

THE DAMES' DOCKET

A Bimonthly Newsletter from Level Best Books



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The Dames of Detection
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GREETINGS FROM THE DAMES

A real highlight of April's Malice Domestic Convention was the opportunity to meet, in person, so many of our Level Best authors. Not on Zoom or in e-mails or phone calls, but in person. I can't tell you how often I was greeted, while rushing from place to place, by folks identifying themselves as LBB authors and telling me how excited they were to be with us.

When Verena and I were able to get together with our authors at a meet and greet, as well as to celebrate Maureen Jennings' birthday, it was certainly a thrilling experience. And, as we unloaded cartons of books and set up our sales tables in the Dealers' Room, I was astounded at the number of books Level Best has published to date.

To top it off, I was able to moderate or attend the panels featuring our nominated authors. When I could, I attended panels to hear other LBB authors speak. I have to say, I was one proud publisher and editor.

I've asked LBB Malice attendees to share their impressions of the experience and have included the responses I received in this newsletter.

Speaking as a Malice Domestic Board member, I have to say that the convention was a huge success. After two years, it was such a treat to once again get together with old friends and new to celebrate the mystery genre.

There was only one addition that would have made the weekend even better. That would have been the presence of Shawn Reilly Simmons, our beloved friend and business partner. But she was in our thoughts and we were over the moon when she won an Agatha Award for Best Short Story. Way to go, girl!

Shawn, Verena, and I are looking forward to seeing you all next year.

For the Dames,

Harriette



ENERGIZED ABOUT WRITING

Rebecca Saltzer

It was exciting to meet authors I had read and inspiring to hear how they overcame obstacles (e.g., Rhys Bowen shifting to Lake Union to publish a standalone that was “not her brand.”) I returned home feeling energized about writing!

Rebecca Saltzer worked as a bond analyst on the trading floor at Lehman Brothers in New York City in the heyday of the eighties. Like the protagonist in her novel, she sometimes encountered fraud and other questionable business practices, except in real life, none of it led to murder. In 2021, Rebecca received the William F. Deeck-Malice Domestic Grant for unpublished writers. Her debut novel, Murder Over Broken Bonds, will be published by Level Best Books in January 2023.



A JOYOUS OCCASION

Liz Milliron

Malice Domestic was the first in-person event I've attended since February 2020 and I cannot begin to describe how joyous an occasion it was. It always feels like a big family reunion, but this time even more so. It was a family reunion with those you haven't seen in too long. I hadn't realized just how much I missed the smiles, hugs, and laughter until they happened. What a wonderful introduction back into something resembling normalcy!

Liz Milliron is the author of The Laurel Highlands Mysteries series, set in the scenic Laurel Highlands of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and The Home Front Mysteries, set in Buffalo, New York, during the early years of World War II. She lives outside Pittsburgh with her husband, two children, and a retired racer greyhound.

<https://lizmilliron.com/>



MALICE-GO-ROUND AND ME

Lessons from a First Timer

Linda Norlander

I use “first timer” a bit loosely. Last summer I did the live video version of Malice-Go-Round at More than Malice. I had two minutes on screen to stumble through a book pitch and the only person I saw was me on my laptop screen. It wasn't the same as facing a room full of people waiting at tables to hear the words that would send them immediately to the bookstore. Now that I have actually faced the 200 or so eager listeners, I have a few lessons learned.

For those of you who have never experienced the “Go-Round” it's like speed dating except instead of finding the “one” you find a table full of people who love books. Each table has up to eight people and your job is to give them a reason to read your book in the two minutes before someone calls time. You are paired with another author and the two of you change tables every five minutes. If nothing else, it's a lesson on how to get up quickly and move to another table. The experience is both exhausting and exhilarating.

