

## *The View from Undercover: Michael Dorto*

by Ellen Quint

Imagine working for seven years undercover in the scrap metal business, right in the heart of the Gambino crime family. That is exactly what Michael Dorto did.

Michael, now a detective with the NYPD Major Case Squad, was our guest speaker at the May 5th Sisters in Crime meeting. He began by sharing that he knew from the time he was six years old that he wanted to be a policeman. His father worked as a mechanic for the police department, which explains Michael's career interest—and his passion for all things related to cars.

It was his knowledge of cars, in fact, that made him a perfect candidate for this undercover assignment, where he first worked for three years alongside a confidential informant who ran a tow truck operation. They would pick up stolen automobiles from various garages after the cars had been stripped for parts. Once Michael established his credentials, the Organized Crime Control Bureau decided to kick things up a notch and set Michael up as the owner of his own pick-up and towing business in order to put the squeeze on the crime boss. Michael successfully managed this business with real employees until the crime boss threatened him and attempted to burn down his operation.

Michael described the heart-stopping moment when the crime boss first paid him a visit to let him know that he expected Michael and his operation to come in line with the "way things were done" in the Gambinos' territory.

Michael explained the pieces and players in an undercover operation:

- Actors: The detectives who actually take on identities and go undercover.
- Confidential informants: Players on the inside, who for various incentives provide information and connections for the undercover actors.
- Plants: The physical spaces set up to keep eyes on the undercover operation.
- Ghosts: The field team of plainclothes detectives who are close enough to provide back-up for the undercover actors.

Michael responded to questions and explained the logistics of working undercover. He said that you usually keep your own first name, which is easier for you, and if you run into anyone who knows the real you and calls you by your name, your cover won't be blown. So Michael Dorto became Michael Conti.

He explained that there is an operation within NYPD that provides undercover agents with a new identity backed by a passport, social security number, credit cards, and gym membership. Further, the undercovers are assigned an apartment that is secure, can be police monitored, and is appropriate for the undercover's new identity. While Michael Dorto lived in Staten Island, Michael Conti had an apartment in Queens.

As a result of Michael's undercover work, over 70 criminals have been prosecuted.

Michael shared his compelling story with us, answered our many questions, and—if that wasn't enough—when we were kicked out of the library meeting space, he joined us for dinner to continue answering our questions.

Over dinner, Michael had a chance to talk about his current work in the Major Case Squad. This division is assigned all bank robberies, kidnappings, art, and antiquities theft, commercial burglaries over a million dollars, and homicide or assaults on police officers. Michael brought along a die-pack of twenty-dollar bills that banks use to aid in tracking down bank robbers. He also shared with us copies of real notes that robbers pass to tellers. Michael explained that robbers tend to be repeat offenders who use the same language and syntax. Detectives can often identify the robbers through their notes.

The consensus was that Michael has many experiences to share, and due to time constraints he just touched the surface. We hope to bring him back in the future.



## Murder New York Style Anthology Update

We have a wonderful cover and are currently checking the galley for the new *Family Matters* anthology, coming out in e-book and print in time for September's Brooklyn Book Festival. The chapter's second anthology, *Fresh Slices*, will be re-released in e-book version only, and contracts are being sent to all the contributors now to allow us to do that. A smaller selection of stories from the out-of-print 2007 anthology are being collected (to-be contracted) constituting a brand new "first" e-book anthology at a shorter length and lower price—it'll now be called *Deadly Debut*. Thanks to the tremendous and exacting work of our Sister in Crime Lois Karlin of Glenmere Press, we will have coordinating illustrations and professional cover layouts for all the editions, so by September, our chapter will have three lovely titles in the Murder New York Style series available for sale!

-- Clare Toohey

# BLOODLETTER

by Cathi Stoler

Controlled chaos reigned when the doors swung open to the Haverford/Baccarat Ballroom in the Grand Hyatt Hotel, Bethesda, Maryland and over 150 attendees rushed in to be dazzled and swayed by the 40 authors of Malice-Go-Round. Or, at least we hoped so.

A tradition at the Malice Domestic conference, this event—think speed dating on steroids—gives participating authors a chance to present a 2 minute pitch for their latest work. And, while that might sound like a reasonable amount of time, it goes pretty fast. Authors move in pairs from table to table—20 in all—giving the capsule version of what their book is all about. Attendees take notes, eat the goodies authors offer, and ask questions if there's time, which there rarely is. It's a lot of information to give and to receive but a whole lot of fun. Photos provided by Robin Templeton.

