

# SISTER-IN-CRIME:

A n I n t e r v i e w  
w i t h

## MARGARET MARON

by Art Taylor

Margaret Maron began her career writing short stories, but she has achieved her greatest success as the author of 10 novels. Most are in one of two series of mystery novels: the Sigrid Harald novels are set in New York, while her more recent ones, featuring Deborah Knott as the detective, are set in North Carolina. *Bootlegger's Daughter* (1992) has been awarded the Edgar, Agatha, Macavity, and Anthony awards (the first book to make such a sweep). Maron is a former president of the national Sisters-in-Crime organization and is also a member of the Carolina Crime Writers Association. Her novels include *One Coffee With* (1982), *Death of a Butterfly* (1984), *Bloody Kin* (1985), *Death in Blue Folders* (1985), *The Right Jack* (1987), *Baby Doll Games* (1988), *Corpus Christmas* (1989), *Past Imperfect* (1991), *Bootlegger's Daughter* (1992), and *Southern Discomfort* (1993). *Shooting at Loons* will be published in 1994 by Mysterious Press.

This interview took place on 26 July 1993 at Maron's Johnston County home. We spoke in her office, an extension just off the southeast wall of her house. Her desk was strewn with evidence of the upcoming deadline for her next book, *Shooting at Loons*, which is set in the Beaufort-Harkers Island area; and the wall behind her desk appeared just as busy, serving as a huge bulletin board of pictures and letters, clippings and pamphlets. Two quotations, hanging side-by-side, caught my attention. The first was from Flaubert: "L'auteur, dans son oeuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout et visible nulle part." ["The author, in his work, must be like God in the universe, everywhere present and nowhere visible."] The second was taken from Marion Cabell Tyree's *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*: "If persons without brains can accomplish this, why cannot you?" – a question which originally addressed the making of bread.

The other walls were lined with filing cabinets and bookshelves. When I asked her if she kept files on her characters, she said yes – both computer files and index cards – and quoted one critic as having said, "Here she comes again with her cast of thousands." Her books ranged from mysteries, both past and present, to a wide selection of poetry to such reference works as *Barron's Law Dictionary* and *The Book of Common Prayer*. One shelf housed her awards: the recent Edgar and Agatha awards and a previous Agatha for the short story "Deborah's Judgment." When we sat at her table to begin, I noticed a more focused selection of research material for her novel-in-progress: *Troubled Waters* by Glenn Lawson and *Seacoast Life: An Ecological Guide to Natural Seashore Communities* by Judith Spitzbergen. Lying beside them was a Harkers Island cookbook, *Island Born and Bred*. Later, she would speak of subscribing to the Carteret County newspaper and show me her Carteret County phone directory, which she kept in order to find fitting names without running the risk of including real people.

We began by talking briefly about her growing up on her family's farm, which her grandfather had bought around the turn of the century. I learned that she was educated in the Johnston County school system and at UNCG and UNC-CH.