don't, something isn't working. It is necessary for her to get a good handle on at least her main characters before the story can proceed.

A final word – write about what you know, or what you have learned from reliable resources. You can't truly carry off a story about trouble in an orphanage in South Africa if you have no knowledge of any orphanages or anything South African – and why would you want to?

- Pat McAlister

New York literary agent Donald Maass will present his acclaimed one-day workshop

Writing the Breakout Novel

January 21, 2006 at the Fairmont Palliser Hotel in Calgary Lunch is included.

Learn to:

- Write with new depth and passion.
- Build strong plot layers.
- Create inner conflict and tension.
- Strengthen voice and point of view.
- Find and strengthen your theme.

Registration is \$199

Register online at albertaromancewriters.com
Online registration closes January 18, 2006

As well, payment may be mailed to:

Alberta Romance Writers' Association
223 – 12th Avenue SW,
Calgary AB T2R 0G9
Mail-in payments must be received before
Jan 16, 2006.

For more informationp visit the ARWA website at albertaromancewriters.com

November Program Review:**Diana Scott – Three Act Plot Structure**

At November's meeting, Diana Scott showed us how to use Michael Hauge's Three Act Movie Structure to plot and pace a novel. Using the Old Y's TV, she presented examples of the Plot Points from movies.

A good story has many ingredients. Two of them are dynamic characterization and believable conflict. If you have those two, structure can assist you in writing a good story.

First of all, think of plot and subplot. Plot is the sequence of events that lead the hero to his objective. Plot answers the question: What does my character Want? This is a tangible, measurable thing. e.g. to find the killer. Subplot answers the question: What does my character Need? This is more emotional. e.g. love or self-worth.

Think of your story as being divided into Three Acts, with Act 1 taking the first 25%, Act 2 taking the next 50%, and Act 3 taking the last 25%. The turning points (and there are 2 of them) fall between the acts. A turning point spins the story in a new direction.

You need to know these five things for both your Plot and your Subplot:

- the end
- the beginning
- the first turning point at 25%
- the mid point at 50%
- the second turning point at 75%

Ideally the points for the Main and the Subplot happen together. Now let's take a closer look at the Acts:

Act 1**1. Set up**

This is who the hero was yesterday. We see the hero's normal life before everything changes. In *Pretty Woman*, Edward is at the party; Vivian is in her apartment and on the street. The Set up takes the first 10% but only in a movie because a movie audience takes longer to get into a story. In a book, the setup is more interspersed. A book starts when something changes. So, for a book, begin with change happening.

2. New Opportunity

In a movie this happens about 10%. A book starts here. This new opportunity usually involves a choice, but not always. For *Pretty Woman*, 10% is where they meet and she *chooses* to show him the hotel. But in *Ghost*, this is where Sam dies; obviously not a choice.

3. Beginning the Journey

The next 10% - 25% of your story establishes who the characters are. In *Ghost*, Sam learns what it's like to be dead.

4. Turning Point #1 - Change of Plans - 25%

We are at the end of Act 1. Desire changes from general to specific. There is commitment or choice by the character. Edward decides he needs a companion for the week; Vivian chooses and says yes. Sam follows Willy home and learns that his murder was not random; Sam chooses to find out why. Now he has a specific goal. In *Thelma & Louise*, Louise decides to go to Mexico and gives Thelma the choice. Thelma chooses to go with her. The character's choice dictates what will happen in Act 2.

Act 2

5. Progress The hero seems to make progress towards the goal. Vivian learns how to be a lady. Sam meets the subway ghost and learns skills. *Thelma & Louise* are heading to Mexico.

6. Mid Point - the Point of No Return - 50%

The hero's life as he knew it is over. He has changed, and can never go back to what he was at the beginning of the story. He has not become who he will be by the end of the story, but he has started to move emotionally in that direction.

