Eight years ago, I had the honor of addressing the Florida chapter of MWA. That talk began: I come to you today from the middle. The exact middle of this tour, the hump day in a 13-day trip ... I come to you from Baltimore, which is in the middle of the Mid-Atlantic states. I come to you from what is, I hope the middle of my career and, okay, sure the middle of my life. I also come to you from a middle course in mystery writing, one in which I’ve been able to balance writing a series and a set of alternating stand-alones. And, finally, I come to you from the midlist.

I went on to define what midlist really was — the term was not always used correctly — but concluded that, in a culture where we were always making things sound bigger, better, cooler than they are, I was no longer going to be called midlist. Like a Starbucks medium drink — I was a grande. We were all grandes!

A lot has changed in eight years. Technically, I am no longer a midlist writer. Every book I’ve written since 2006 has, in one format or another — hardcover, mass market paperback, digital, trade paperback — made some variation of the New York Times list, although it’s often been the so-called extended list which goes up to 25 titles. (My most recent book debuted at #18 on the Times hardcover list, and is #18 a week later, and I have never been higher than #10.) Arguably, I’m just a different kind of midlister.

As much as my life has changed, it is more overwhelming to consider how much publishing has changed in those eight years. In 2006, very few people self-published and there were almost no hybrids — people who were self-publishing, but also doing books with so-called traditional presses. (I use the term “traditional publishing” with great reluctance. I don’t think the modification is required.) The so-called Big Six publishers are now the Big Five. Thirty-two percent of Americans over 16 own an e-reader, according to a Pew Research Report. There are self-made millionaires among the self-published. In 2013, E.L. James, who started out writing fan-fic on the Internet, was #1 on Forbes list of the 15 wealthiest fiction writers.

In this atmosphere, at this conference, it is worthwhile to wonder — what does being a professional writer mean? Who is a professional? And what’s with all the vitriol between the extreme elements of the two camps? When the founder of Smashwords can say, without qualification, that traditional publishing is now increasingly stigmatized — man, we have gone through the looking glass and down the rabbit hole.

I pay close attention to these discussions because I am a former journalist and while I was happy to leave the newspaper world behind me in 2001, the year I became a fulltime novelist, I never saw what was coming for my former industry. I don’t want to be caught off-guard again, but I cannot suss out the future of publishing. And part of the problem is that the dialogue has gotten a little, um, histrionic.

What can we say with absolute certainty about self-publishing versus traditional publishing? I’ve yet to see any reliable data on earnings. From either side. I saw someone online say they knew several self-published writers who were making six figures a month. That sounds suspect to me because relatively few people, in the United States,
2014 Al Blanchard Award Contest
Now Open, Deadline April 30

Submissions for this short crime fiction contest, established by the New England Crime Bake Committee in memory of Al Blanchard, co-chair of the first three New England Crime Bake Conferences, NEMWA President, and member of Sisters in Crime, are currently being accepted.

The prize includes: $100 cash award, publication in Level Best Books’ twelfth anthology of short crime fiction, free admission to the Crime Bake Conference, and a handsome plaque. In addition to the winner, four honorable mentions are chosen.

The award is presented at the New England Crime Bake Conference in November, but the winner is not required to attend.

The story must be a crime story by a New England author or with a New England setting for non-NE authors, previously unpublished (in print or electronically, including author websites), no more than 5,000 words in length, and may include the following genres: mystery, thriller, suspense, caper, and horror (with no torture/killing of animals or children.) For details on how to submit, visit www.crimebake.org/Al.htm

New England authors may submit the same story or stories (max. of two) to both the contest and Level Best Books; for their guidelines, visit www.levelbestbooks.com. The judges will consider stories that have been previously submitted, provided we have only seen them once before.

There is no entry fee, and the deadline is midnight, April 30, 2014.

Good luck!
Leslie Wheeler, Chair, Al Blanchard Award Committee

You should have received several mailings about this year's Edgar® Week Festivities. Please contact us if you have not.
Mystery Writers of America presents

2014 Grand Master Interview

Wednesday, April 30, 2014 - 5:00 to 6:00 pm
Grand Hyatt New York
Broadway Room – Conference Level
East 42nd Street at Grand Central Station

Please join us as we celebrate Robert Crais and Carolyn Hart – our 2014 Grand Masters.

