

written by Edward D. Hoch) the Queen byline never again appeared on a piece of fiction. Frederic Dannay continued to be active as an editor, commentator, and elder statesman of the mystery

world, but when his partner died the wonderful novels and stories they had produced together, both "Queen" and non-"Queen," also came to an end.

Partners In Writing / Partners On Writing

by Gay Toltl Kinman

Partners In Writing

How does a character share her inner feelings? How many interior monologues can she have before reader, writer and character begin to question sanity?

While I was writing *Castle Reiner* (Clocktower Fiction), a gothic novel set on the California coast in 1899, my heroine, Vinney (Lavinia Fergusson Cathcart) did just that. How to solve the problem?

In his book, *The Hero With 1000 Faces*, Joseph Campbell talks about the hero/heroine having a mentor. A mentor gives advice and direction, but does not solve the mystery for the sleuth. However, the mentor is a sounding board.

A sleuth needs a sounding board. It seems like a simple solution, but to me it was a revelation.

A 'partner' is better than a mentor because they are on equal terms. That's why there are characters like Dr. Watson. There's no better way to get the information out, to show the thought process of the sleuth. And a partner can trigger the thought process.

When I first submitted "Miss Parker and the Cutter-Sanborn Tables," a mystery I wrote for the *Sisters in Crime Los Angeles Chapter's* first anthology, the story was not chosen. In the first version, the heroine had no companion. In my submission of the revised story to the second anthology, the heroine had a roommate and partner. Adding a partner took them in a different direction. They bounced ideas off each other. They *did* things, felt things and talked about it all. The story was selected. Not only selected, but nominated for an Agatha.

Once I discovered that basic fact—that I gotta have a partner for my sleuth, then writing stories became a heck of a lot easier.

Partners on Writing

Another kind of partner is a writing partner.

When I first heard the term I thought it meant collaborating together in writing a book, but another interpretation is—a critique group.

Having a critique group is essential and critical—it's a way to make writing stories easier, rejections fewer. Having the right critique partners helped me get published. They spotted plot holes, unmotivated characters and unsatisfying endings. They also gave me ideas on how to solve plot problems. They *were* my writing partners, collaborating on my work.

Critique groups have made me a better writer—and they will do the same for you!

Below are some of the things I've gleaned about critique groups from being a member of eight of them through the years:

Beware of these caveats:

What is it like to have your work critiqued by others? A non-writing friend asked me that. I told her it felt like I was taking my clothes off.

Beware of those who offer advice on your writing, but they, themselves, don't bring anything to the group to be critiqued.

Beware of those who only tear down, but don't help you work out any problems and don't offer suggestions as to how to fix it.

The structure of a critique group:

The size has to be manageable—three to six writers is good. Perhaps not everyone brings something every time but they do most of the time.

Groups can meet every week, every other week, once a month, but no less. Meeting regularly keeps you on track, gives you a deadline to aim for.

If you have four or more members, set a time and day and place, say, every two weeks on Tuesday at Denny's. If a member can't make it, pages should be mailed to her so that she can give you feedback. but you'll find there are few absences. This is a highlight in our life. We are serious writ-

ers and want to be better—heck, we want to be published. And once published, we want to do it again and again.

Groups that form around specific genres, such as mystery, poetry or non-fiction, work best. If you are in a group that does everything from erotica to inspirational, giving a good critique out of your area of expertise can be difficult. Someone who is not familiar with the genre may not be helpful, and may even be harmful. For example, there's a significant difference between a romantic suspense novel for a romance line and a mystery story with a love interest. Both have their own unique guidelines. However, all genres rely on a good story with an interesting setting, vital characters and a logical and satisfying ending.

Ideally, each member of the group has pages to hand out and that's what the group critiques the next time. Hearing the material aloud is good, but you'll give—and get—better feedback reading it with red pen in hand, sprawled in a favorite reading chair ready to write a critique or make notes on the ms.

After a group has jelled, it's hard to bring in another person—the dynamics change. Even replacing a person who has left the group takes time for the group to regroup.

How you should act as the author:

While a member of the group is critiquing your work, you shut up, unless asked a question. You're not there to defend your work, you're there to make it better. You may not agree with what the person is saying, but listen to her anyhow. For example, she hated your cutesy little character dog, Buttons, and you thought he was so funny. Does he really add anything to the plot?

During the critique, I usually say, "Okay, I'll look at that." I make my notations on my copy, and I know the critiquer will give me his/her copy with notes on it.

