

**Sisters
in
Crime**



Heart of Texas
Chapter
www.HoTXSinC.org

HOTSHOTS!
March 2009

2009 Officers

President

Sylvia Dickey Smith
sds@suddenlink.net

Vice President/President-elect

David Ciabrone, Sc.D.,
FIOF
mysterywriter5@msn.com

Treasurer/Membership

Sarah Ann Robertson
hotxsinc@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor

Micqui Miller
micquim@yahoo.com

Publicity Chair

Joyce Arquette
JArquette@austin.rr.com

Historian

Betsy Tyson
betsy.tyson@sbcglobal.net

Library Coordinator

Jennifer Old
jsmooth@austin.rr.com

Webmaven

Linda Bingham
linda@macrogirl.com

Sisters in Crime is an international organization of women and men whose purpose is to promote mysteries written by women and to combat discrimination against them. Speakers include published mystery authors and technical experts who help writers craft better mysteries, and readers enjoy what they read. Meetings are free and open to all.

For more information, check out the Sisters in Crime website at www.hotxsinc.org

Sunday, March 8, 2009
2:00 p.m.

Author and HoTXSinC member

Vallie Fletcher Taylor

presents

Putting the Paranormal In Your Mysteries

Westlake Barnes & Noble bookstore
located in The Village at Westlake shopping center
at the southeast corner of Loop 360 and Bee Cave Road
512.328.3155



Val Taylor has been comfortable with what other people call the paranormal all of her life. After a Near Death Experience at age two (and another at 39) she was gifted with psychic insights which she assumed everyone had.

Careers in business, teaching, journalism, research and writing have given Taylor ample opportunity to use her psychic ability combined with every day common sense. Ms. Taylor has

traveled as a featured speaker for annual conventions of the International Association of Near Death Studies, an organization formed so that physicians, scientists and medical personnel can better understand the process and after effects of the Near Death Experience. She has spoken at M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital in Houston on "Early Childhood NDEs."

"I look forward to reconnecting with the Sisters in Crime members," Taylor continues, "and hope to leave behind some ideas for incorporating paranormal events in future plots. I'll leave time to answer specific questions at the end of my talk and be available to hold the hand of each skeptic I frighten."

This meeting is free and open to anyone who enjoys writing or reading Mystery or True Crime.



News and Announcements

Out and About with HoTXSnC authors ...

David Ciambrone, Sc.D., FIOF will be appearing and signing at the following events. If you're in the area, please stop by and say hello!

March 28 - 4:00 p.m. - *Murder by the Book*,
Houston

April 14 - Presentation to the *Dallas Area Writers Group* - Cedar Hill

May 1 - 4:00 p.m. - Presentation as part of the *Georgetown Library Author Series*

June 20 - *Hard Boiled Heros and Cozy Cats Mystery Conference*, Dallas

Monday, March 2 - 7:35 a.m. -

Weslynn McCallister, writing as **Jamie Cortland**, will be interviewed by **Larry Whitler**, on radio station **WOCA AM**, Ocala FL. This will be a 15-minute live interview before a listening audience in Ocala, Gainesville, Palatka and the outer perimeter of Orlando areas.

Saturday, March 21 - 3:00 pm. - **Micqui Miller** and **Sylvia Dickey Smith** will speak to the Mystery Readers group at the *Hill Country Book Store*, Georgetown, about the HoTXSnC Chapter.

New for your bookshelves from HoTXSinC authors ...

Dave Ciambrone scores another hit!

HoTXSinC Chapter Vice President and 2008 Sage Award recipient, **Dave Ciambrone**, is pleased to announce the release of his latest novel, *San Gabriel's Secret*, published by **LL Dreamspell** and released January 2009.



See Page 12, for more information about *San Gabriel's Secret*.

L. C. Hayden's *Why Casey Had To Die* re-released by Harlequin/World Wide

Harlequin/Worldwide Mystery and HoTXSnC



member **L. C. Hayden** are pleased to announce the release of the paperback edition of *Why Casey Had to Die*, an Agatha Finalist for Best Novel and a Pennsylvania Top 40 Pick. Books are available through the author's website at www.lchayden.com.

Scroll down past the paragraph and click on the cover. That will take you to Harlequin.

See Page 12, for more information about *Why Casey Had to Die*.

Pickles and sequels from Sylvia Dickey Smith

Sylvia Dickey Smith is pleased to announce her third book in the *Sidra Smart* mysteries, *Dead Wreckoning*, launches April 1, 2009.