In 1976, after years of amateur film-making and short story writing, Robert Crais moved to Hollywood and found work as a screenwriter, crafting scripts for such major TV shows as Hill Street Blues, Cagney & Lacey, and Miami Vice. In the mid-1980s he left television and began writing novels full-time. Upon the death of his father in 1985, he was inspired to create his main character Elvis Cole using elements of his own life as the basis of the story. It resulted in his breakout novel, The Monkey’s Raincoat, which was nominated for Best First Novel Edgar Award. Eleven books followed in the Elvis Cole series. Joe Pike, Elvis’ partner, and Carol Starkey, an LAPD bomb expert, are recurring characters and also have their own books. Crais is known for his thought provoking plots and his ability to weave present day issues and social commentary into his mysteries. He has been nominated for every major award in the mystery field.

Carolyn Hart is a native of Oklahoma City, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Oklahoma, and began her writing career at her local newspaper. In 1964 Hart won a contest looking for a mystery novel that would appeal to teen girls which resulted in her first published book. She wrote a number of young adult books over the next seven years. In 1972, she turned to writing for an adult audience and has published fifty novels, a remarkable achievement for any author. Hart’s series Death on Demand contains twenty-three novels, including: Southern Ghost, Death Walked In and Dead Days of Summer. She writes two other series (the Henrie O mysteries and the Bailey Ruth Raeburn series), and has published a total of eleven books in both. In addition, she has written numerous stand-alone suspense novels. She has been nominated for many writing awards, and is a past president of Sisters in Crime.

They will be interviewed by our 2013 Raven Award recipient, Oline Cogdill. Oline is a trusted book reviewer and has been handling our Grand Master interviews for many years.

This event will be free to all current MWA members but you must still register as there is limited seating. Non-members are welcome to attend but will pay a nominal fee of $25.

PLEASE include the below information with your reservation and check or credit card information. We accept Visa, Mastercard and American Express. You may also make your reservation via our website by using the MWA store. Please note that the check is for the Grand Master Interview and make it payable to:

Mystery Writers of America – 1140 Broadway, Suite 1507 New York, NY 10001
Phone: 212-888-8171 Fax: 212-888-8107

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Name:
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# of Reservations: Names of Additional Registrants:
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What human tissues and secretions do not contain DNA?

Q: It seems that a criminal cannot walk near a crime scene without shedding DNA. I would like to know what kinds of personal trace evidence would NOT be testable for DNA. Sweat? Urine? Feces? Facial oils? Semen from someone who has had a vasectomy? Tears? Mucus? Pus? Would it matter that a person was a non-secretor? If the person had a bacterial infection or venereal disease, would the infection contaminate the sample and make it unusable? Would a scab or a fingernail clipping contain DNA?

A: Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) is the molecule that makes up our genes. It is present in any cell that possesses a nucleus.

In humans, the notable exceptions are the Red Blood Cells (RBCs). Developing RBCs within the bone marrow do have nuclei, but they are lost during the maturation process so that by the time they are released from the marrow into the blood stream, the nucleus is no longer present. Thus they have no DNA.

White Blood Cells (WBCs) do. When blood is tested for DNA, it is the DNA of the WBCs that is tested.

Basically, for DNA to be found, the tissue or fluid tested must have cells or cellular material. The cells do not have to be intact, since fragmented cells still have intact strands or fragments of their DNA among the debris. The sample size must be sufficient to yield enough testable DNA, but very small samples such as a single hair follicle or saliva from a postage stamp may be enough.

Also, the DNA cannot be exposed to extreme conditions such as high heat since this will denature (destroy) the DNA and testing is not possible.

In secretions such as tears, sweat, saliva, urine, and feces, cells from the tear ducts, urethra, salivary ducts, mouth, intestinal lining, and the skin may yield enough DNA for testing. Or it may not. For fiction purposes, you could have it either way.

So, even if the secretion itself doesn’t have DNA as a component, it “picks up” shed cells, and thus DNA, along its route from its source to its exit point.