First Lesson: Prepare for the Event Even if You Are on the Wait List

Since I was on a wait list with a number of people ahead of me, I assumed I wouldn't get in. I showed up with fifty bookmarks and no idea what I was going to say. It wasn't until the last minute that I made the cut. I don't recommend trying to come up with a two-minute pitch while hurrying to the first table. Fortunately, my author partner agreed to go first while I tried not to hyperventilate through her presentation.

Second Lesson: Say Something That Grabs the Listener

In a two-minute pitch you need to distinguish yourself, engage the listener, remain true to your book, and do it all as concisely as possible. Rambling on doesn't work. I noted when my co-presenter Eleanor Kuhns talked about her books the details she added were what resonated with the listeners. She painted the historical time and setting including the very specific “at a time of a smallpox outbreak.” I tried to do something similar using catch words like “a ghostly figure in the snow,” “a young woman in late stages of labor,” and “a young woman who didn't speak English.” A participant at one of the first tables grabbed me as I was rushing to the next table and said, “Make sure to mention the dog, too.” She'd read the little blurb on my bookmark that included a mention of a rescue dog named Bronte. Bronte got a mention at the next 18 tables.

Third Lesson: Bring Enough Swag

Along with a prepared and rehearsed pitch, make sure you bring enough swag so people will remember you. Fortunately, I had some bookmarks in my bag, but I ran out about a third of the way through. Bookmarks, postcards, business cards, or whatever you decide to bring, make sure you have enough. For over half of the “Go-Round” I could only offer an apology and a hope that some of the people at the table wrote my name down. (As a side note: long after the event, I was looking over my bookmarks and discovered a typo. Rats! At least I spelled my name right.)

Fourth Lesson: Have Fun

Despite fumbling around with the pitch, running out of bookmarks, and generally being unprepared, I had a great time. In those few minutes at each table, I felt like I connected. (Okay, maybe not with the woman who was snoozing in her chair.) The listeners were attentive and generous and forgiving.

Did I sell any books as a result? Who knows? But the excitement and, yes, the ability to be in front of people instead of on my computer screen was worth it. Will I do it again next year? You betcha!

Linda Norlander is the author of A Cabin by the Lake mystery series set in Northern Minnesota. Books in the series include Death of an Editor and Death of a Starling and Death of a Snow Ghost. A new mystery, What Goldie Witnessed, will be released in November. She lives in Tacoma, Washington.



MALICE MOST MARVELOUS

Agatha nominee

Murder in the Master - A Chesapeake Bay Mystery

Judy L. Murray

"I don't know why you should assume that I think of murder all the time." —Jane Marple in *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*.

How appropriate! What joy to gather five hundred mystery writers and fans under one roof for four days and discuss...murder!

Jane Marple would have loved every minute of Malice Domestic. Greetings and exclamations emanated across the hotel lobby as familiar faces spotted each other for the first time in far too long. Recognizing new colleagues we "met" virtually over the past three years was a conference constant.

Malice-Go-Round was a blur of talented authors. Special interview sessions with honored guests inspired us. Voices buzzed from every corner of the building with everyone sharing ideas on writing, marketing, and the industry. Hotel staff did their best to keep us steeped in coffee. Those who drove to the conference made sure their stash of wine kept chats flowing long after dark.

But we had one big problem. No, actually two. Try as we all did, we could not get to all forty-five panels to support our Level Best authors. We needed skateboards. Pride of all pride, our smart Level Best authors popped up as participants in virtually every panel. Level Besties, you were amazing!

Our second big problem—we all missed Shawn. We knew she was in the virtual background and responsible for so much of this conference. Hugs to her for all her incredible work to make Malice so special. With Verena and Harriette supplying the champagne, we all toasted her, knowing she'll be back, in person, very soon.

Cheers to all our nominees and winners. For me, to be one of those writers nominated for an Agatha was such an incredible honor. I'll always remember and be grateful to so many, many authors that wished me congratulations. You were very generous, and it meant the world to me.



Thank you. Can't wait for us to be together again.

Judy is a real estate broker and restoration addict. Murder in the Master introduces Helen Morrisey, a gutsy and mature woman long on loyalty and short on romance.