As a part of the launch, Sylvia is introducing Sidra Smart's brand new **Sassy Pickles**. In *Dead Wreckoning*, Sidra decides she wants to launch her own brand of pickles along with solving crimes. Jars of these pickles will be available for purchase at select book signings.



With the launch of Book 3, Sylvia is also launching a recipe contest. The winning recipes to be included in Book 4, due out next year. Submissions may be sent to sylvia@sylviadickeysmyth.com.

Plus, the first place winner will receive a free copy of Book 4. Get those submissions in!

Please see Page 12, for more information about *Dead Wreckoning*

News & Announcements (Continued from Page 2)

Available from the HoTXSinC Library

By Jennifer Old, Librarian

We have the following reference items in our library:

- **Readers Digest Illustrated Reverse Dictionary**
- **Smaller Slang Dictionary** by Eric Partridge
- **A Writer's Time: A Guide to the Creative Process, from Vision through Revision** by Kenneth Atchity
- **20 ??? Questions???: Answers for the Inquiring Writer** regarding agents, royalties, copyrights, and contracts by Clay Reynolds
- **Creating Characters: How to Build Story People** by Dwight V. Swain
- **How to Enjoy Writing: A Book of Aid and Comfort** by Janet and Isaac Asimov
- **Pinckert's Practical Grammar: A Lively, Unintimidating Guide to Usage, Punctuation, and Style** by Robert C. Pinckert
- **The Elements of Style** by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White
- **Getting the Words Right: How to Revise, Edit and Rewrite** by Theodore A. Rees Cheney
- **No Plot? No Problem: A Low-Stress, High-Velocity Guide to Writing a Novel In 30 Days** by Chris Baty
- **How to Write Best Selling Fiction: Discover the keys to success in today's market for novels** by Dean R. Koontz
- **Spider, Spin Me a Web: A Handbook for Fiction Writers** by Lawrence Block
- **Furniture Treasury** by Wallace Nutting

- **First Thought Best Thought: Essential Insights for Writers and Poets**, a collection of CDs featuring William S. Burroughs, Eiane Di Prima, Allen Ginsberg, and Anne Waldman
- **Galveston, Island of Chance** by Frank E. Chalfant
- **The Book of Texas Days (Texas history during the 1800s and early 1900s)** by Ron Stone

Our fiction selections include:

- ◆ *Triple Jeopardy* by Roger Parloff (2 copies)
- ◆ (The Biography of) *Dashiell Hammett* by Julian Symons
- ◆ *Song of the Bones* by M. K. Preston
- ◆ *Sunshine* by Robin McKinley
- ◆ *Morning Star* by Micqui Miller
- ◆ *Holly in the Morning* by Micqui Miller
- ◆ *Sweet Caroline* by Micqui Miller
- ◆ *The Knife Struck Four* by Patsy Ward Burk
- ◆ *Cut and Run* by Jeff Abbott
- ◆ *Airframe* by Michael Crichton

You can arrange to check out a selection by contacting Jennifer Old, at 512.295.6062. She will bring your book or CD to the next meeting.

Round Rock New Neighbors Book Discussion Group

Monday, March 16 - 1:00 p.m. - The Round Rock New Neighbors Book Discussion Group will discuss *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie at their next meeting. The group will meet at Barnes & Noble Round Rock. The store is located in the La Frontera Village at the intersection of IH-35 and SH-45. *This event is free and open to the public.*

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Texas Mystery Month

The purpose of Texas Mystery Month, held each May, is to spotlight Texas Mystery Authors. As a community service event, all Texas Mystery Authors are invited to participate and do not have to be members of Sisters in Crime.

Activities include presentations, signings, radio interviews, workshops, the occasional cocktail party and The Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Project. Meetings of the Texas Mystery Month Committee normally take place once a month at a place mutually agreed upon.

Texas Mystery Month Volunteer Opportunities

Opportunities abound for Chapter members who would like to become involved in this exciting annual celebration.

Author Committee:

- * Updates list of Texas Mystery Authors
- * Contacts Texas Mystery Authors and invites them to participate
- * Helps match authors with venues

Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Project

- * Updates contact list for soliciting entries
- * Invites Aspiring Mystery Writers to participate
- * Recruits Mentor Authors
- * Helps match Aspiring Mystery Writers and Mentor Authors
- * Helps plan Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event on May 17, 2009

Bookstore/Venue Committee

- * Updates list of bookstores and other venues
- * Contacts bookstores/venues for participation
- * Helps match authors and bookstores/venues

Publicity Committee

- * Updates lists of contacts
- * Develops new sources
- * Prepares and sends News Releases
- * Keeps website updated
- * Keeps newsletter updated

Events Committee

- * Contacts previous Local Event Coordinators
- * Provides support for local events

The Fifth Annual Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event

Aspiring Writers of Cozies, Thrillers, True Crime, and other Mystery Genres are welcome to submit the first 500 words and a one-page synopsis of an unpublished manuscript to the **Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event**. This is not a contest. There is no judging and no fee. It is a wonderful opportunity for writers unpublished in the mystery field to get to talk to and be mentored by published authors.

