

Sections
[Journal Home](#)
[Business/Real Estate](#)
[Sports](#)
[Journal & Topics](#)
[Des Plaines](#)
[Elk Grove](#)
[Glenview](#)
[Mt. Prospect](#)
[Niles](#)
[Park Ridge](#)
[Prospect Hts.](#)
[Rosemont](#)
[Travel](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Write Speak Out!](#)
[Read Speak Out!](#)
[Calendar \(NorthStarNet\)](#)
[E-Mail the Journal](#)

Local News

THE JOURNAL & TOPICS NEWSPAPERS | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2007

Mystery Conference Inspires, Informs, Entertains

By DENISE FLEISCHER

Lifestyle Editor

It was freezing outside, but mysteries were the hot topic of the 9th annual Love is Murder conference, held Feb. 2-4 at the Wyndham O'Hare in Rosemont.

There is nothing more inspirational then inviting today's best-selling mystery authors and placing them in discussion panels with an audience filled with beginning and established authors, agents, publishers, librarians and editors.

After entering the long, narrow gold striped registration area with its elegant green carpet, hundreds of attendees gathered for hugs and handshakes, bagels and sweet rolls and circled their daily program for panels they would be attending throughout the day. On Saturday's lineup, panel discussions focused on: the paranormal, graphic novels, romantic suspense, fiction, cozies, PI's, first time authors, writing violence, the history of mysteries, reviewers, anthologies, blogs and websites, weapons and more. For nearly an hour you could sit in a conference room and learn from those who "have been there" and "done that."

According to Liz Hanley, the event's coordinator, Love is Murder is the sole brainchild of Evelyn Hopkins, who was the head of Continuing Education at Harper College. When Hopkins became the Dean of Continuing Ed at the College of DuPage she asked if she could take the conference to the new college. Hanley had met Hopkins at Harper when she was teaching for-credit English and working in the Access and Disability Services Department. When Hopkins transferred to DuPage, Hanley applied and was hired to be the coordinator of the Continuing Ed writing program.

"Thus I became the coordinator for Love is Murder (LIM). My first LIM as coordinator was in 2002. It was pretty terrible. I knew nothing about running a conference. I had been teaching English for 10 years. I didn't put signing times on the program. Can you imagine?" said Hanley. "But I guess the people who felt that the Chicago area needed a conference, like Mary Welk and Barb D'Amato and many others, were very forgiving, and very helpful too. I received so much good advice and help that I can't begin to thank them all enough. I also had institutional help and the complete support of the Dean and founder of Love is Murder, Evelyn Hopkins, which was a huge advantage."

It turned out that Love is Murder wasn't a good fit for the College of DuPage either. Hanley felt the problem, which could be equally true at both colleges, was they didn't understand the literary value of a writer's and reader's conference in their missions and that they had little vision about how it could well have lent amazing legitimacy and gravitas to their programs and schools. Also, you have to go through 20 channels to get anything approved and they are very conservative.

When Love is Murder separated from the College of DuPage, the organizers had to start from the drawing board, but the conference started making money. It also received the support of very persuasive and enthusiastic authors who agreed to be on the newly formed board: authors Robert Walker and Joe Konrath.

"That first year, in addition to Walter Mosley, we also had David Morrell, Warren B. Murphy, F. Paul Wilson, William Kent Krueger, it was also Barry Eisler's first conference," stated Hanley.

Joining the LIM board were Silvia Foti, Ophelia Julien, Luisa Buehler, Karen Burgess, Ann Chernow, Ted Hertel, Julie Hyzy, Todd and Terry Stone, Robert Walker and Mary Welk. All play a vital role in the smooth handling of the informative event.

According to Sylvia Foti, organizing the event involves a lot of contacts with the big names and everyone else.

"For the most part Hanley Kanar and Julie Hyzy did the scheduling of the panel topics this year. Although we have board meetings throughout the year and brainstorm topic ideas, then they run with them," said Foti, author of *The Diva's Fool*. "Every year we've included every author who asked to be included. This is the first year we had to cut off authors by Dec. 1 because there was a great demand of authors to get on panels."

Speaking of panels, the conference rooms being in the same hallway was a major plus. Mary Welk served as moderator for the "Mystery of Romantic Suspense" panel. I had to attend this one because this is the third book I'm writing. In the small, but cozy room, seated at the front table were Kelle Z. Riley, Nancy Pickard, Tasha Alexander, Morgan Mandel and Laura Caldwell. Linda Palmer was unable to attend because her brother was ill. The discussion centered on the difference between love and romance, mores during the Victorian era, actual news stories becoming subjects of romantic suspense books, using outlines, tension and pacing and pushing the envelope. What was interesting was the fact that Laura Caldwell specialized in medical malpractice defense before writing chick lit and mystery and suspense.

