



October Tornado Alley Meeting



Mary Coley, an Oklahoma native, is the award-winning author of nine mysteries set in Oklahoma, a non-fiction children's book, and numerous short stories. She received the Oklahoma Book Award for Fiction in 2022. Coley was also honored with the Tony Hillerman Award from New Mexico/Arizona Book Awards in 2022.

Join us at 7 p.m. October 13th on Zoom, when Mary will talk about "Get Closer: How to Draw Readers into Your Story."

The Zoom link will be emailed close to the date.

Mystery Writer of the Month

John F. Toles is an author and Episcopal priest whose vocation and creativity intersect in imaginative ways. His works include the Father Anthony Savel Mysteries (*The Golden Fistula* and *The Marble Finger*), *Springhill*, and *The Journey*.

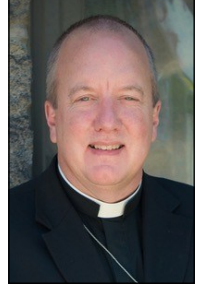
Toles recognized early on the power of the story to reveal truth and ignite imagination. Drawing on more than twenty years of ministry in the Episcopal Church in the Father Anthony Mysteries, he employs his knowledge of the church, pastoral encounters, and faith to craft the setting and characters. Those characters are often flawed, searching, and authentic—reflecting the human condition in ways that resonate with readers.

The Father Anthony books feature an amateur detective, a goofy standard poodle, Detective Stavlo, and other memorable characters. While uncovering a murderer, Father Anthony also discovers something about himself along the way. Fans of the Father Brown Mysteries, Mitford Series, and The Chronicles of Brother Cadfael will find a kindred spirit in Father Anthony. *Springhill*, a work of literary fiction, transports readers to Louisiana, where the main character experiences, in one hot, humid afternoon, the life and drama of a small town. *Springhill* was a 2024 finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award.



The Journey is classified as Christian fiction. It traces a young man's early journey toward understanding his purpose in God's plan. Toles believes that storytelling—whether in sermons or novels—is a sacred act capable of opening windows which shed light on human nature and faith. He is currently working on the third Father Anthony Mystery—*The Forty-Second Wife*. For now, even the title will remain a mystery.

John is an avid traveler, photographer, winemaker, chef, painter, and reader. Stephen King is one of his favorites, though he also loves classic novels. His art adorns his walls at home. Being from Louisiana, he makes Gumbo for Shrove Tuesday for the whole church. He is a former president and current member of the Enid Writers Club, a member of OWFI, and recent member of Tornado Alley. 📖



Tornado Alley Chapter of Sisters in Crime is proud to announce our fourth annual mystery-writing conference on Saturday, March 21, 2026

The headline speaker this year is **Vanessa Lillie**, author of the USA Today bestselling suspense novel, *Blood Sisters*, which was a Target Book Club pick and GMA Book Club Buzz Pick. It was named one of the best mystery novels in 2023 by *The Washington Post* and Amazon. The sequel, *The Bone Thief*, will be out October 28th.

Originally from Oklahoma, Vanessa is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She has fifteen years of marketing and communications experience and enjoys organizing book events in and around Providence, Rhode Island, where she lives now. She loves connecting with readers and hosts an Instagram Live show with crime fiction authors.

Mark your calendar for this fun and educational event!
More details will appear in upcoming issues of the newsletter and also on the website at www.tornadoalleysinc.org.

Pros and Cons of Writing Two Projects at Once

by Dianne McCartney

As a multi-published author, I'm frequently asked why I seem to be more productive than other writers. Although there are several reasons, the most important factor is that I write two projects at a time. Although that idea makes many people groan in despair, this arrangement works well for me. Let's examine the pros and cons of approaching your work in that fashion.

The most compelling reason is to avoid the infamous writers' block. When I get bogged down in my first manuscript and become frustrated with the lack of progress, I immediately change to my second project. Concentrating on that piece for a while jars my brain back into productivity. It's usually just a few days before I'm ready to return to my priority, the book I want to complete first. The short break gives me a burst of renewed energy.

