## **Murder Under Way**

Peter Sharp Legal Mystery #14

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## INTRODUCTION

If this is the first Peter Sharp Legal Mystery you're reading, it might help you to know a little background information about the characters.

Peter Sharp's wife asked him to leave their home when she decided to downsize the household she owned, due to a conflict of their respective philosophies concerning legal representation: Peter is a private attorney specializing in defending the poor, unfortunate people 'wrongfully' accused of crimes. On the other hand, his now ex-wife Myra, is the elected District Attorney of Los Angeles County... the people who Peter contends operate the only successful 'rail-

road' in the country. Peter ultimately wound up living on a dilapidated old boat in their back yard, until moving it to a slip in Marina del Rey, where he discovered his former classmate Melvin Braunstein was a boat neighbor who soon became his employer, using Peter to do certain legal chores for his small law firm.

Unfortunately, Melvin died in a plane crash, leaving Peter to inherit the small, failing law practice, an office manager (Melvin's twelve-year old Chinese step-daughter Suzi, a computer genius) and Bernie, her huge St. Bernard.

In accordance with Melvin's Will, the court appointed Peter as Suzi's legal guardian, and through a series of misfortunes that miraculously worked out, the they wound up living beautiful 50-foot Grand Banks trawler-yacht, from which they operate the small law firm.

When Peter isn't swilling Patrón Margaritas at one of the marina's local watering holes, he's usually involved in some losing legal case that little Suzi will inevitably solve,

leaving Peter with the impression that he's actually as good as he thinks he is.

When Suzi isn't busy scheming up some plan to get Peter and Myra back together again, she's using her amazing computer skills (and several valuable law enforcement programs she 'appropriated' from Myra's home computer) to aid local police agencies with their computer problems.

All the local cops eat lunch at a Szechwan restaurant around the corner from the marina, where Suzi's uncle is the owner; she occasionally acts as cashier.

Your mission – if you decide to accept it – is to match wits with this 12-year-old girl and see if you can figure out a solution to each case before she does... and not being misled by theories and arguments proposed by all of the adults surrounding her (police, investigators, attorneys, prosecutors, etc.)

## Chapter I

Lynorth Front Street in Lahaina just appears to be another double-sized balconied storefront business with a window facing the street for its retail store, where they sell Yacht Club chotskies like hats, tee-shirts and other goodies that have been silk-screened or embroidered with the club's famous Whale emblem.



The only other thing you notice from the street is a small sign indicating "Members Only," and once inside, if you're a member, you can eat, drink, and associate with cruising sailors from all over the world who either belong or are using the club's reciprocal privileges granted to members of other yacht clubs.



My ex-wife and I honeymooned here some years back, and we were fortunate enough to run into a 'local' that I went to law school with. After moving to

Hawaii shortly after graduation he became a member of the Club and nominated me for membership. My Mrs. never cared much for boating, so I kept the membership active and try to get here at least once a year to unwind. So here I am, sitting here on the club's extended deck out over the Pacific Ocean watching a cruise ship pass by, while trying to embalm myself with a large, blended, topless (no salt on the glass rim), margarita.



Cruising sailors are an interesting group of people, and sitting around here at the club and schmoozing with them is a lot of fun because every one of them has great stories to tell. You can't drive to Hawaii, so everyone who's here on the island now had to come by either plane or boat – and for boaters, that means an ocean crossing - the type of event that always gives rise to tales of adventure, mishaps, surprises, discoveries and plenty of other stuff that makes for compelling conversations.

The world may be a pretty big place, but something like a small island yacht club can compress it down to something a lot smaller, so everyone here seems to know that I'm a well-know criminal defense attorney from the mainland. The surprising thing about my reputation this month is that it really has nothing to do with me: it's about a author dock-neighbor of mine back in Marina del Rey California whose latest five books are in the club's lending library, and in today's economy they've become quite popular. The titles are

Foreclosure Investing,
Deposition Preparation,
27 Secrets to Success
Publish & Perish and
Income Tax: do we have to Pe

Income Tax: do we have to Pay it?

His name is Ed Sinclair and he owns two boats on my dock: a large,

comfortable 60-foot Hatteras that he lives on, and a small 28-foot Wellcraft cabin cruiser that he uses to harbor cruise or hop over to Catalina Island on.

A few years ago he visited Maui and asked me to sponsor him for membership, so he's also one of the club's celebrated personalities. His autographed picture hangs on the wall right next to where mine should also be... but isn't.

There was an article about him in the New York Times recently, and he's made a few 'author' appearances on the television talk shows. The club's management is aware of his budding popularity, so being a friend and neighbor of his, I've become a minor celebrity here, just by being Ed's sponsor. I try to turn the conversations away from Ed, because like most authors, he's not a very interesting person. Unfortunately, my efforts at changing the subject from him to me usually fail, and I wind up taking down a lot of names and addresses all over the world of members expecting to arrange for an autographed picture of Ed sent to them.

Now I know how some prominent judges must have felt when attending a cocktail party in their honor I was invited to once: almost everyone there was either a judge or attorney, but when they all learned that the husband of one of the attending female attorneys was a plumbing contractor, most of the crowd immediately abandoned the honored judges and circled around the plumber, asking for his card and asking questions about some drip or leak they were having in their residence.

So here I am, a famous criminal defense attorney, and all these people want to talk about is some nerdy author who writes books that can put you to sleep faster than a lecture on celestial navigation. What a world we live in. I've only got about four days to spend here on the island, and on the first night here, during one of many conversations about my author-neighbor Ed, I told the crowd that the last time I spoke to him was way back during summer, before he left on a 4-month book-signing promotional tour for his books.

My plane trip here was a couple of days before Ed returned from his promotional tour, so I haven't had a chance to talk to him since his return. I do remember him mentioning that when he got back he would be preparing his small boat for a trip: he decided that he wanted to buy some property in Avalon, a small town over at Catalina Island, a local boating destination about thirty miles off of our Southern California coastline. I told him that I'd probably miss his return, because Thanksgiving is one of my favorite times of the year to flee to Maui and escape the mandatory get-togethers with former in-laws who still pretend to like me. Suzi will stand in for me at those horrible dinners because she loves being with Myra. It also gives her another crack at Myra's

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home computer, where the kid can 'graze' for some secure law enforcement software she can use to help her cop friends... who also become our law firm clients when they get divorced or rear-ended.

That's all I've got to say about Ed, much to the disappointment of my fellow boaters here at the club, so thank goodness, we're now forced to go back to interesting conversations about cruising the oceans and fascinating destinations. One of the boaters sitting a couple of tables away from is online surfing for updated weather reports and to see if we're involved in any new wars. A breaking bulletin just came in on Google News, so she brings her laptop over to our table to let us read it:

WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR FOUND DEAD – Possible Suicide Late Thanksgiving evening: Investor, yachtsman and popular non-fiction author Edwin H. Sinclair, Jr. was found dead in his boat, fifteen miles offshore of his home port of Marina del Rey California. Cause of death is reported to be a single gunshot.

Further details have not been released, but due to the fact that Sinclair was alone on the boat, it is suspected that he took his own life.