The first six aspiring writers will be chosen and matched with published mentors. The mentoring will culminate in the Fifth Annual Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event (BBSAWE) to be held at the Barnes & Noble Westlake (701 Capital of Texas Highway South, at Bee Caves Rd., in Austin) on Sunday, May 17, when aspiring writers will meet with their mentors for in-person discussions about their submission or the publishing industry. The aspiring writers and their mentors will also be recognized at the BBSAWE.

For detailed submission information, visit:

<http://www.hotxsinc.org>.

Attention published mystery authors:

This year Micqui Miller will be coordinating matching Mentoring Authors with Aspiring Writers. If you are a published mystery author, please consider participating in this fun event.

What's in it for you? The joy and satisfaction of meeting a new person and forming a lasting friendship; taking the lead in discovering new talent; and a special place among your peers for ensuring the continued growth and appreciation of the Mystery Genre.

If you are interested in participating as a Mentoring Author--or know a published Mystery author who may wish to participate, please contact Micqui directly at micquim@earthlink.net.

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What you missed ...

... if you didn't attend the February meeting: a terrific, unforgettable presentation by renowned forensic artist Lois Gibson.

Lois is one of a handful of forensic artists working full time at their profession and who are recognized by law enforcement. She emphatically states that most professional forensic artists still struggle for acceptance of their unique talents.

Through her skills and gift, she has helped law enforcement bring thousands of perpetrators to justice. She is equal parts artist, spiritualist, psychic, and scientist, a woman who came to the profession because she was sexually assaulted, and later, stood as an accidental bystander when her rapist was arrested.

Lois has a eclectic style, a flair for drama, and wonderful presentation skills that riveted attendees and focused new light on the incredible crime-solving technique of forensic arts.



Photos by Micqui Miller

Upcoming Chapter Programs

April 12 - Author Micqui Miller will lead a panel discussion on e-books: *Go Green! Read (or Write) an eMystery and Save a Tree!*

June 14 - P. J. Nunn, founder of **Breakthrough Promotions**, will present a program on **What You Don't Know About Book Promotion.**

July 12 - T. B. A.

2009 Texas Mystery Month

May 10 - Award-winning Mystery Author L. C. Hayden

May 17 - Barbara Burnett Smith
Aspiring Writers Event

August 9 - Chapter Indoor Picnic/Potluck - Presentation by **David Heavener**, Actor, Teacher, Filmmaker, Singer and Songwriter.

Vallie Fletcher Taylor

March 2009 Spotlight Member

Vallie Fletcher Taylor is definitely one of the most fascinating people we'll ever meet. Those of us who attended last year's Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event witnessed first hand her sense of humor and her wonderful presentation skills. Vallie, like last month's Spotlight Member Weslynn McCallister, is a charming, lovely woman, who also graciously served as a Mentoring Author. She will speak to our chapter this month about including paranormal aspects in mysteries. As you'll see, there's no one better qualified!

MM: *Paranormal fiction is extremely popular. However, many authors know little more about the paranormal than what they've read or seen on television and in the movies. You, on the other hand, have experienced paranormal events since childhood. Would you share with our members how you first became aware of your gifts and what they meant?*

VFT: I imagine the Near Death Experience I survived at age two enlarged upon my psychic ability. (I'll be talking about "shared after-effects" of NDE survivors at the meeting). At such a young age, I did not realize that everyone else did not have the same abilities I did. My mother was totally mystified by some of the things I talked about and tried to correct what she considered my misconceptions. Like most small children who find themselves in this position, as I grew I learned to keep certain things to myself.

MM: *You were named a "A Visionary" by the Brain-Mind Institute of Los Angeles in 1989. Please tell us about the Brain-Mind Institute and how this honor was bestowed?*

VFT: In the 1980s, this organization was headed by author Marilyn Ferguson whose book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* was considered a New Age classic. I met Marilyn at a national publisher's convention in Washington D.C. where she was the keynote speaker. She and I spent a lot of time together and she asked my permission to involve me in a series of tests the institute was then conducting. The purpose of all the testing was to come up with a "Visionary Profile."