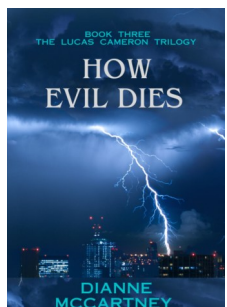
It's important to remember that the second project doesn't have to be another book if the idea of that is too overwhelming. It could be a short story, a non-fiction piece or even a poem. The additional benefit is that since you have saved the time you would have spent wallowing about being stuck, you will have two projects completed faster than you would have otherwise expected. If you can't use the second piece for publication, consider entering it in a contest.

The other noticeable bonus from working this way is that you might emerge with a cleaner manuscript with much less left to edit. That's because when you return to your manuscript after a short absence, errors tend to jump out and you can take a few minutes to fix them before proceeding.

I realize that goes against conventional wisdom of not editing as you go, but again, it works for me. I'm a bit of a rulebreaker by inclination.

That said, if you are an analytical person, you may struggle to work in this manner. Some writers have a need to move straight from chapter one until the end with no interruptions. Taking a break to introduce something else would cause them unnecessary stress. If you're that type of writer, this practice may not work well for you.

Dianne's latest book, *How Evil Dies*, is a new release from The Wild Rose Press.



In closing, I offer a con mixed with some unsolicited advice. If you are a new writer working on your first book, I would stick with that one project until you finish. This is because so many authors never finish a novel. Getting one project to the finish line will give you something to offer an agent or publisher while you're working on your second. I suggest you save trying this technique for the next go round.

If you've never considered this method, be brave and try something new. You'll never know what works for you unless you give it a try. 📖

Member News & Activities

(Send your news to marcia@marcia-preston.com for inclusion)

TA member **Merle Davenport** reports that *Echoes of the Criminal Mind: A Writer's Guide to Crafting Authentic Criminals* is ready for pre-sale. It will be published around Thanksgiving. After 25 years teaching inmates inside the prison walls and extensive research, he put together a book that describes criminal character traits along with charts to help writers create authentic villains. Merle will be one of the speakers at the Tornado Alley spring conference on March 21st.

Courtney Bradley stays super busy. On October 17-20 she'll be talking about her books and hosting an influencer chat at the Ashland Mystery Festival in Ashland, Oregon. And the Book and Bloom bookstore in Broken Arrow will host her *Deadly Drafts* as a book club choice on October 30.

Marty Ludlum attended the big Boucher-Con convention in New Orleans where Michael Connelly was the guest of honor. Marty spoke about the business aspects of writing to a lively group. And he says the New Orleans food was wonderful.

Dona Mularkey has signed a contract with The Wild Rose Press for the third and final book in her Drake's Key series. It's titled *A Shiver of Sharks*. (A title that definitely makes me shiver!)

Peggy Chambers sends this news:

The Enid Writers Club will present a one-day workshop on November 8 called **Writing A Great Story**. Speakers include Jacob Benavides on *In Circles: Writing From Out and Within Your Background*; Nick Lyons on *Writing Historical Fiction*; Ally Robertson on *Plotting—A Quick List of Plotting Steps and How to Use Them to Create a Solid Outline*; and Jennifer Wilson (JW Rose) on *Taking the Mystery Out of Writing Poetry*. Box lunches from McAllister's are included in the \$25 cost. Coffee and donuts at 9 a.m.; the first session begins at 10. Pre-registration is required. Pay online at <https://serendipitylanecreates.com/products/enid-writers-club-registration>. Or send an email to enid.wc@mail.com to sign up and get the address to mail a check. **Registration cut off is November 5, 2025.** Location is at St. Matthews Episcopal Church, 518 W. Randolph, Enid, OK.

Tornado Alley Mystery Writers Podcast

Episode 49: Interview with Yvette Walker
Date: Friday, October 17, 2025

Yvette Walker is a multifaceted storyteller whose work spans gripping crime fiction, faith-centered nonfiction, and award-winning journalism. As the author of the Linda Radcliffe crime-novel series—including **Sixty** and the sequel, *Trial of the Heart* — Yvette blends sharp suspense with deeply human characters, crafting narratives that explore justice, redemption, and the complexities of the heart. An accomplished journalist and Opinion Editor inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, Yvette brings decades of editorial leadership to her storytelling. Her experience as a newspaper editor, ombudsman, and podcaster informs her keen eye for truth and the power of narrative.