PANDORA'S TIME CAPSULE

Elizabeth Aden

“Aunt Betsy, what do we do with these boxes? They’re filled with paper,” my nephew shouted across the large playroom.

In preparation for the estate sale, we were cleaning out my mother’s office, something that hadn’t been done in 32 years. We’d sorted through medical files, personal diaries, books, magazines, photographs, and even empty wine crates. The only actual paper that we’d found to date was in boxes that contained unused stationery—engraved with her name and address.

I looked at the boxes. They were the same vanilla-colored glossy cardboard that held letter-size stationery. “Bring it here so I can look at it.”

I opened the first box. The top sheet was typewritten with the words “Dune House by Eunice Mays Boyd.” I thumbed through the perfectly clean manuscript. On the second page, it read, “Dedicated to Marilyn Reed Roberts”. My mother. It was written and dedicated to my mother sometime between 1947 and 1950 when she was married to my father. I opened the second box, which was much lighter. “Slay Bells”, clearly a Christmas murder mystery. The third box contained a very different title, “One Paw Was Red.”

I flipped through this outlier and saw a familiar name, F. Millard Smythe. I understood. Eunice was my godmother. She published three novels set in Alaska featuring an amateur sleuth, a small, unassuming grocer. She won awards and received accolades for her novels *Murder Breaks Trail*, *Doom in the Midnight Sun*, and *Murder Wears Mukluks*. In my hands, I held the fourth book in this series. The last of the Alaska mysteries.

I knew my godmother, whom I called Nana, had written a book set in Europe which she began when she retired from the University of California. I’d read that manuscript when I was twenty years old and in college. I’d loved the crafty plotting, red herrings – a classic Christie-style “whodunit.” I couldn’t put down the yellow draft paper pages. I could read her penciled corrections and was surprised by the ending. When she died the following year, my mother rescued that manuscript and gave it to me. The 250 pages were held together on a clipboard.

For forty-five years I kept that manuscript. As my time became more flexible, I thought it would be fun to see some of the sites she described in *A Vacation to Kill For*. In 2014, I visited Carcassonne, France. There, I re-read the book and walked the places she described and confirmed her descriptions of this walled medieval city. At the end of the trip, I thought about what might be involved to publish this murder mystery. That was as far as I got...a thought.

But that all changed when I discovered the other three unpublished murder mysteries. I read them. “Dune House” was set in San Francisco’s Ocean Beach. “Slay Bells” was also set in San Francisco, but near the Stonestown shopping center. I guessed that they were written between 1957 and 1963 because we were living in that area during those years.

I knew my godmother regularly participated in a writers' club and had co-authored *The Marble Forest* with other Bay Area writers, including Anthony Boucher. The movie *Macabre* was based on that book. We all saw the movie and it gave the ten-year-old me nightmares.

In all those years, not once do I recall hearing her talk about works in progress or the submission of manuscripts for publication. Nothing.

What to do? I now had a critical mass of manuscripts. I felt an obligation to honor Eunice's memory and to let others enjoy her skillful, intelligent writing. Thus began my journey. First step was to convert the typed pages into a Word document. I tried scanning the typed pages and then using OCR software to convert it into an electronic format for editing. It worked, sort of. The next step was a manual edit. So far, so good.

Then, a local editor suggested, "Why not get the rights to her published books and republish them as well?" OMG, four books just became seven. Luckily, I found a literary lawyer who asked if I had the rights to publish the books. He asked if I had a copy of her will. Nope, and neither did Alameda County. In this case, possession didn't seem to count for nine-tenths of anything. He next suggested getting in contact with her heirs and closest next of kin and obtaining a release to allow me to publish and republish her books.