Those involved were given all kinds of standardized exams like one would expect to take in college. Then, we were subjected to a wide spectrum of alternative evaluations such as astrological charts, palmistry, phrenology, speaking while looking into a camera that kept

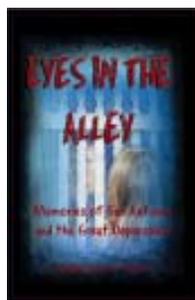
getting closer until it was literally touching our noses, etc. This part of the testing was a lot of fun because we never knew what to expect next. Marilyn used people she considered the best in the nation to conduct these tests. One had to be extraordinarily flexible during this process and some individuals became fearful and left the program. The institute changed names about the time I moved away from Austin in 1990 and I lost track of what was going on.

MM: *You have written, taught and lectured about Near Death Experiences (NDEs). My mother believed she had an NDE at sixteen, during a very grave illness. She was a pragmatist to her soul and never revealed this until her late sixties. Is that typical of Experiencers?*

VFT: Yes, I've had two NDE's...the one I mentioned above and another during emergency surgery at age 39. No matter how young a child is when she/he survives a NDE, the memory is always as if it happened yesterday. It is totally life-changing and many people don't tell others for fear of being considered crazy. It is also a very beautiful and emotional memory. It takes a very long time before most survivors can talk about it without breaking into tears.

MM: *Your memoir, Eyes of the Alley, was scheduled for release in August 2008. Will you tell us about it.*

VFT: *Eyes in the Alley* is both history and autobiography. During the years I taught history, I found life during the Depression of the 1930s was remembered and judged by two photos. One was of men standing in line for a bowl of charity soup in the North East. The other was a miserable looking family standing in a barren field



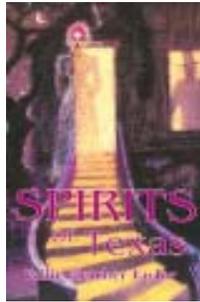
Spotlight Member - (Continued from Page 6)

in the Midwest dust bowl area. I saw those pictures as a child in the newspaper...and I see them today on television.

Living as a child during the 1930s and World War II was most decidedly very different than the lives we live today. *Eyes in the Alley* points out these differences with a sense of humor and a series of vignettes from my life.

MM: *You also wrote Spirits of Texas, a collection of true Texas hauntings. Will you tell us about Spirits and your inspiration to write it?*

VFT: After I left Austin and moved into the North-Central Hill Country, I was asked to write a ghost story for a newspaper in this area. Being both a former journalist and a former history teacher, I did a lot of historical research in order to have an accurate setting for my fictional tale.



When my story was published, a very large number of readers totally believed it. They would even argue with me that it was true! I was shocked and assumed that working in my carefully researched facts must have convinced them. I finally got the idea, "If these folks want real ghost stories that badly, I'll just go find some."

This occurred about the time that *Rebel Private: Front and Rear* was published by Dutton. Newspapers and periodicals carried stories about me in connection with that book and some mentioned that I was in the process of researching ghost stories. I began receiving phone calls and letters from all over the U.S. and a few from overseas. That's when, because of time and financial constraints, I decided to limit my tales to those with settings within the borders of our state.

Nine and a half years of research followed during which time I had some of my own ghostly visits while on site. I would only write about events where I could stay at the haunted location myself and do first person interviews with everyone involved with the ghost(s). Looking back at the people I met during this research, I realized that individuals who "live with ghosts" share many characteristics with survivors of NDEs. I identified 12 of these and spoke about them at Seattle Pacific University to a convention of the International Association of Near Death Studies. I assume the connection here is a certain closeness with spirit beings.

MM: *Do you write fiction? If so, in which genres do you work?*

VFT: Yes, I also write fiction and short stories. I have written a whole series of children's stories in rhyme. They were designed to use humor to teach values and "sounds-like." They are exactly what I needed when teaching little ones and also what I hear teachers and librarians say they need today. However, I do not know a publisher who is looking for this type of thing...not many wandering loose around this ranch land. The last meeting I attended for children's writers, I heard publishers say, "Don't send us anything in rhyme!" I could only wonder if they had ever read to their own children or been in a classroom.

All of my value stories are based on events and challenges faced by real children. I had the satisfaction of having one of these stories (written from the viewpoint of a special education child) used by Special Education teachers in a major urban school system. I had the heartbreak to witness that same story used as the eulogy at the funeral for the child who inspired it. He died at age 12 as a result of a hospital mistake.

