

everyone had been a victim of crime or knew someone who was a victim of a crime. Such is the world we live in.

My wife, on the other hand, wondered “why us?” She had always been careful about leaving lights on; of making sure the house looked occupied. So why did the thief pick our home? Had he been watching us? Did he see us drive off that evening? Now that he knew the house, would he return for those valuables he missed?

The police behaved professionally (taking fingerprints and such) and so did our insurance company. I have no complaints, except — the girlfriend of one of the guys I play hockey with suggested that we got what we deserved because I write books that treat crime as entertainment. She accused me of promoting crime by making it look fun.

I did not take offense. The truth is — the woman was right. Crime fiction is entertainment. I don’t believe we actually promote crime by writing about it, but yeah, sometimes we do make it seem like fun. But that’s the point. It’s fiction. Hell, it’s fantasy. That’s because in most PI novels the good guys always prevail, the bad guys get their comeuppance, and the victims — and our readers — receive a satisfying

conclusion.

In real life this rarely happens. Even people such as my wife and me, who can easily absorb the loss, are left with a sense of vulnerability. When we leave the house now, Renée still wonders if our stuff will be there when we return.

And this is nothing! compared to the anguish of those who have lost their bank accounts, their homes, their identities — or the pain and suffering victims of violent attacks and their loved ones must feel every single day.

Authors try to write honestly. Certainly Lehane does. We try to reveal the truths that reality obscures. But let’s face it, in detective fiction we also get to do something that actual victims of crime seldom have the opportunity to do.

We get to write “The End.”

And that’s what I strive for in my McKenzies. I want to give readers a happy ending.

A past President of the Private Eye Writers of America, David Housewright has published 23 novels including 16 featuring unlicensed PI Rushmore McKenzie (*Dead Man’s Mistress*, *St. Martin’s Minotaur*). He has won an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America and three Minnesota Book Awards.

wished I could tell her so.

The light changed and I drove onto the freeway. For the next hour and a half on my drive to Los Angeles, I thought about her. She was definitely the heroine of a story. What was her story? I’d love to sit down and talk with her, ask her questions — how did you lose your legs, are you okay now, having therapy mentally and physically, what kind of prosthetics are they, how are they connected to you, are they computerized — in essence tell me everything.

Always in the back of my mind is advice that Tim Wohlforth gave at a short story panel during

a conference. In the news had been a report of two women who lived in Long Beach, California, and went to Carmel, where they were found in their hotel room — dead — with plastic bags over their heads and masks on their faces. That raised a lot of questions, but Tim said we’re writers, we should be making up the rest of the story, not finding out what it is, because then the story we would have made up is gone. I found that to be true — and good advice.

So I made up a story about her that answered all my questions. One of my resources was Andrew McAleer, who is knowledgeable about military affairs and gave me the exact information about what could have happened to a soldier in Afghanistan.

All of this was timely because Sisters in Crime Los Angeles had a call out for submission for its new anthology, *Last Exit to Murder*. That gave me a location — a freeway exit near LAX. I drove around the area to find the perfect location — a motel. The title of my story was “Motel LA.” My heroine grew up there as her parents owned it, now she was back home, working part-time in the office as she tried to find out what her life was to be without legs. She told me she had been christened Charlotte after some relative, but she wanted to be called Char.

I did research on prosthetics, watching a YouTube video about a woman putting them on. I also contacted a company that made them, but the company refused to give me an interview. There’s a story there. I was miffed, and thought briefly about revenge. Usually people are very helpful. That influenced the story, as I didn’t go into the mechanics of the prosthetics. And it turned out to be a good thing, because the field was changing moment to moment with the advancement in computerization. My facts would have been outdated as I printed the story out. I crossed ‘revenge’ off my To-Do list — the company had done me a favor.

Usually I write in the first person, but I could

not presume to be in Char’s head. I had to write in third person about what I observed, how she acted and what she told me.

An accolade to Dr. D.P. Lyle: In one of his posts he mentioned a mental condition of those who want their healthy limbs amputated. I had to read about that, and in doing research, I found another fact that I used. It has to do with people who are attracted to amputees — in an unhealthy way — something I knew nothing about, nor even guessed that such an aberration existed.

I also had to do research on the dog. I read books, went to pet stores, and watched two YouTube videos. I tried to contact Old English Sheepdog organizations — no luck there. I wanted to touch the hair to see how it felt. During this time we went on a trip to England. As we were walking along a canal I saw the dog I had been looking for — an OES. I asked the couple who were walking it if I could pet it and told them I was writing a story about the breed. They looked a little dazed. I wondered how crazy I sounded and looked. The dog was a teenager and quite stoic about having its thick hair poked and touched. Serendipity!

I submitted the story, but it didn’t make the cut. Char, however, stayed with me and told me about the cases she was working on and how she solved them. She had been an MPI, a Military Police Investigator, so segueing into getting her PI license was a natural. She had a good support system — a neighbor, and a police officer, both of whom she had known in high school. The police officer had a friend who owned a PI Agency and he offered Char a job.

I had no plans of writing a series of stories about Char, and never would have thought of the character, if I hadn’t seen that women in Ventura.

In another touch of fate, I was back in Ventura a few months later after having written the story. I saw her in the hotel lobby. I wanted to run up to her and gush about the fact that I had written

a story about her. She was attending an Army job fair that was only for veterans — which meant she had been in the Army, and what Andrew told me and what I wrote was most likely the reality — blown up by an roadside bomb, an IED.