Authors are chosen by lottery since there are many more authors than the 40 slots available. This year, I was lucky to be chosen and to pair up with a great partner, Jessie Chandler, the writer of the Shay O'Hanlon Caper Series. We alternated playing Vanna White, holding up each other's books—*Pickle in The Middle Murder* and *Chip Off The Ice Block Murder* for Jessie and *The Hard Way* and *Nick of Time* for me—so everyone could get a good look. At the end of an hour and a half, voices were hoarse but spirits were high and it seemed a good time was had by all. Below are Cathi Stoler and Jessie Chandler.



## Malice-Go-Round



### Publishing News & Notes

**Chapter** members Hilary Davidson and Terrie Farley Moran are proud to have stories included a new anthology *The Lizard's Ardent Uniform & Other Stories*, which has been compiled in honor of a talented young poet, Kyle J. Knapp, who was killed in a tragic accident in 2013. Hilary's story is "The Debt" and Terrie wrote "Dust to Dust." BEAT to a PULP will release the anthology in early summer 2014.



**Some** writers will kill to get published! KILLERFEST, a short story by Mary Moreno, is now an ebook for Amazon's Kindle. The first in a series of novellas, it takes place at a crime writer's conference where a serial killer is on the loose and authors are turning up dead. KILLERFEST is a humorous look at the challenges of the writing life.



**Hilary** Davidson is delighted to announce that her first stand-alone suspense novel, *Blood Always Tells* from Forge is out now.



**Terrie** Farley Moran is looking forward to the August 2014 release of her first-in-a-series cozy mystery, *Well Read, Then Dead*. The publisher is Berkley Prime Crime.



**Leigh** Neely happily announces the single-title release of WITCH'S AWAKENING by Neely Powell. This is the first book of The Connelly Witches series from Harlequin E and will be followed by the release of WITCH'S HAUNTING in the fall.

## Learning About TSA Security

Who knew that a passion for video games could lead to a solid job—and a socially useful one at that? According to Paul Stoler, Senior Expert Security Training Instructor with the Transportation Security Administration, most TSA trainees are young and lack a college education—but playing video games proved to be an excellent qualification.

Paul spoke to Sisters in Crime NY/TriState March 19. The timing was appropriate, since the mystery of what happened to Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 was still monopolizing the headlines. Paul insisted he had no inside track to solving the mystery, but he confirmed evidence points to the pilot or co-pilot. Since 9-11 cockpit doors are heavily reinforced, so it's unlikely anyone else entered and tampered with instruments.

Paul started as a screener and was soon asked to work with first-class passengers. One thing led to another, and at this point he has trained almost every screener working at JFK. He began with a survey of incidents that led to increased focus on airline security: the hijacking of Southern Airways Flight 49 to Cuba in 1972; the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 and its crash in Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988; Ramzi Yousef and the Bojinka plot; and Richard Reid, the would-be shoe-bomber. The trend has been toward devising explosives that can be assembled on the plane out of seemingly innocuous materials—thus TSA scanners must look carefully at everything passengers bring aboard. Laptops can be part of an improvised explosive device, but unless they are accompanied by suspicious things like organic matter, they are not cause for extra questioning. Agents are rewarded when they find something suspicious, so motivation to be alert is high—not to mention that an oversight can result in disaster.

In discussing Richard Reid, the would-be shoe-bomber, Paul described how a terrorist cell functions. Each cell focuses on one aspect of a plot and contains a limited number of people, so if one cell is infiltrated the whole plot will not be discovered.



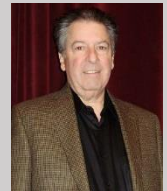
A cell also enables a division of labor that draws on the various abilities of the members. For example, someone a great deal smarter than Richard Reid devised the shoe bomb stratagem. Richard Reid's task was simply to carry it out (and he failed). In order to devise new terrorist strategies, a cell might probe the TSA's screening procedure for weaknesses, experimenting with attempts to get various objects and substances through the screening.

Paul also talked about expedited screening programs, such as Global Entry and TSA's pre-check program. And why are travelers sometimes directed to lines in which they don't have to remove their shoes or display their carry-on liquids? Agents watch for body language that signals a traveler poses no threat. On the other hand, a traveler who is nervous—even for a reason totally unrelated to airline security—might be singled out for an intensive search and pat-down.

International travelers must book flights at least 72 hours in advance, and the reservation form asks for the passport number. Thus the passport can be checked, and a stolen passport will be flagged. Most countries subscribe to this procedure but Malaysia does not, which is how the two passengers with stolen passports ended up on Flight 370.