Whatever you submit to the group, tell them where you are in the process—just did this last night, or it's my fourth draft and the best I can do.

How to be a good critique partner:

You should give the most honest evaluation that you can. Praise what you like, suggest changes where needed. Above all, don't impose your style

on someone else's work.

In my group, we take turns critiquing. When one person is through, then the next begins, and we usually don't interrupt each other. It should be a positive experience. I find it fun to explore possible scenarios, work out scenes for my work and for the others in the group.

Critiquing doesn't mean 'criticize.' It means 'critique'—that's positive and negative. Many experienced critiquers do a 'sandwich' First slice is overall praise at the beginning. The filling is the meat of the critique, including comments about words, descriptions, and similes liked. Then the last slice is more praise of the overall work.

Usually the critique is on plot and character inconsistencies. How was it possible for the character get from here to there? What was the character's motivation for doing a particular act? Are the character's actions inconsistent with her persona?

In revising, you can't change your story to meet everyone's suggestions, nor another's writing style. But if two people point out the same thing, pay attention. When I revise, I look at the same page each critiquer has given me, as well as my own notes to revise that page. Then I move on to the next page and repeat the process.

I love reading the pages from the writers in my critique group. It's a thrill to know the writer, a thrill to read a new story, and a thrill that they trust you with their newborn baby.

When it's time to change groups:

When mechanical errors like grammar and sentence structure occur on a regular basis in members' works.

When you progress as a writer, but the other members of the group don't.

When they treat it as a hobby or a social meeting, which is fine, but that's not what you are there for.

When you don't feel good afterwards about their suggestions.

When you dread going.

When you don't feel they are making you a better writer.

If any of the above occur, then it's time to move on.

So how did I solve the inner monologue problem

with Vinney? I can't claim brilliance. The answer is—with my critique partners.

They mentioned letter writing. Great idea. Then it dawned on me. In 1899, letter writing was almost an art form. So, from a castle on the California coast, Vinney wrote her thoughts, her emotions and her observations, to her best friend Phylidia, aka Phyl, now married and living in Burnley, England. What a radical change! It all poured out. I couldn't believe Vinney had all those feelings

about everything. I was surprised. On the surface, and in the castle, Vinney didn't show her emotions. But, wow, when she wrote to Phyl, the paper seared and the ink flowed. I learned things I didn't even know about her.

So partners in your story—and partners on your story—will make for a better story!

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Connubial Cop Stories

Jim Doherty

It's not all that surprising, really, that married couples who write mysteries often collaborate. Why shouldn't partners in life be partners in authorship? What *is* surprising is that married collaborators tend to write in a particular mystery sub-genre. It may be coincidence, or it may be something else, but a remarkably high percentage of husband/wife mystery teams specialize in police procedurals.

The trend goes all the way back to one of the earliest writing/marriage partnerships. Between 1923 and 1942, G.D.H. Cole and his wife, M.I. Cole, wrote more than twenty novels, plus two collections of short stories starring Detective Superintendent Henry Wilson, one of Scotland Yard's top men. Strictly speaking, the Wilson series wasn't really "procedural" in the sense that there was any real effort, or even any pretense, of technical accuracy in the presentation of police work. Still, Wilson was depicted as a plodding, if intelligent, officer, and the Wilson stories fell into a sort of "proto-procedural" type of cop story fairly common during crime fiction's "Golden Age," which Julian Symons dubbed the "humdrum" mystery. They were the vanguard of a general tendency to treat the enforcement of the law more realistically than was usually the case during this period.

The "humdrums" are usually identified with British writers, but on this side of the pond, another husband/wife team was producing American versions of the form. Frances and Richard Lockridge were best known for their series about Pam and Jerry North, the bright young married

couple with the unfortunate tendency to trip over bodies whose demise they had to explain. But the Norths were far from their only continuing character.

Their next most popular series detective was Captain Merton Heimrich of the New York State Police. Originally a lieutenant when he first appeared in the North mysteries *Murder Out of Turn* (Lippincott, 1941) and *Death of a Tall Man* (Lippincott, 1946), he'd been promoted to captain in his first solo appearance, *Think of Death* (Lippincott, 1947). He went on to star in more than twenty novels (some of which were written by Richard Lockridge alone following Frances's death), getting promoted to inspector and meeting, courting, and eventually marrying a pretty, young, suburban widow in the process.