The same is true for semen. Cells from the urethra and the non-sperm secretions (mostly from the prostate gland) as well as the sperm itself can supply testable sample. After a vasectomy, the sperm count in the specimen should be very low or absent, but DNA from the other cells in the ejaculate would supply the needed DNA.

The secretory status would have little effect. Approximately 80 to 85% of individuals are secretors. This means that they secret proteins of their ABO blood type in all bodily fluids, including seminal fluid. The ABO type can be used much as blood typing to eliminate a suspect in a rape. For example, if the victim is a secretor of type O and the suspect is a secretor of type A, but the vaginal material tested shows type B, the suspect is not the perp.

On the other hand, if the vaginal material matched the ABO group of the suspect, he could not be eliminated, but neither could he be convicted. DNA testing would be employed to make a conclusive match (or not). Thus, secretory matching is similar to blood typing. It can eliminate someone but cannot conclusively ID them. It is too crude a test. DNA typing is specific.

In the case of pus (purulent drainage), the bacterial DNA would cause little confusion and the suspect’s DNA could be separated out in most cases.

A scab is basically clotted blood with fibrin and other materials consumed during the clotting process and should yield usable DNA. Fingernails, like hair (nails are basically evolutionarily modified hair) are acellular (without cells) and have no DNA.

D. P. Lyle, MD. Website: http://www.dplylemd.com
Blog: http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com
Protecting your name or pseudonym

Q. Can I legally protect my pen name, or the name of my mystery series? What about my website?

Many novelists use pen names or pseudonyms and many also have a “branded” series of mysteries, usually named after the chief character. What such writers have in common is the need to protect the goodwill and value of their pen name and/or series.

To accomplish this, writers must understand both copyright and trademark law.

When filling out the copyright registration form, either online or on the paper Form TX, the Copyright Office allows you or your publisher to list either just your pseudonym or your real name, or both. Nicknames and other diminutive forms of legal names are not considered pseudonyms.

If you write under a pseudonym but want to be identified by your legal name in the Copyright Office’s records, give your legal name and your pseudonym on your application for copyright registration.

If you write under a pseudonym and do not want to have your identity revealed in the Copyright Office’s records, give your pseudonym and identify it as such on your application.

The difference in protection is that if you use your real name, protection for the work extends for your life plus seventy years; if you use a pseudonym, the term of protection is 95 years from the publication of the work, or 120 years from the creation of the work, whichever period expires first.

If, however, after filing the original application in a pen name, the author’s identity is later revealed in the records, the term reverts to the life of the author plus 70 years.

Under U.S. copyright law, however, names, slogans, and titles cannot be copyrighted. This means that copyright will NOT prevent others from using your pseudonym, or the name of your mystery series.

Pen names and series names, however, are entitled to protection under state laws governing unfair competition and under the federal Lanham Act, which prohibits “false designations of origin, false descriptions, and dilution.” These laws give you the right to bring a civil action against someone appropriating your pseudonym or series title.

Further, if a pseudonym or series name becomes identified with the person using the name and/or the books and other products authored under the name, it may be entitled to protection under trademark law. If so, consult an intellectual property lawyer; also see my article, “Do You Need A Trademark?” at http://publishlawyer.com/do-you-need-a-trademark/, which explains these concepts in greater detail.

CAUTION: If your pen name also is the name of a living individual, you must either obtain that person’s consent or file a disclaimer stating that the name is not that of any real person.

Pen names also cannot be used if they are the name of a deceased President of the United States during the life of the President’s widow, except with the consent of the President’s widow (unlikely!).

What about your website name?

Internet domain names are treated differently under the law. Registration of your domain name by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is separate from trademark registration.

Nevertheless, you may be able to register your domain name as a trademark, provided the name is being used in connection with a site that is offering a service or product.

Daniel Steven, Chairman of the MWA Contracts and Grievances Committee, is a suspense novelist and publishing attorney (www.dsattorney.com.) This column provides general legal information; consult an attorney for application of the law to your specific circumstances. © 2014 Daniel Steven

Launch Party 4/29 for MWA’s Newest Anthology - Ice Cold

On Tuesday, April 29th, we will be launching our newest anthology, Ice Cold, edited by Jeffery Deaver and Raymond Benson. The launch party will be held at The Mysterious Bookshop, 58 Warren Street, New York, NY. Phone number is: 212-587-1011. The event will begin at 6:00 p.m. and many of the contributors are scheduled to appear. In addition, many of the 2014 Edgar® Award nominees will also be at the bookstore.
Launching a crime fiction reading series

by Richie Narvaez, MWA-NY President

Last year the MWA-New York chapter launched a crime fiction reading series that has proven very successful.