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***Paul Stoler  
Senior Expert Training  
Instruction***



Everyone is familiar with the screening of carry-on luggage, but checked luggage is also screened, using a CATSCAN process. If anything looks suspicious, the luggage is opened and inspected. Unfortunately the CATSCAN image of something as innocuous as peanut butter can look like a dangerous explosive. But once verified as peanut butter, it is returned to the bag. When a checked bag is opened for inspection, the TSA inserts a printed notice—which Paul referred to as a “love note”—informing the traveler that the bag has been inspected. Travelers can carry even fearsome objects like guns and knives in checked luggage since they won't have access to them during the flight. The only concern with checked luggage is that it might contain an explosive device.

Paul ended his talk on a lighter note, describing amusing things he's encountered while screening, notably a giant melon leaking juices, and a remarkable sex toy—much to the chagrin of the bags' owners.

# BLOODLETTER

## Message from the President

As I write this, Sisters in Crime NY/Tri-State is looking forward to its last two events of the 2013-2014 year. On June 7, we sponsor a full-day writing workshop led by Donald Maass. Donald is a very busy New York literary agent and the author of a number of books on the craft of writing, including *Writing the Breakout Novel*, a theme that will also be the focus of the workshop. A huge thank-you goes out to Catherine Maiorisi for organizing this event. On June 24, we hold our annual end-of-year party. Once again the venue will be Cowgirl restaurant in the Village, where we'll commandeer the party room and give members a chance to relax and catch up with each other.

These two events represent two valuable dimensions of Sisters in Crime—activities that help us develop as writers and activities that give us the pleasure of meeting and mingling with like-minded women (and men). Both seem equally important to me.

After the party, we'll break for July and August. Then the 2014-2015 year kicks off with our first meeting on September 17 and the Brooklyn Book Festival the following Sunday. As usual, we'll have a Sisters in Crime NY/Tri-State booth, and this year the festival will see the launch of our third Murder New York Style anthology: *Family Matters*. The anthologies represent another valuable dimension of our group, the chance to develop skills in the short-story genre and, in some cases, a first opportunity to see one's name in print.

In all, it's been a busy and productive year. I hope to see you at the workshop and party, and I wish everyone a wonderful summer!



Peggy Ehrhart

## Ezines Unplugged

At the April 16 meeting of Sisters in Crime NY/Tri-State, Program Chair Susan Chalfin moderated a panel of ezine editors: Joe DeMarco from *Mysterical-e*, Todd Robinson from *Thuglit*, and Jack Getze from *Spinetingler*.

An ezine—the word is from “electronic magazine”—is an online version of a traditional magazine. The mystery genre has given rise to many of them, beginning with a great surge in 2006. Since there are few print venues for short fiction these days, the ezine has become a significant venue for mystery writers, both new and established, seeking outlets for short stories. All three editors feel a mission to find new writers. A number of writers, notably our own Hilary Davidson, have been “discovered” by agents who first read their work in ezines. Hilary's stories in *Thuglit* led to her current book contract.

Joe DeMarco's *Mysterical-e* publishes quarterly and includes mystery fiction, reviews, columns, and interviews. In fact, Joe is currently looking for columnists. He publishes stories that range from 500 to 5000 words, and if he really likes a longer story, he'll publish it in installments.

Todd Robinson's *Thuglit* publishes only fiction, eight stories every two months. Todd prefers stories between 3000 and 6000 words. Writers are paid \$25 per story plus a percent of sales. *Thuglit* appeared online from 2005 to 2010, then came back two years ago in both Kindle and print editions, with a charge of \$.99 for the Kindle version and \$5.99 for print, which is POD. *Thuglit* also brings out “Best of” anthologies, published by Kensington.

Jack Getze at *Spinetingler* publishes fiction in a wide variety of subgenres—mystery, horror, even science fiction—as well as reviews. *Spinetingler* doesn't publish separate issues but is constantly posting new material. Jack prefers stories to be under 5,000 words, though he's currently serializing a 15,000-word story. Writers are paid \$25 per story.

As is the case with print publications, an editor's job includes the nitty gritty tasks of line editing and copy-editing. Rather than completely rework a submission, Joe prefers to return it to the writer with suggestions and an invitation to resubmit. Todd has no time for heavy editing but acknowledges that, since people now pay to read *Thuglit*, they deserve a product that's relatively free of typos. When it comes to line-editing, Jack prefers to let writers tell their stories their way as long as things are clear, but he will ask a writer to revise the ending if he feels the ending needs more punch—readers expect a reward at the end of a story.

All three editors urged writers to check their ezines' websites for submission guidelines and to follow the guidelines carefully when submitting.

<http://www.spinetinglermag.com/>

<http://thuglit.com/>

<http://mysterical.com/>