Dante's Peak has the perfect intersection of Plot and the Subplot mid points. The hero and heroine have gone on a date, are sharing their first kiss (their first sign of commitment) and they are interrupted by the child asking for a glass of water. The water has sulfur in it: a sure sign that the volcano will blow. They have made their first commitment to the relationship, and the volcano is committed to blowing.

In *Sixth Sense*, the Mid Point is where Malcolm opens up to Cole. And then Cole tells Malcolm his secret - I see dead people. At this point, Malcolm is not totally sure what's wrong, but he thinks he can help.

7. Complications and Higher Stakes

Things start to go wrong in this second half of Act 2. In Ghost, Sam discovers it's his best friend. In Sixth Sense, we get to see the ghosts that Cole sees. We understand what is at stake. Malcolm sees his wife getting closer to another man. Now the hero is being thwarted. He is no longer making progress.

8. Turning Point # 2 - the Major Setback - Black Moment - 75%

This is when what the hero thought he had going for him is gone. In Sixth Sense, Cole has previously been safe from the ghosts inside his tent. But now even his tent is not safe as one of the ghosts comes into the tent. Cole must now face his demons.

Act 3

9. The Final Push

This is "do or die". The hero should finish the film exhausted. Edward and Vivian have broken up. In Witness, the cops arrive to kill him. Thelma & Louise are in the chase.

10. The Climax - 90 - 99%

This is the peak emotional moment of the story. The hero wins or loses. In Pretty Woman, Edward climbs the ladder. Thelma & Louise drive over the cliff.

11. The Denouement

This is a chance to show the hero's new life. In a book, it could be an epilogue. Not all films or books have the Denouement. (e.g. Thelma & Louise) But it can tie off loose ends and show a new life. In Ghost, Sam & Molly get to see each other one last time.

The Three Act Plot Structure shows the story events needed and their relationship to one another. The right thing must happen at the right time to elicit emotion. And this is one way to tell a good story.

For more information on Three Act Structure, check out Michael Hauge's website www.screenplaymastery.com

- **Suzanne Stengl**

Confessions of a First-Draft Dodger

After leafing through numerous books about authorship, I discovered the same advice repeated over and over again: write your draft, don't stop, no editing on the way. And though at first I dithered around 'rewriting' the beginning hundred pages of my first novel, after a year I finally listened to the suggestion. One month later, I completed another three-hundred pages and finally typed the words 'the end'.

But I should have typed 'the beginning'.

For although many authors insist a first draft is the foundation to a story, I would disagree. Unlike cement, which cannot be changed once set, a first draft will insist on being altered, molded, perhaps even redesigned completely. Characters you hired as walk-ons demand more stage time. Scenes that rippled with tension, suddenly lie down and die. The voice you started with changes pitch, or even gender, or if you're writing science fiction, possibly even species.

Unfortunately, no amount of rewriting that first hundred pages prevented me from experiencing the inevitable. If you're working on your first novel, save yourself a whole heck of a lot of time. Write your draft, don't stop, no editing on the way.

- **Fiona Pinnell**

Newsletter Notice of Change

Mystery Press is switching to electronic format

After this issue, you must have paid the \$5 mailing supplement on your membership in order to have a paper newsletter mailed to you. See or contact Margaret, the treasurer, or Anne, the president, to take advantage of this opportunity.

If you want a paper copy but don't want to pay the mailing fee, see the editor, Jayne, to request a copy for pickup at a meeting.

MWI Board News:

Ink's Board of Directors meets four times a year. Between meetings, we stay in touch by other means, especially email.

The board has a continuing interest in all of our major activities, including the program, the newsletter, and the website. This year, we reached a milestone when we offered our first workshop. Our Program Chair, Sandra Ruttan Einarson, organized the workshop, beginning with an invitation to Kevin Ripa of J.S. Kramer and Associates to speak about private investigation. We reached another milestone with the website. Our Webmaster, Catherine Saykaly-Stevens, moved the website to a paid host. This offers a number of benefits, including the potential to add new features, easier maintenance, and the removal of the ads.