I also wrote what I thought was going to be a ghostly mystery for young adults. Then I attended another writers' meeting in Dallas. The agents and publishers there made it plain they did not want anything that did not depict teenagers as "street wise, sexually active and foul-mouthed." They read selections from manuscripts that had just been chosen. I blushed! I plan to rewrite my book for adults and hope that content will replace the curse words and graphic sex these New Yorkers wanted. I also have to hand it to your group of mystery writers for their abundant skills. I hope to learn from them.

My book is based upon experiences I had while living on a Gulf Coast ranch in a huge plantation style home built in 1861. I absolutely loved that place and did not mind sharing it with a few "presences." However, a generation later, my children were quite startled by them.

The house was built on a high bluff overlooking Karankawa Bay, which was an idyllic and peaceful setting. Almost all of the Texas coastal homes from that era are gone as a result of fire or hurricane. I had to put my manuscript in a drawer for some years after something happened that broke my heart. Our old ranch was purchased by a couple with more money than sense. I assumed they would love living in this magical place as

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much as I had. Instead, they had this beautiful home, complete with its historical marker, bulldozed down so the wife could have "something more modern."

MM: *Please tell us about "A Story of You," the class you teach in Clifton.*

VFT: I believe the greatest gift anyone can give friends and family is a written record of their own life experiences. This does not have to be in the form of a lengthy book. As a Poetry Therapist, I lead groups of individuals into writing either poems or prose (their choice) about their experiences. I bring poems and short pieces of prose to the group and we read them and discuss the words or phrases with which we particularly connect. Then these pieces are used simply as a diving board to leap into a memory pool. Participants find themselves remembering events they had not thought about in years. This is an extremely healing experience and students have been able to release grief and long held resentments as they read their pieces to the group. Sharing stories is beneficial and we get to know one another in a very personal way.

I tell them at the very beginning that they cannot possibly do anything wrong because they are the only experts on their own life. I also urge them to let the words flow because I will never look at their papers or criticize mark-outs, misspelling, punctuation or grammar. Without fear of embarrassment, they feel free to stretch their skills.

English was not the first language of some of my students, so being able to write as they speak frees them creatively. I was elated to receive a poem in the mail from one of my students...written as she visited her native Spain. The piece vibrated with strong emotions as she expressed the joy she felt in returning home. Love and pride in the natural beauty of her homeland burst forth from every stanza.

MM: *A few years ago, you were involved in discover and release of Rebel Private: Front and Rear, Memoirs of a Confederate Soldier, by William A. Fletcher. Will you tell us about your relationship to Mr. Fletcher and your involvement in bringing the book back to life?*

VFT: William Andrew Fletcher was my great grandfather. He died many years before I was born, so I never got to meet him during his lifetime. However, during the time I worked with

his Civil War memoirs, his spirit worked with me and we talked often. (Run skeptics! Protect yourselves!) We even argued over a story I wanted to include in the Afterword. He wanted it taken out and it was one of my favorite stories about a very heroic thing he did during the Galveston Hurricane of 1900. Since that was the only thing the editors at Dutton took out of that portion, I guess he went on to New York City and influenced them.

Bill Fletcher went into Confederate service as a poor carpenter. After the war, he returned to Beaumont and went to work in the lumber business. It soon became obvious that, despite a very limited education, he was a business genius and inventor of great skill. He opened a world market for East Texas yellow pine and was the first to export it on his fleet of schooners. He ended up owning sawmills all over East Texas. Called "The Old Man Eloquent" in his later years due to his talks at national lumber conventions, he gave back generously to his home community.

When he retired and sold all of his holdings to Kirby Lumber in 1902, he began writing his memoirs of Civil War service. His old army buddies had urged him to do that ever since the South was defeated. Of course, his story was, at least in part, their stories. My other Beaumont great-grandfather, A. N. Vaughan, had fought beside him in Hood's Brigade and told anyone who would listen, "Bill Fletcher was the bravest man I ever saw and he had more wild experiences than all of the rest of us put together!" This man was a highly educated writer and newspaper publisher, but continued to insist that Bill had to be the one to write the book.

Bill was a front line soldier in Hood's Brigade, a behind the lines scout (spy) for Gen. Stonewall Jackson and was gravely wounded at Second Manassas and Chicamauga. After his second wound (foot and leg) he asked to be transferred to Terry's Texas Rangers because "I'm a good horseback rider and I want to stay on the front." Stay on the front he did in both the famed Texas infantry and cavalry. Due to a gun that would not fire, he was captured eventually...survived the horror of the infamous Chattanooga Prison.