As chair of the Events Committee, I brought the idea to the board after I read at Noir @ the Bar, a series of drinking establishment-based readings that began in St Louis and has branched out to cities all over the country. I read at the debut New York reading, hosted by the charmingly irascible Todd Robinson, editor of Thuglit, at a small bar in the West Village. More than a dozen writers read and the event lasted three hours. The readings were short, the voices were many and distinct, and there was booze. It was hands-down one of the best readings I’d ever been to.

Afterward, I thought: Why didn’t MWA hold readings? After all, we have a pretty sizable stable of writers. MWA national had done readings featuring big name writers during Edgar® Week. Why didn’t our chapter do them, and feature all members?

So I brought the idea to my board based on three principals.

• Practice. While promoting their books, writers have to speak in public, to do Q&A, and often will read a sample of their work. For many, it takes practice to be comfortable in front of (hopefully) large groups and to make your writing sound like a must-read.

• Exposure. Emerging writers need to find readers and fans. And experienced writers, well, they could always use a few more readers and fans. (We’ve been inviting agents to readings as well, in the hopes of a miraculous union.)

• Camaraderie. Our members can chat at meetings for years about each other’s writing but never actually share it. Here was a chance.

• Free. This would be a gratis event for members. Of course, if they wanted, there would be drinks at the bar. What’s not to love?

We launched the readings in the summer in order to offer something to members during a time when we do not normally hold meetings. We kept the rules simple and the event egalitarian. Active, associate, and affiliate members were invited to read from their published or not-yet-published crime-related novel, short story, or work in progress. Eight readers were chosen for each reading. The readers went in alphabetical order and each of them got eight minutes tops to read. This way, there were no stars, and the event moved quickly.

We chose a small bar in New York City called KGB, known for hosting literary events. It is an intimate space that allows everyone to feel more comfortable, and its dim lighting and Cold War-era décor gives it a sense of intrigue that is perfect for our genre.

Then-President Patricia King hosted the four readings we did last year. In general, the readings were very well attended, even crowded on a couple of occasions. One thing became clear over the course of the readings: There was no difference

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between people with few to no stories published and people with a dozen books out—our members rose to the occasion and read masterfully. And we have yet to have to physically drag anyone away from the podium.

We now hold readings on a roughly bimonthly basis, and we have a long waiting list of members signed up and eager to read. We also want to encourage members who live in our geographic area but who are too far away to come to Manhattan to organize their own MWA reading nights.

PICTURED: Charles Salzberg, C. Clark Criscuolo, and Lyndsay Faye. Photos by Patricia King

Tips for reading your work in public

Practice. You’ll be more confident if you practice your reading in front of the mirror. Listen for speed bumps, for what doesn’t work. Watch your body language. Do you look stiff? Do you use your hands too much? Note your volume and tone and speed. Don’t read like you’re reading an instruction manual. Energy!

Prepare the text. Make sure you have an easy-to-read-in-dim-lighting printed version of your work. You may want to mark the areas where you think you should pause. Also: Never read from a cell phone; everyone in the audience will hate you for tapping every 50 words.

Choose wisely. Make sure what you read lends itself well to public reading. Too much dialogue can be hard for an audience to follow. For crime fiction, read something that ends on a twist or cliffhanger to keep your audience intrigued. You may want to edit your story to make it work better as a performance.

Cut the chatter. Saying a few words about yourself or your story before you read is great. But keep it short. It’s always best to give the audience less rather than more.

Make eye contact. Every once in a while, take a moment to look at the audience and make a personal connection. Pauses also work well for pacing your story and building tension. Keep your finger or a bookmark on the page, so you don’t lose your place.

Don’t pull a Bukowski. If you like a little wine to relax, fine. But multiple tequila shots are not advised. Don’t be remembered for your slurring. Or hurling. Best thing to ingest before public speaking: a banana. It’ll help calm any nervousness you may be feeling.