The board is presently reviewing all of the job descriptions for officers and committee chairs. We want the descriptions to include all the tasks that volunteers are presently doing on Ink's behalf. We also want to be sure that the volunteer positions are fairly balanced, so that none of the jobs is too onerous.

At the beginning of the year, we began to review membership benefits. We realized that one important volunteer position, the Membership Chair, was devoted primarily to the reading of the 45-page submissions of prospective full members. As a board, we concluded that it would be better if the Membership Chair spent more time on improving the membership experience for all members, rather than on receiving, reading, and returning (without comment) the submissions from new members. Thus, the board has asked the members to remove the 45-page rule from the by-laws. The members will consider this question at a General Meeting at 7 p.m. on Thursday, January 12.

- Anne Jayne

Elmore Leonard's mystery-writing rule #10:

"Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip."

www.mysteryinkonline.com/2004/11/10_rules_for_wr.html

Malice Domestic:

St. Martin's Press offers first-time novelists a chance to publish with a large house that otherwise only accepts agented submissions

To enter the Malice Domestic Contest for the Best First Traditional Mystery Novel, you send St. Martin's a self-addressed stamped envelope, and approximately one month later you'll receive an application form with the name and address of a volunteer reader. Unlike most writing competitions, you send your magnum opus directly to a private citizen with no official connection to the publisher.

In the first round, St. Martin's does not keep track of submissions. Therefore, once you pop your novel in the mail, you have no way of knowing what happens to your magnum opus until your judge contacts you, usually by January, to tell you if you've made the long list. Unfortunately, because the opening stage is manned solely by volunteers, some of whom are too busy to return self-addressed reply cards, you may never hear if your manuscript was even entered.

That said, the prize for the winner is substantial: a \$10,000 advance, and enough publicity to ignite the careers of previous unknown authors such as Donna Andrews and Julia Spencer-Fleming. For more information:

www.minotaurbooks.com/minotaur/malice.html

- Fiona Pinnell

National Crime Writing Week - June 1 to 8, 2006

CWC members and interested parties: what would you like to do in your community for NCWW? It can be as simple as working with a library or two and/or bookstore to set up a display of our members' books. Or you might want to get fancier and set up a group reading/signing. Or fancier yet with a read-a-thon or mystery night. Send us your proposal with the approximate cost involved and we can all start planning.

Cheryl, Crime Writers of Canada [info@crimewriterscanada.com]

Crime-Buster! Kevin Ripa, PI

Mystery Writers Ink's first full-day workshop, on October 29, 2005, was sold out. Our speaker, Kevin Ripa, owns a private detective agency as well as a computer security firm, and is past president of the Alberta Association of Private Investigators.

Kevin was an engaging speaker, a fount of information and anecdote about the daily round of a PI and about the riskier jobs his agency has taken on, such as abduction recovery. The morning was dedicated to getting that all-important private investigator's license and doing surveillance work. Informal surveying of the attendees at lunchtime highlighted several items that had sparked interest or creative surges.

One surprise was how easy it is to get licensed in Alberta: \$50/year for a private license and \$500/year for an agency license. While there are private investigator courses offered at Mount Royal College in Calgary, they are not a pre-requisite for getting either a license or a job. We learned that a lot of PI's really do live in their overdraft, just like many fictional sleuths. It is vital, however, that a real PI not take the smart-talking sleuth as their model when dealing with the police; PI's are only as successful as their ability to maintain networks of friendly informants, both in and out of the police service.

PI's are often constrained by laws more than protected by them. If the subject figures out they're being followed, they may report you to the police as a stalker. You may not enter private property uninvited, although you may take photos or video as long as you stay on public property or on property that you have the owner's permission to use. You may not seek information by claiming to act for the police or any licensing agency (even plumbers!). You must give your true name in Alberta, no aliases allowed, but you don't have to give your full name. "I'm Mr. Smith," is acceptable, or "Hi, this is Ted." If the person answers your questions without asking for further information, that's their problem.