When placed on a prison train to be moved farther east, he determined to escape and left his spot in the box car, totally surrounded by guards, to jump out of the moving train at night. It was his job for the next few months to remain alive in snow-covered enemy territory and escape detection

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while obtaining food, fresh clothes and a mount to ride back to his old outfit.

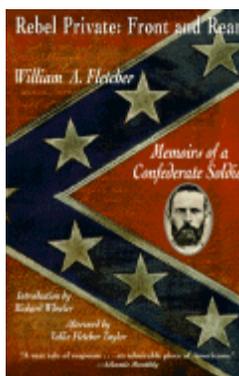
Strangely enough, Bill Fletcher spaced scenes in the manner of a professional writer when he related times of severe stress and then let the reader relax and enjoy a hearty laugh. The book is a tragedy, comedy, horror story, suspense thriller and certainly a science fiction time machine that takes the reader's hand and pulls him into another era.

Bill's book was written with no intent to market it. He wanted to give copies to family and friends and send boxes to the Confederate Veteran's Home on Austin's Sixth Street. After the original edition was published in 1908, he gave some copies out and then had the rest stacked in his three story Victorian home in Beaumont. While the family was living at their farm on the Neches River, the Beaumont home caught fire and almost all of the copies were burned. No thought was given to republishing.

It was not until the 1940s that historians located the one copy in the Library of Congress. They traced my family to San Antonio and we learned for the first time the extreme importance of Bill's story. Memoirs of that war were few and far between and were written by Generals or officers of high rank. These men wrote of statistics and mass maneuvers, whereas Bill wrote of only things he had personally seen and done. For the first time, they were learning what it was like to be a Civil War front line soldier.

Bill would have never dreamed of historians and scholars making a cross country trip to try to get their hands on a copy of his memoirs. Neither would he have guessed that a shy, but creative, southern belle would use his slim volume as a framework on which she would build a giant romantic saga. Yet, as the historians located us, so did Margaret Mitchell who thanked us for what she called her "most valuable single source of research."

If you were to read *Rebel Private: Front and Rear*...and then reread *Gone With the Wind*, you would recognize Bill's words, descriptions, characters and scenes. The prototype for Rhett Butler was actually Bill's father...or at least his words and attitude about the inevitable outcome of the war and the futility of it all. Wouldn't you know! Rhett was really a Texan!



In any event, historians converged upon my great aunt...each wanting a copy of the original. Copies were borrowed by "scholars" and never returned. The short stack of copies rescued from the burned house became shorter and shorter. Aunt Vallie was torn between wanting to share with history and wanting to preserve copies for family. So, even as a child, I wanted to somehow make the book available for anyone who was interested and not just a select few historians. Thus, I eventually annotated the original manuscript, wrote an Afterword about the rest of his life and found an agent.

MM: *You're a writer, speaker, teacher, poet and former journalist. With so many irons in the fire, what is an "average" day for Vallie Fletcher Taylor?*

VFT: An average day is dealing with a herd of goats...each of whom believes it is a house pet. When I lived in Austin, I smelled of Georgio. Now, I reek of Essence of Billy Goat. Living in the country is my cup of tea and I enjoy the love my different breeds of critters share with me and also with one another. The Great Pyrenees dogs and the assorted cats tend to cuddle up with the goats. I'm weaning a pair of twin black kids who have been bottle fed because their mother didn't know what to do with them. I swear when they see me they bleat, "Maa-Maa!"

It is much easier to keep up with acquaintances in a rural area. I'm blessed to have a large assortment of interesting individuals as friends. I love to cook and entertain and, fortunately, so do most of them. I belong to a group of women who meet to study different wines and with what foods each of them might be served. Of course, our method of research includes sampling each bottle...along with delicious cuisine.

No two days are alike so I cannot really describe a typical day. I just stay flexible and deal with whatever and whoever comes my way. This is a very rustic home and the heat is furnished by wood stoves, so I enjoy writing by a warm fire in cold weather.

MM: *Many authors start writing during their childhood. Did you start at an early age or acquire the "bug" as a teen or in your early twenties or thirties?*

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VFT: I was blessed to have a mother who read to me from the time I was an infant and a father who was a great story teller. So, I dictated my first stories to my mother long before I could write. In my San Antonio school, my first published efforts were in the Highland Park Elementary newspaper.