Fortunately, I grew up knowing members of my godmother's family. Even though Eunice had no children, her niece and family visited the Berkeley home frequently. Her niece was also the same age as my mother and we kept in contact through the years. Well, up to a point. The niece died decades ago and I'd lost touch with her children. Enter LinkedIn. I found her nephew and sent him a note. We connected online. He suggested I get in touch with his brother who was the keeper of their family's pioneer history. I did. With their help, I was able to identify her surviving heirs: their sister and Eunice's nephew, Harry.

Back to the internet. I spent hours figuring out which Harry Mays it was, deduced the email and then bingo, I found a phone number. I dialed it and miraculously a woman answered the landline.

"Hi, I'm Eunice Mays Boyd's goddaughter. My mother was Mal Matys. I knew Harry's parents George and Harriett and I was the little girl at the house on Forest Avenue."

"I remember Mal well," she replied.

We chatted for a while and she told me Harry wasn't too well. She put Harry on the phone and I told him about the books and my desire to publish them.

"So, would you like me to sign a release?"

"Yes!" I replied.

The lawyer wrote a release and I sent it immediately to Harry with two copies and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Ten days later I had his signature. Two weeks later the grandnephews and grandniece gave their permission and six weeks later Harry was dead. Whew— just in the nick of time.

Now back to the published books. I found a copy of the standard Farrar & Rinehart contract from 1943 which required giving them 90-day notice to assess whether they would republish the three out-of-print books. The attorney sent a certified letter to the successor company. They didn't reply, so I was good. That's how I spent the Pandemic lockdown.

Next step. I contacted a couple of publishers that reviewed books submitted directly by authors. I emailed two. Otto Penzler at Mysterious Press wrote back immediately saying that he remembered reading *Murder Wears Mukluks* and found it delightful. He would be happy to republish her works and maybe the fourth in the series, *One Paw Was Red*. He wasn't sure about the other three books.

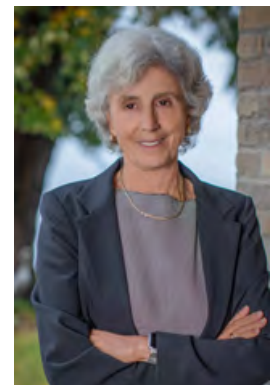
Remarkably, his email was followed the next day with a reply from Verena Rose at Level Best Books who wanted to learn more. She were intrigued because Eunice had written during the Golden Age of mystery writing. After reading *Dune House*, Level Best Books agreed to publish all seven books. *Dune House* and *Slay Bells* were published in December 2021 and *A Vacation to Kill For* will be published in 2022.

My journey has refreshed many memories and reconnected me with childhood friends with whom I share a common history. I am proud to have undertaken this journey. It has been work, but I've learned. It is an adventure to enter into an entirely new discipline. It also inspired me to write my own books, a medical thriller, *The Goldilocks Genome*, and a non-fiction coming-of-age adventure about my fieldwork experiences in Melanesia, *HEPATITIS Beach*.

I have a doctorate in biomedical anthropology. My fieldwork described the natural history of infection with hepatitis B virus on a remote, primitive island where I lived for two years. After brief stints in academics and branding, I had a successful career in pharmaceuticals and biotech, where I was introduced to personalized medicine—the use of an individual's genetic data to tailor prescription medicines. I discovered the profound individual, clinical, and economic benefits that could be realized if it was implemented. For example, 40% of hospital costs in the US are due to drug adverse events that could have been avoided using genetic-based prescriptions. *The Goldilocks Genome* introduces the personalized medicine to the lay reader. I am also working on a proposal for a popular science book on personalized medicine.

I am grateful for the experience of bringing Eunice's "lost" murder mysteries to life and for the time I spent with her. I will continue to open boxes and see where the contents take me. I hope that others will have the courage to do the same—hope and satisfaction were in my Pandora's boxes.

Elizabeth Aden has a PhD in Biomedical Anthropology and was Senior Vice President of a major Swiss Pharmaceutical company. She loves travel, adventure and novelties.



MARCH-JUNE NEW RELEASES

