



REPORT TO THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

9.30pm, Friday 13 October, 2023

Carmel Shute, Secretary

Thank you, Moraig – and thank you everyone for sticking around for our 2023 AGM.

The other convenors have threatened to take out a contract on me if I rave on as I am wont to do, so this will be a mercifully short report.

It's been a busy year – no surprise there!! Nationally, we now have 576 paid-up members. With supporters, our mailing list for our monthly newsletter, *A Stab in the Dark*, is now a record 4144. We trust you enjoy *Stabby*, as we convenors call it, and our Facebook and other social media posts. BTW – when lockdown started, I started posting about crime shows, nearly all with female protagonists. I am now up to 413 posts. So much TV crime! So much viewing pleasure.

We've had a stack of events here in Victoria – 10 here at the Rising Sun plus an event with the Kingston Library and another in Maryborough for the Words in Winter Festival. In June, the Melbourne Athenaeum Library, a long-term supporter of the Scarlet Stiletto Awards, hosted the launch of our 30th awards and wonderful readings of the past two years' winning 'body in the library' stories, thanks to **Leigh Redhead** and **Susanna Lobe**.

Last year's Scarlet Stiletto Award ceremony with *Tropo* star, Nicole Chamoun was a joyous occasion, especially since almost everyone went 'troppo' with their attire. As mentioned earlier, this year we asking everyone to come along in scarlet and pearls, the 30th anniversary gift.

The Davitt Awards last month were a sell-out with 144 books battling it out for the six awards on offer. **Debi Marshall**, the investigative true crime reporter and broadcaster, told us some very confronting stories, including how the murder of her partner set her on the true crime course.

We were chuffed when our Radio National's Big Ideas recorded and broadcast our 17th Law Week event, *Boys Behaving Badly* and what to do about it.

Interstate, the chapters in Queensland, NSW, Tasmania and South Australia have also held several events, though it's been a bit quiet. They could do with more active support from local members.

The Tasmanian Chapter convenor, **LJM Owen** is also the director of the Terror Australis crime writers' festival in Tasmania. Master classes are about to start, including with **Ann Cleeves**, with the big talkfest getting underway at the end of the month.

One of the great initiatives this year has been Scarlet Stiletto Bites: Scintillating stories by Australian women. It was the brilliant idea of **Susanna Lobe**, who has been narrating all the top winning stories from 1994 in the lead-up to the 30th Scarlet Stiletto Award ceremony on 25 November. She is a fabulous reader – she can do all the voices! They're free and posted on Fridays on Spotify, Apple, Google, Amazon and other services.

Our monthly Murder Monday one-on-one author interviews have had a new lease of life. The new interviewer is the effusive **Jacq Ellem**, a Tasmanian member, and she has introduced us to little-known authors such as **Raquel V Reyes**, author of the Caribbean Kitchen Mystery Series featuring a Latina sleuth. We now have 52 Murder Mondays available on our YouTube channel.

The monthly **Crime Stack**, where publishers donate 20 copies of books to members. has proved a big winner. Winners are chosen by algorithm – however, amazingly quite a few members have had two or three wins, sometimes in successive months! One of the quirks, the many quirks, of AI.

Of course, the threat of AI to authors' creative output is now writ large. Thousands of books from some of Australia's most celebrated authors have potentially been caught up in what Booker prize-winning novelist **Richard Flanagan** has called "the biggest act of copyright theft in history".

The works have allegedly been pirated by the US-based Books3 dataset and used to train generative AI for corporations such as Meta and Bloomberg.

Sisters in Crime member and best-selling author, **Dervla McTiernan**, who says the way language models use copyrighted material is "outright theft. There is a very real risk that the channels through which books are sold and marketed would become clogged with AI generated work, which would be poor quality, but it would be more difficult for individuals writers to access the market."

Sisters in Crime is supporting the impressive work on AI being undertaken by the Australian Society of Authors. We need to be both alert and alarmed.