A PI's most valuable asset is the ability to make people feel comfortable enough to talk freely, so they let information fall without being specifically asked. Listen carefully for potentially useful snippets. Where a subject's mother lives, or their last known employer, could lead to someone who knows where the subject is

now. A second valuable trait is the ability to blend in when doing surveillance. Act like you have every right to be wherever you are, and most likely nobody will question you. Bring a jacket, hat, and spare sunglasses on surveillance, as they can all change your appearance fast. Don't wear bright Hawaiian shirts like Magnum PI, and don't drive a bright red sports car when tailing a subject. Know where the phones and public washrooms are when you're staking out a location. Be prepared to sit in your car for hours or even days.

Familiarity with technology is a must. Not only can basic Internet research save hours or days in tracking someone down, but cameras, audio and video recorders are practically standard equipment. One useful trick when on surveillance is to take a video or digital photo of the area every fifteen minutes whether anything is happening or not. The time-date stamp on the camera is proof not only when the subject does something, but also evidence for the client that you really were sitting there all the time you're billing them for. If you want to operate a spy cam small enough to fit into a take-out coffee cup, practice a lot first, so you can aim the camera at the right place without any visual feedback.

If the morning session was in territory almost as familiar as your local Safeway store, the afternoon was much farther afield. Kevin discussed the costs and pitfalls of child custody retrieval and executive abduction recovery in Europe and Asia. Those stories were amazing, and inspiring, but alas too long to be included here. Watch the March 2006 issue of Mystery Press for 'How to retrieve a kidnapped child from his mother in Switzerland.'

- Jayne Barnard

"Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all."

Anonymous, courtesy of Fiona Pinnell

And, Last and Best: The GOOD NEWS!

[right where you'll see it every time you check the schedule]

Lorna Schultz Nicholson's third Young Adult hockey novel, *Delaying the Game*, is in print! It's available through the publisher, James Lorimer & Company (www.lorimer.ca), at Amazon.ca, and at selected bookstores across Canada.

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**Postcard Perps are BACK!!!** Yes, the popular short-short story contest is happening again (right after the holidays). Here's this year's theme, courtesy of last year's winner, Susan Calder Arnold:

*Your tour boat docks on Jekyll Island, off the balmy coast of Georgia. Everyone hops out. The guide gives you an hour to snorkel, swim or explore the uninhabited island. While the others flop on the beach, you head for the lush, tropical growth and lose yourself in crimson poinsettias, coconut palms and hundred year old oaks dripping with Spanish Moss. Monkeys screech, parrots chatter and birds sing in the sultry air. Too soon it is time to turn back. You circle, wondering which way to go, and spot someone from your boat. You hurry toward him and stop. On the trail, lies a body oozing blood.*

Watch the MWI website after January 1, 2006 for details on length, how to submit, and (in March) where to cast your vote for the best solution to Susan's vacation nightmare.

**Meeting Schedule:****Second Thursdays, Old Y**

**7:00 to 9:00 p.m.** (except where noted)

**Thursday January 12:** How to get published in the crime fiction world: a report on Harrogate Crime Festival and Bloody Words. What do leading agents and publishers say about the latest trends in the publishing industry? What advice do they have for aspiring authors trying to get their work into print? Plus other important information about the latest in the crime fiction world.

**Thursday February 9:** For sale. Every month hundreds of books are added to purchasing catalogues that retail outlets order from. Some become bestsellers and some fade into oblivion. How do books make it from the presses to the shelves? Independent bookstore owner Michael Hare talks about how books are selected and what you can do to improve your odds of publishing success.

**Thursday March 9:** "Networking for Authors: Survival Tips for Professional Socializing." Helping writers utilize opportunities to develop relationships that will positively impact their writing careers. Brenda Collins has 20 years experience in senior management and now works as a management consultant.

## Mystery Writers Ink Society

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**Mission Statement:** *Mystery Writers Ink shall support writers of mystery fiction by providing networking opportunities and by educating and informing writers about writing techniques, publishing, and marketing.*