MM: *You were kind enough to be a mentoring author for the 2008 Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Authors Event. Will you tell us about the mentoring you've done, and what writing groups you're involved in, like the International Women's Writing Guild.*

VFT: For years, I had the opportunity to mentor within a public school setting as I taught. I've been called upon in more recent years to speak as a mentor in a few school districts for such events as Career Day. Most of the mentoring I do now is in conjunction with the Story of You classes in fine arts centers and is in the form of encouraging people who want to write for their own enjoyment and creative release. I enjoy the mentoring I do for Sisters in Crime and always benefit from meeting the aspiring writers

MM: *Tell us a little about each of your books and where they rank in your heart as your favorites.*

VFT: Each of them differs in thematic content from the others to the point that I could not possibly pick a favorite. Because *Eyes in the Alley* was long enough at the end of World War II, the editor and I found out I actually had enough stories for two or three books. One chapter was a book in itself...so, I spent more time editing than writing. So many important adventures and examples, especially in the field of following one's inner guidance, had to be left out since they occurred during my adult life, I need to put this into another story.

MM: *Do you have any advice for new authors who are wondering the best way to get their work noticed in this very competitive field.*

VFT: I wish I did. I have seen things happen at major publishing houses and agencies that don't make a bit of sense. For years, I stayed on book tours speaking about *Rebel Private: Front and Rear*. After doing a program at book stores, and then signing copies, I was well aware that the hard cover edition of the book far outsold the soft cover. Historians, Civil War buffs and gift givers all wanted a hard cover. Yet, Dutton pulled it in and still publishes soft cover only.

There was a West Coast agent who became very excited about handling my children's stories. Her agency would not let her handle them despite the fact that she was extremely enthusiastic and had years of experience to back up her judgment. So, I guess I don't understand the way some of the powers that be think.

MM: *Who are some of your favorite authors, or the authors who influenced your writing?*

VFT: As a child, I loved Poe and Longfellow along with Carolyn Keene who wrote the Nancy Drew originals. I don't write in the style of any of them...but love their work.

I enjoy too many types of books to mention all of the authors. A few would be Michael Newton, Richard North Patterson, Jodi Picoult, poet John Fox and Texas writers Janice Woods Windle and Leon Hale. The book which really haunted me for some time was *Cane River* by Lalita Tademy.

MM: *What are some of your favorite mysteries, and why?*

VFT: Don't ask me that when I'm getting ready to speak before a group of mystery writers! I haven't had an opportunity to read all of their works. I share a love of mysteries with my great-grandfather Bill Fletcher. My great aunt said that he always had a new mystery on his bedside table. I loved the first mysteries written by former lawyer Richard North Patterson. They were based on some of his cases and I found them almost impossible to put down. Later, his books seemed to dwell more upon politics and, for me, they lost the intensity and richness of expression of his first efforts. When it comes to a mystery to relax with, I enjoy the far less complicated work of Mary Higgins Clark.

MM: *Do you have a new book in the works? Would you like to tell us about it?*

VFT: I'm considering several ideas for my next book. When I make a decision, I'll let you in on it.

MM: *Tell us about your life when you're not writing? Do you live close to your family? Any pets, or special projects or community service that is close to your heart?*

VFT: I've already mentioned pets and community service. For years, I used my ranch home for all types of seminars and workshops. I brought in

Spotlight Member (Continued from Page 10)

fascinating people to teach or lead and participants traveled from across the U.S. to attend. I still bring in a few outstanding presenters. I get the most calls to bring back a personal friend who is the most outstanding medium in the world as far as I'm concerned. People sit in a large circle and she goes from one to the other mentioning names and exact causes of death...then brings through personal messages for verification. No vague statements here. She blows people away. I also get requests to teach my class called "Understanding and Developing Your Psychic Ability." I've had articles written about me in which that ability was mentioned. Some of them were syndicated. All of a sudden people were just showing up (no phone calls in advance) at my doorstep...out here in the middle of nowhere.

I had no desire to be "A psychic reader." When they came from places like Chicago or Maine, I would read for them, but always started off by saying, "I want you to know, I don't have any gifts that you don't have also. I may simply be more open to my ability." So, I designed that course and have always had the fun of seeing participants realize what they can do when they stop being afraid of letting their own intuition speak to them.

MM: *Any closing thoughts you'd like to share with our members?*

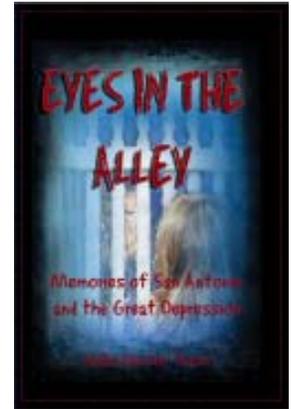
VFT: I look forward to meeting with your talented group of mystery writers on March 8.