The "Cozy Does It" panel included Linda Mickey, Sandy Balzo, Gail Lukasik, Jeanne Dams, Mary Wilk and Julie Hyzy. This panel's moderator was Luisa Buehler, whose recent title is "The Scout Master: A Prepared Death, the fourth book in the Grace Marsden series.

The discussion began with the definition of a cozy and it was determined that there is minimal violence and graphic description. Social issues covered can delve into spousal abuse, elder abuse, priests, addictions, religious extremists, immigrant problems, anything you hear about on the news today.

"I think of a cozy as a sub genre, where justice triumphs at the end," stated Sandy Balzo, author of "Uncommon Grounds." Balzo is a Milwaukee native, and in her former life, was assistant vice president at Firststar Bank. "That readers are taken to a frightening place by a hand that must make it safe in the end."

Jeanne M. Dams, author of the Dorothy Martin and Hilda Johansson mysteries, feels that an essential element in a cozy are the characters' attitude about life. She stated that in a cozy a world view is essentially optimistic.

"Characters are embroiled in a terrible situation, but life is pretty good," said Dams, who is known for her colorful, elegant hats. She stated that she didn't start writing until she was over 40. "Some people take a while to figure out what they want to do when they grow up, and I had no training in writing, just a certain natural facility and love of the mystery. My first book was published in 1995, just before my 54th birthday. It won the Agatha Award for best first mystery."

Balzo commented about evil hiding in familiar places. Wilk, whose latest book is "The Scarecrow Murders," added that you simply don't know who you're living next door to. What's interesting about a cozy, said Balzo, is that average people, like us, can solve crimes. But it's done in a contained environment, threw in Wilk.

"Brains over brawn. Great for escapism," claimed Mickey, author of Horse Power, the third in the Kyle Shannon mystery series.

"Through the characters, we find something in our selves," stated Hyzy, who began writing science fiction before moving into mystery novels.

In the "Are Readers Entitled to Sex" panel, author Tony Perona led Ann Macela, Camille Hyytinen, Rosemarie Piemonte and Darren Callahan in an interesting discussion.

"Coming from a romance writer's end of it," began Macela, author of "The Oldest Kind of Magic, "It has to advance the plot and my characters have to have sex for a reason."

Camille Hyytinen, who wrote "Pattern of Violence," a hard-core crime thriller and it's sequel "Pattern of Vengeance" believes that including sex in the plot depends on the book. "Writing it can be awkward. It has to sound interesting, real and sexy and adhere to the language. Often I catch heat from my grandma who is 90 years old. She always says, "Why does everyone have to have sex in books!"

Darren Callahan, who has written drama for the BBC, The Sci Fi Channel and New York City's Radio Pacifica, brought up the issue of making his own characters to be like real people. He includes variations of body types and ethnicity. It makes fiction real. Callahan's forthcoming novel is "City of Human Remains."

Rosemarie Piemonte who has earned a A.A. in Criminal Justice, is the author of "Falling Roses." She is also a Fire Dept. secretary in the western suburbs. Piemonte spoke of numerous ways of adding excitement to love making. She blushed quite a few times about the techniques, stating that it was easier to write.

Lunch in the ballroom allowed the attendees to relax before returning to the panels. A tempting high tea in the registration area was a wonderful treat. Selecting pastries and tea sandwiches was as difficult as writing your next chapter.

Afterward, one of the four panels offered focused on anthologies and included Joe Konrath, Libby Hellmann, Barb D'Amato and Julie Hyzy. Julia Buckley was the moderator. Julie is the author of "The Dark Backward." A few things learned here were that many anthologies are by invitation only, themed and a great way to market your writing

and get new readers. Joe Konrath's anthology project on hit men, which he edited, was a must to look into.

It was in this panel, as well as Blogs, Websites and Fan Communication, that Barbara D'Amato, an award winning and highly respected author of the Cat Marsala mysteries, spoke. D'Amato's recent title is "Death of a Thousand Cuts." She is past president of Mystery Writers of America and Sisters in Crime. She has won the Agatha, Anthony, Macavity, Carl Sandburg and Mary Higgins Clark awards. She was also seated at the dinner table with Piemonte and I, Jeanne Dams, Thomas J. Keever, AuthorIsland.com's owner, a beginning writer, her mother and a website correspondent and her mom. We'll all be smiling for a week.

Other highlights of the conference were Charlaine Harris, author of the popular Sookie Stackhouse series in the Diagnosis Paranormal panel; Anne Perry's Master Class; purchasing books from Brainsnacks in the vending room; the presentation of the Readers' Choice awards; Todd Stone's Novelist's Boot Camp; demonstrations from a graphologist and a polygraph specialist, dinner in the ballroom and James Bond author, Raymond Benson, playing piano after dessert was served.

Oh, and did anyone notice the body on the floor in the vending room. Who is the guilty party?

[Back to top](#)