Respect your timeframe. No one likes a hog. You’ll outstay your welcome.

Don’t be rude. Don’t dash out once you’ve read. The other readers listened to you. It’s only fair you stick around to hear their work.
make more than $1 million a year — I looked it up. The claim is, at best, anecdotal. I have at least a dozen friends earning that kind of money from traditional publishing, but I don’t think most writers earn that much. And while the #1 earner on the Forbes list started out as a self-published phenomenon, she didn’t get to #1 until she was published by Random House. By the way, everyone else on that list was published by one of the so-called Big Five.

Yet, best I can tell, the primary argument, the most frequent argument for self-publishing is a financial one, with some claims for control. You will make more money. You won’t be dependent on someone else to decide what’s worth publishing.

You know what no one argues? No one argues that self-publishing will produce better books. As good-as books? Yes, people argue that all the time, and I don’t disagree. Some maintain that the discrepancy is at the lower end, that the worst self-published books are worse than anything traditional publishing has produced. Others argue that’s not true. Here we are in highly subjective territory, where we will not find agreement. So let’s go back to this:

No one is claiming that self-publishing will yield better books, overall, than traditional publishing. The argument is never about the work itself.

Again, yes, we are agreed that it can and maybe has produced books that are as good as anything in contemporary fiction. (I’m not going to load the deck by using Faulkner and Trollope as the yardstick for traditional publishing and I’m not going to let the self-publishing camp claim Poe and Virginia Woolf, among others, as theirs. That’s wildly disingenuous. On both sides.) There is absolutely nothing to prevent a masterpiece from coming out of self-publishing.

So where is it? N ≈ A, R – Q as I write on student papers when I teach. Not a rhetorical question. Please point me in the direction of a great novel that has come out of self-publishing — I’m sorry, I need to be more precise with my words: Please show me a great novel that could have only come out of self-publishing. Something that you would put alongside Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch or Jess Walter’s Beautiful Ruin, or Ben Fountain’s Billy Flynn’s Long Halftime Walk or The Luminaries by Eleanor Catton or The Street Sweeper by Elliot Perlman or Kurt Andersen’s True Believers or Ron Hansen’s A Wide Surge of Guilty Passion or John Lanchester’s Capital.

You may wonder how I came up with these particular titles. I turned on my iPad and looked to see which books I owned in two formats, digital and hardcover. This was just a sampling. Yes, I’m a freak. But freaks like me are the cornerstone to whatever our future is. And, by the way, if you’re not a big fat freak of a reader, then you have no business being a writer. Really, stop now. You want to know the one thing you can do to improve as a writer — read a lot, read well.

Whenever anyone tries to talk about a meritocracy in writing, there is always someone keen to deflect the conversation. They will say, “Well, no one agrees on what’s good, so the marketplace is the only real judge.” They will point out that there are snobs who don’t consider genre fiction capable of producing great work, so why would we align ourselves with their values by judging books? They go back to the idea that traditional publishing produces the same amount of crap as self-publishing.

I can’t speak for anyone else, but while I’ve always been in Samuel Johnson’s camp about the importance of being paid for our work and paid well, it’s not just about that, right? If it’s just about the money, why do people keep writing after they’ve made enough money to live well? Why do you write? I’m going to be blunt here: If you are writing to get rich or famous, you are writing for the wrong reason. Not because those things are not possible. But they are fantasies. Fantasies are great. Fantasies can even be helpful. But a fantasy is like that cup of coffee you have at 2 p.m. to keep you going through a long day. We start with words, the need to tell a story that no one else will tell, or tell us as we plan to tell it. If you’re not starting with the words — well, as the kids say, you’re doing it wrong.

That is not to confuse fantasies with dreams. Dreams are essential. When I teach, I encourage my students to say their dreams out loud, to at least one sentient and sympathetic person. A young man came over to me and said: “OK, I want to work for your husband.” (My husband is a television producer.) “Fine, I said. Now what are you going to do about it?”