The Lockridges also wrote novels about NYPD officers, some featuring Nathan Shapiro and others featuring Paul Lane (both of whom also turned up, in supporting roles, in books starring the Lockridges' non-cop series characters). As with the Coles, the Lockridges' cop stories were not designed, either in fact or in appearance, as rigorously authentic depictions of police work, but they did show their protagonists as plodding professionals rather than gifted amateurs who happened to pack badges.

While the Coles' Wilson mysteries and the Lockridges' Heimrich mysteries, without actually making any effort at technical accuracy, pointed the way to a more realistic kind of police story, the cop novels of Gordon and Mildred Gordon fully embraced the form that their predecessors only

suggested. There was a good reason for this. The male half of the team, Gordon Gordon, had practical professional experience as a law enforcement officer. During World War II he had spent three years as an FBI agent, assigned primarily to counterespionage duties in the Chicago field office. This experience stood the team in good stead when they decided to collaborate on a series of suspense novels. Mildred had already written one solo mystery, *The Little Man Who Wasn't There* (Doubleday, 1946). Four years later, with his Bureau career behind him, Gordon Gordon joined his wife on *FBI Story* (Doubleday, 1950), the first of five novels to feature Special Agent John "Rip" Ripley.

Aside from the Ripley series, the Gordons also wrote one stand-alone FBI novel, *Power Play* (Doubleday, 1965), and three novels featuring FBI agent Zeke Kelso, a feline-allergic G-Man repeatedly forced, in each appearance, to work with a temperamental cat named "D.C." The first book in this trilogy, *Undercover Cat* (Doubleday, 1963), was filmed twice by Walt Disney Studios as *That Darn Cat*.

In addition to their books about the FBI, the Gordons also wrote about local cops in books like the Edgar-nominated *The Case of the Talking Bug* (Doubleday, 1955), which examined the ethics of electronic surveillance, and *The Big Frame* (Doubleday, 1957); a state trooper assigned to protect a presidential candidate in *Campaign Train* (Doubleday, 1952); and Navajo Tribal Police in *Captive* (Doubleday, 1957) and *Ordeal* (Doubleday, 1976).

Like Mildred Gordon, Dolores Hitchens was married to a cop. And like Mildred Gordon, Dolores Hitchens was already established as a solo mystery writer before she collaborated with her husband, Southern Pacific Railroad Police Investigator Bert Hitchens. But unlike Mildred Gordon, whose solo mystery-writing career began and ended with a single novel, Dolores Hitchens was the author of more than thirty books, remarkable not only for their professional craftsmanship, but for their versatility. Her work ranged from Agatha Christie-like "cozies" (usually written under her maiden name of D.B. Olsen), to hard-boiled private eye novels (her two-book series about Long

Beach PI Jim Sader is considered by many to be one of the high points of this sub-genre).

In the mid-'50s, around the same time that Anthony Boucher first coined the term "police procedural" to describe the new kind of "semi-documentary" approach crime writers were taking in their fictional treatment of law enforcement, Mrs. Hitchens teamed up with her husband for a series of five novels detailing the activities of a squad of railroad policemen in Los Angeles. Interestingly, considering that the first book in the series, *FOB Murder* (Doubleday, 1955), appeared a year before Ed McBain's first 87th Precinct mystery, the Hitchenses did not use a single lead character in their books. Instead, the lead rotated from among the members of the squad. In other words, they actually created the concept of a "corporate" hero before Ed McBain did. And, in some respects, they were more successful at it. While McBain's books are called "87th Precinct Mysteries," one character, Detective Steve Carella, soon became, despite McBain's efforts, "first among equals," and has retained this position, for all practical purposes the "star" of the series, ever since. The Hitchenses, on the other hand, were actually able to rotate a completely different lead into each of their five railroad police procedurals, thus actually achieving the "ideal" of the corporate series hero that was McBain's original plan.

The team of married procedural novelists who have achieved the greatest worldwide success are probably the Swedish writers Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo. Unlike the Gordons or the Hitchenses, neither of the Wahloos had any practical experience in police work. They became interested in the form as a result of being hired to translate several of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct books into Swedish. Recognizing that the police procedural, by virtue of being the most naturalistic of mystery sub-genres, was potentially a great vehicle for social comment, the couple, both firmly committed Marxists, decided to write a series of Swedish-set cop novels that would allow them to expose, within the framework of crime fiction, the evils and hypocrisies of Western capitalist culture.

In this aim they were, in retrospect, unsuccessful. More than thirty years after *Roseanna* (Pantheon, 1967), their first novel about Stockholm