

Anacacho - Book Review

By Lauren Roberts

Imagine having your book — your very first book — be nominated for a national award. Louise Gaylord, local author of *Anacacho*, the first in a series of Allie Armington mysteries, has found herself in just such a position.

Anacacho is the name of an actual ranch located near the Anacacho mountain range in southwest Texas, giving a historically accurate feel to the story that begins when Allie, an assistant district attorney, receives a call from a former best friend.

Reena Carpenter's marriage is in trouble, and Allie finds herself reluctantly dragged back into Paul and Reena's life. Her memories of loving Paul, of aborting Paul's child, and of having Reena betray their friendship and marry Paul come tearing back.

But those concerns are soon overridden by others: Reena's drinking, missing paintings, Paul's attempted seduction, the tension-filled relationships between ranch manager Del and his wife, Susie (and former best friend of the Reena-Allie-Susie triangle), Paul and Susie and Reena, and Allie's own growing intimate relationship with fellow District Attorney Duncan Bruce.

When Reena is discovered dead, throat slit and eyeless, Allie is pulled back to the ranch only to realize things are vastly different, more confusing and definitely more sinister. What is Sheriff Cotton's real interest? What happened to the ranch? Why is Allie being followed? What has happened to Paul? *Anacacho* offers twists and turns that lend a constant surprise to the storyline in a well-designed format.

On May 28, the Publishers Marketing Association will host its 15th annual Benjamin Franklin Awards reception and dinner at the Wilshire Grand Hotel in Los Angeles to recognize design, editorial and marketing excellence in the book publishing industry. Gaylord is one of only three finalists in the Mystery/Suspense category.

Based in Manhattan Beach, PMA is a trade organization for small- and medium-sized book publishers that aids them in marketing their books in a number of ways. Two of their main events — Publishing University and the Benjamin Franklin Awards — are held in conjunction with (although unrelated to) BookExpo America, the annual trade show for the publishing industry where publishers present their latest titles to booksellers both independent and chains from all over the world.

I, too, am involved with the awards, having been a design judge for three years now. My involvement began when a good friend who had been a longtime judge no longer wanted to do it, and she recommended me. I was accepted and assigned to the Coffee Table/Gift category the first year, the Arts category in the last two years.

Publishers submit books that are grouped by genre and judged on editorial and design merit by professionals in the fields of book reviewing, library science, bookselling and

book designing. Books published between Jan. 1 and June 30 must be submitted by the end of August, and the judges get these around Oct. 1. Books published in the latter half of the year must reach PMA by Dec. 31; these get to the judges around the middle of January.

The pressure is intense: the deadline looms, the number of submissions is high and the quality is mostly good-to-excellent. Design judges must rate 15 elements including cover appearance, exterior and interior layout, paper stock, use of color, photograph and/or illustration quality, typography and (the most difficult question) how each submission compares to its competitors.

The awards are growing in prestige and popularity. The first year PMA awards went to individuals. It wasn't until the third year that the current category format was developed; then there were 20 categories. This year, there were 53 categories, 1,625 entries and 142 judges.

The winners are showcased at BookExpo, giving them maximum exposure to bookstore and library buyers, publishers, the press, agents and other industry concerns. And all entrants receive the critique sheets that allow them to learn what worked as well as what didn't work and why.

The mystery/suspense genre is one of the most popular in publishing today. It is also one of the few that encourages newcomers, though because of the large number of writers in this genre it is hard for a new author like Louise Gaylord to move up and out of the congestion, which is why getting the nomination is so important to her career. Lauren Roberts can be reached at news@scbeacon.com.