EYES IN THE ALLEY By Vallie Fletcher Taylor

Publisher: Zumaya Publications

Release date: August 2008

To most people, the Great Depression brings to mind shantytowns and fields buried in dust, breadlines and shuttered banks. For young Vallie Fletcher, it was a time when she startled her San Antonio neighbors by jumping off garage rooftops, convinced she could soar into the air. After all, that's what she did during a near-death experience at age two. It was a time when she looked into the face of a starving child, a face that would haunt her throughout her childhood.



Segregation rules that did not make sense, sharing a classroom with four sets of twins, "medical" treatments and "health" rules that seemed as likely to kill as to cure, music and dance teachers collaborating with mothers who have seen too many Shirley Temple movies trying to turn children into performers – all and more are combined in this fascinating memoir of a time that to many is no more than a notation in a history book in a place where the past is as much a part of the infrastructure as the streets.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27 is the deadline for News, Reviews, Announcements and Articles for the for the **APRIL 2009** edition of **HOTSHOTS!**

Send info to Micqui Miller at
micquim@yahoo.com

SAN GABRIEL'S SECRET**By David Ciambrone**

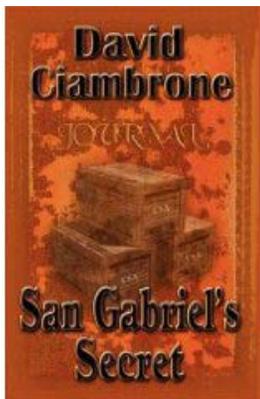
Publisher: LL Dreamspell

Release Date: January 2009

ISBN: 160318080X

ISBN: 978-1603080801

Nestled on the San Gabriel River in Central Texas' Hill Country, Georgetown is a small town where things are normally pretty quiet. That is, until Adam Thomas, a retired scientist and now writer of a newspaper column for women under the name Aunt Kay, inherits a Confederate soldier's journal and a murder. Adam and his girlfriend Kathy find themselves the center of dark doings and racing headlong into a fast paced, high stakes adventure to untangle a murderous puzzle, a series of macabre organizations and locate the centuries old San Gabriel Secret.

Visit David Ciambrone at www.davidciambrone.com**WHY CASEY HAD TO DIE****By L. C. Hayden**Imprint/Series: [Worldwide Library](#)[Worldwide Mystery](#)

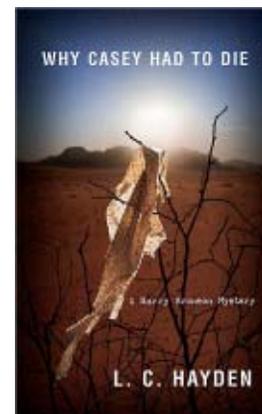
Publication Date: Feb 2009

Book Type: Paperback

Category: [Mystery](#)

ISBN: 9780373266630 (#663)

Newly retired police officer Harry Bronson has just one regret in his career: the murder he never solved. It was his first case as a rookie, and the only one he played strictly by the book. Perhaps that's why he still has the files with him more than twenty years later. And why he's ready when the killer that got away comes back, ready to resume the game.



Cryptic letters, along with an invitation to join a murder-mystery convention with an eerily familiar plot, lure him to Arizona—and another murder makes him realize he's up against a twisted mind intent on some kind of final showdown. When his faceless enemy strikes out by abducting Harry's wife, Carol, a desperate race across the desert is about to become a one-way trip where winner takes all, and the loser dies trying.

DEAD WRECKONING**By Sylvia Dickey Smith**

Publisher: L L Dreamspell

Release date: April 2009

ISBN: 978-1-60318-138-9



Newly licensed private investigator Sidra Smart reluctantly takes on the pro-bono case of Boo Murphy, a poor, countrified woman accused of murder. When Boo tells her tale of stumbling on the Hotspur, a schooner half-buried in a Texas swamp, everyone is convinced she's found treasure worth millions. As Sidra searches for both the schooner and evidence to clear her client, she battles an unknown enemy, and soon discovers they know their business much better than she knows hers. After several close calls, not only does Sid question her own abilities, she discovers her trusted mentor George Léger is involved in illegal activities that threaten not only their friendship, but also their lives.

Even Slider, her half-paranoid, half Chesapeake Bay retriever battles demons from his past as the investigation takes Sidra back to familiar small town territory. Complicated family histories dating back centuries and feuding family relationships muddy the clues, and the truth seems as elusive as the spectral schooner. When all seems lost, eighteenth century spirits of the infamous Jean Lafitte and voluptuous, swashbuckling pirate-queen Mary Anne Radcliff show up to offer Sid assistance.