Another initiative was to declare Sisters in Crime's support for The Voice. The mission of Sisters in Crime has always been to give a voice to those without. We feel that it is now time for the First Nation Australians to have a Voice. Hundreds of Australian writers, agents, booksellers, and publishers have supported the Writers for the Voice initiative which was started by Nicole Abadee and Jane Novak, a Sydney Sisters in Crime member. A sleuth of Sisters in Crime author members had also signed up.

On a personal note, before moving to a retirement village, I donated my read crime library – 1998 books – to the Footscray Mechanics Institute. We're having a launch sometime soon. You may have seen the photo of my library as the showreel ran through.

I'll close with some thank yous, firstly to the many volunteers who make Sisters in Crime run. We exist on your generosity.

Many thanks to the convenors who have served over the past 12 months:

- President **Moraig Kisler** tries to keep our meetings in order – no mean feat – and does a splendid job organising our reviews. Moraig is also a Davitt judge and is desperate to find enough time to finish her police procedural novel, *The Salt Works*. She is also on the programming sub-committee with Carolyn Beasley, from Swinburne University of Technology, and me. She is taking next year off but we're expecting her back on the committee next year.
- **Vice-President Lindy Cameron** liaises with interstate chapters and always has bright ideas about programming. She now also videos our events. She has made an outstanding contribution to Sisters in Crime since 1992. Lindy is a great trouble-shooter and her enthusiasm remains contagious.

- Our treasured **Treasurer Lesley Gillis** does an outstanding job in keeping our finances in order and paying our bills. Lesley works closely with our esteemed accountant, **Robyn Young**. Lesley couldn't be here tonight because she is in Japan, probably in a hot tub (sigh...)
- Committee member, **Sara Hood**, has done an outstanding job in modernising Sisters in Crime – updating our website, our association rules, and our membership system. However, since April she has been in Europe on a gap year. We miss her every day and if she doesn't come back, we'll be definitely be taking out a contract! She is currently in Sardinia, sob!

I would also like to pay tribute to:

- **Caz Brown**, a former convenor, who has done such a great job in designing our award graphics, and our trophy plaques, t-shirts, tote bags, convenors badges, and medallions to go on the shortlisted and winning Davitt books. She has played a key role in creating Sisters in Crime's 'look'. Caz has been made a life member as she served on the national committee for 10 years but, because of the pandemic, and her health concerns, we're still to make a formal presentation. This has been going on for more than two years...
- **Ani Allbutt** who designs graphics for our regular events, such a wonderful addition to our work.
- I do admin, programming, event coordination, sponsorship, PR, and publisher liaison. I am totally desperate to find someone who might take over this role. If you are interested, please let us know.

Finally, many thanks are also due to:

- Australian publishers who generously support both the Davitt and Scarlet Stiletto Awards, donate books for our raffles, and approach us re authors to speak at our events and, if possible, help get them here.
- **Deb Force** and the wonderful team at the **Sun Bookshop**, our official bookseller at events, which now offers an online service. Members get a 10% discount from anywhere in Australia. Deb has an encyclopaedic knowledge of crime writing and is a great source of top advice on what's worth reading, though we don't always agree.
- **Precilla Damain** who took over administering the Scarlet Stiletto Awards last year. A big job but she has done it so well!
- **Christina Lee** who flies down from Brisbane at her own expense to run the Scarlet Stiletto Award judging weekends. This year's was the first in-person session since 2019.
- The indefatigable **Dr Carolyn Beasley** from **Swinburne University of Technology** which supports the Davitts and the first prize for the Scarlet Stiletto Awards, and helps to program events.
- **Jon** and **Analiese Woolley** and the wonderful team at the Rising Sun.
- **Mark Barry** from BS Sound who does a sterling job setting up the PA system for dummies at our events.

And most especially thanks to all of you, our members, for sticking with us through challenging times. Thank you.