The words must come first. For all of us. Let’s put it out on the table. To be a novelist is to be incredibly hubristic, arrogant and conceited. We are all arrogant people who think we have something to contribute to the world of letters. I’m 55. Let’s say I live to 95. Forty years. Forty X 365 = 14,600. If I read a book a day for forty years, I will read fewer than 15,000 books. Much of my backlist on Amazon doesn’t attain that ranking on an average day. Actually, I have no idea if that’s true because I don’t check my Amazon ranking most of the time and I never Google myself. But it sounds true.

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We're in this together... Continued from page 8

So — professionalism. What is it? Why is it worth having?

Professionalism is taking your work seriously, but not taking yourself so seriously. It's making your work the best it can be. It's meeting deadlines, being respectful of other professionals' time and expertise. However you choose to publish, you can be professional. And, in fact, I would argue that self-publishing requires an even greater degree of professionalism. Because you will be wearing many, many hats, doing many jobs.

Finally, a few more words about words. I made a joke on Facebook and Twitter the other day: “I am artisinally published.” The line occurred to me because I noticed that Starbucks was offering an artisan bacon sandwich and I thought: What a silly corruption of the word “artisan.” So I declared myself artisinally published. Some self-published writers took offense, but the point was that it’s ludicrous for a major corporation to co-opt that word, try to make it mean something it doesn’t.

I feel the same way about “indie” publishing. I find it imprecise, less descriptive of self-publishing than, well, self-publishing. I could live with DIY publishing, if you must. But the use of the word “indie” is almost Orwellian in its nonsense. When you create a less precise euphemism for something that you do, YOU are the person who is stigmatizing it.

Let me show you how it works. I’m a mystery novelist, a crime novelist. I am currently offering a $10,000 bounty to anyone who can find a public forum in which I have disavowed my genre. Criticized it sure, but never disavowed it. Some reviewers, meaning to be kind, have said I transcend the genre. I contend that’s not possible. This is not a plane above which any of us can levitate. I’m a crime novelist. The only reason I prefer “crime” to mystery is because mystery connotes whodunit to some readers and that’s not always true of my work. But every novel I’ve written has been a crime novel and I don’t see that changing.

Sure, some people look down on mysteries. They have myriad reasons, almost all steeped in a willful misunderstanding of crime fiction. Why would I let them define what I do? When the self-published adopt the term “indie,” they are buying into the idea that self-publishing is in some way suspect. It’s not. Done smartly — done professionally — it’s admirable. It takes a hell of a lot of work, more work, frankly, than I’m willing to do. It is a perfectly viable choice for a lot of writers, for a lot of reasons. The key is to do the work, to know the pros and cons. To reach a reasonable decision to self-publish.

But — but — the reason cannot be, must never be: Because I want it now. Because I want it faster. I never knew, until digital publishing came along, how many adults struggled with instant gratification. At the Harrogate crime-writing festival in 2012, a woman stood up and announced she had spent two months writing her novel, then three months trying to sell. “What choice did I have but to self-publish?” she asked. This was very much a rhetorical question.

And the thing is, my heart went out to her. Because while I know, in hindsight, that I had a relatively charmed experience, I also know how excruciatingly slow it seemed when I was trying to break in — a year to write the book, eight months to find an agent, months before it was sold, then another eighteen months to publication. I get it. We all want to be published now.

But does our work want to be published now? Is it ready? Is it the best it can be? Have we earned our spot on the shelf, physical or virtual? Don’t tell me no one can decide if something is good. If you’re going to write, you have to learn to decide if something is good. If you’re going to write, you have to learn to decide if something is good. You have to be a ruthless critic of your own work. You have to be a ruthless critic of your own work.

Has traditional publishing made mistakes? Sure. Have I made mistakes? Absolutely. Have you made mistakes? Probably. Does bad work sometimes sell very well? Yes. And I actually believe it is valuable for writers who are starting out to look to a certain book and think, “Well, if that garbage can be published, maybe I can be published.” But I don’t think it’s right to be cynical about what we do, to say, “Well, I just want to write something that’s good enough to make a lot of money.”

To quote Floyd Gondolli: “Call me crazy, call me a pervert...but there’s one little thing I want to do in this life

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TTD goes ePub... Continued from page 12

use email. The committee recommended that, rather than an opt-in provision as in the past, members will now need to opt-out to continue to receive the print version. The Board unanimously adopted the committee’s recommendation.