I did talk to her and told I'd seen her a few months ago with her dog, and asked about the dog. She told me about it and that was the end of our conversation. The line she was in moved up. A young man was with her, I'd like to think he was her boyfriend. She was beautiful with long blonde hair, taller than me, so about 5'8". I was bursting with questions still — but I had to answer them myself. I was thrilled to be able to

## You Want Your PIs Hard, Soft, or Medium-Boiled? (With a Side of Procedural) by B.V. Lawson

My librarian mother was a devoted mystery fan and got me addicted as a young child. Her tastes ran to the Golden Age and similar styles — Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy L Sayer, Georgette Heyer, Ellery Queen — so naturally, I devoured those as fast as I could.

But I soon branched out with an increasingly diverse diet, including the more hard-boiled tastes of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. From there, it was on to procedurals, psychological thrillers, courtroom dramas, and a little bit of everything in-between. Still, I always seemed to gravitate back toward private investigators. That is what I decided I wanted to write.

However, this left me with another dilemma when it came time to write my own private eye series: which type? Hard, soft, or medium-boiled? They all had their unique fascination to me. How could a literary omnivore possibly decide which course to take first? Especially since I might be living with my choice for several books and many years down the road.

This is, of course, the same question that

talk with her for just those few minutes.

Six stories later, Char decided to let me go, living her life which she's happy with now. The six stories were published individually on Kindle, and as a collection in *Stand Down Mystery Stories*.

Gay Toltl Kinman contributes the "Children's Hour" column for *Mystery Readers Journal*, has written a few books, a few short stories, a few children's books and stories, and several travel diaries. Kinman is the Chair of the Shamus Awards for the Private Eye Writers of America. <http://www.gaykinman.com>.

haunts all crime writers when choosing a protagonist and a subgenre. The determining factors vary, according to an individual author's background and tastes, that culminate ultimately not only in genre choice but authorial voice.

However, in my case it came down to one thing: music. As a classically-trained musician (including piano), I thought it would be interesting to see if there had been any detectives who were also classical musicians. My research turned up many jazz and rock music angles, but few in the classical realm.

That was the first piece of the puzzle, then, and Scott Drayco, the former concert pianist, was born. But again, my omnivore palette stepped in and left me with the question of how such a character could fit into a crime fiction format and how "boiled" should he be?

My solution involved combining my various interests into a multi-layered approach that I call a "private eye procedural": a man forced to give up his musical career after a violent incident and the resulting life-changing injury. A man who then turns to the only other life he knew, the

path taken by his father, an FBI agent-turned-private-consultant to law enforcement agencies.

In this way, Scott Drayco provides an intriguing path toward melding and exploring several facets of crime fiction in one series. He has the freedom of a private eye, who isn't as beholden to bureaucracy and paperwork; yet there are also police procedural elements from his working side-by-side with FBI agents and other law enforcement officers.

He lives in the metropolitan District of Columbia but also winds up spending a lot of time in a small coastal town, Cape Unity, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, thanks to an unusual bequest by a grateful client that brings him back there from time to time. This also provides the chance to explore more than one locale, from the urban to the rural. Again, different types of sleuthing fodder for an author with eclectic tastes.

Is this trying be all things to all people? Not really. I've often been told a varied diet is the healthiest, and I suspect it might apply to writing, too — although the dietary comparison can't be taken into Scott Drayco's own habits, since he is the world's lousiest cook. He *does* experience life in another way that is varied and unusual; he was born with a form of synesthesia, called chromesthesia, in which he experiences all sounds (music, voices, noises) not only as ordinary sound but also as a unique combination of colors, textures, and shapes. His own smorgasbord of reality.

He is quick to point out this doesn't make him a "super detective." Yet, it does literally color his outlook on life, people, and relationships, and in the third book in the series, *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath), synesthesia even becomes a central focus

of the plot.

Drayco is also brilliant, with a Ph.D. in Criminology & Criminal Justice, but he isn't afraid to use his FBI marksman talents or a little Krav Maga when necessary. Yet it's often a return to his first love, music, that gives him the greatest insight into his investigations, using Bach's counterpoint to help puzzle through the toughest cases.

It is the "wounded musician" lying just beneath the surface of Drayco's psyche that ultimately drives him to seek some justice and find some solace in bringing closure to others in a way he'll never have. His glass is neither half-empty nor half-full, his subsistence coming from a dogged devotion to the truth, wherever it may lead.

As I plan my path forward in the Scott Drayco series, I also feel a sense of satisfaction in pursuing my own literary truth — that the degree of how "boiled" this detective may be doesn't really matter as long as I remain true to the character. After all, if an author is the sum total of everything she has ever read, then Scott Drayco will always be well-nourished from the books my mother gave me and from every book since.

Since all this "food" talk is making me hungry, perhaps I'll make one of Scott Drayco's favorite three-ingredient meals: a Fluffernutter sandwich. And maybe one day, he'll actually learn how to cook.

B.V. Lawson's Scott Drayco books have won Best Mystery in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards and were also finalists for the Shamus, Silver Falchion, and Daphne Awards. Scott Drayco's next outing is in *The Suicide Sonata*. For more info, visit [www.bvlawson.com](http://www.bvlawson.com).

## The Mysterious Heart of the PI by Chris Knopf

Carpenter, ex-boxer, ex-corporate hot shot, Sam Acquillo, only became an official PI in the most

recent books, editions eight and nine. Until this change, I'd always preferred my sleuths to be