Many other organizations have made the cost-saving decision to use electronic delivery of their newsletters. MWA has decided to follow this same path. Most of us have e-mail (there are perhaps only twenty members for whom we do not have e-mail addresses) and members will find that this method of delivery is faster and more economical. The issue can always be printed upon receipt of the e-version, should a member desire a hard copy.

However, there are other benefits, as well. TTD size has generally been set at twelve pages, but this change in delivery will allow us to add more content when needed (for example, during Edgar season). There can be expanded articles, more photos, and other vital information that can be delivered faster to members.

This change will all but eliminate printing and postage costs. Further, because MWA is a non-profit organization, our e-mail service provider, Vertical Response, does not charge us for e-mailing. If you have previously unsubscribed from Vertical Response, you will have to “opt-in” to receive e-mails. Contact the national office to find out how to do that.

As a result of the Board action, beginning with the June-July 2014 issue, The Third Degree will be provided to all MWA members via electronic means. Any member wanting to receive hard copies by surface mail must notify the MWA office no later than May 31, 2014.

The Board believes that all members will appreciate this change and make better use of TTD in the years to come.

We're in this together... Continued from page 9

and that is to make a dollar and a cent in this business.” Well, Floyd Gondolli was crazy, he was a pervert and we can argue that he actually heralded the end of professionalism in the porn industry. Yet it is still with us and quite robust, despite a proliferation of do-it-yourselfers who give it away free. As Mr. Bernstein says in Citizen Kane, it’s not hard to make a lot of money — if all you want to do is make a lot of money. But when you’re writing, you need to have other goals as well.

Everyone is familiar with the term “special snowflake.” It’s even in the urban dictionary. What is often forgotten is that the phrase comes from a novel, Fight Club. Tyler Durden says: “You are not special. You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You’re just decaying organic matter as everything else.”

But you are special. Only you can write the book that you were meant to write. Only you can make that book as good as it can be. Because one of the break-throughs of the digital revolution that doesn’t get much attention is that you may be decaying organic matter, but your book no longer is.

It is ludicrous for writers to fight among ourselves, whether it’s about the superiority of a genre or the superiority of a business model. It is unconsolable for writers to misuse words, to create imprecise labels and euphemisms. Auden may have regretted writing the line, “We must love one another or die,” but I never regret quoting it.

Back in the 1980s, a writer named Lisa Alther came on the scene with a book called Kinflicks. She was praised by writers such as John Updike, compared to James Joyce. Hers were very literary novels, but they showed up in airport bookstores with sexy covers, which is, of course, why I bought them. In her second book, Original Sin, a women’s consciousness group is on the verge of falling apart because each member feels she needs a more specialized group — because of race or sexual orientation. Finally, one woman, who happens to be gay and African-American bursts out:

“What I think is this: You confront a carrot with a potato, and it’ll probably insist, ‘Hell, no, I ain’t no potato. Honey, look at me. Hell, I’m orange, and long and thin. And lookee here, I got me this lacy green top.’ Stops them seeing they’re all in that garden together, all gonna get dug up come fall.”

I’m channeling Holly Hunter in Broadcast News, the part in the beginning where she’s giving the speech and she pushes the microphone aside: “All of you know what I’m talking about. We’re all trying to act tougher than we are. But we care. So we’re all secretly terrified by what’s happening, aren’t we?” Of course, that’s when everyone walks out on her. But I have only one paragraph to go.

Folks, we’re in this together. And the big prize, the one that we can never know if we’re going to win, is immortality. That’s not going to be determined by your platform or your advance or your reviews. It’s going to be determined by the work, which will be out there long after we’ve all been dug up, come fall. We are decaying matter, but our books are not. What will you leave behind? How will you be remembered? Your words are your legacy. Use them wisely. Use them precisely. Make them good.

This is an edited version of a speech I gave at Sleuthfest. It was mis-reported — by a blogger who graciously corrected the record — that I called self-published books garbage. The fact is, later that weekend I recommended that one writer consider self-publishing, although that was largely because I saw it as a kind of focus group for him, a way to test his work and gauge its strengths.