Mensa is big on acronyms and abbreviations. AG and RG for Annual Gathering (national) and Regional Gathering (local). LocSec for President (Local Secretary, a British term). This must terrify or at least confuse new members.

This year I attended an event which the national office has yet to abbreviate or reduce to initials: Colloquium. Previously Colloquium was a one-day, standalone event devoted to a single idea/issue/concern. Recently it’s been attached to the front end of the AG so travelers can, if they choose, make one trip and attend both events.

Prior topics did not pique my interest, but this year was a must-do for me. The theme was Crime Scene Intelligence (forensic investigation).

Confession: There is no way on earth I could attend an autopsy. The sights, the sounds, the smell. I’d be on the floor serving as a speed bump impeding the efficient wheeling about of gurneys.

I am, however, fascinated by the subject. I spent seven years glued to the small screen when Quincy, M.E. was on. I’ve devoured Patricia Cornwell books.

Perhaps it was my early indoctrination with Nancy Drew books, True, they contained no murders. But the pursuit of fact by the following of clues coupled with intuition and evaluation was drilled into me by Carolyn Keene (actually Mildred Wirt Benson, but I didn’t find that out until I was an adult).

At this year’s colloquium I got to spend the day with the best, listening to their stories, hearing how they follow the evidence in their particular field to find the "bad guy."

Rhonda Roby told us how she used mitochondrial DNA from Britain’s Prince Philip to identify the members of the Romanov family including Anastasia. This type of DNA is passed down unchanged through the mother and the czarina and the prince were both descendants of Queen Victoria.

Ashraf Mozayani spoke of forensic toxicology, using body fluids to determine alcohol levels (blood test, immediately) and poisons (urine test, perhaps days later) and how some poisons and drugs dissipate so rapidly that the test must be administered within minutes or hours.

Harvey Pratt showed us how he does sketches based on witness statements and described his work doing soft tissue reconstruction on skulls to help identify human remains found days or even decades after death. I also found out how to spot a grave, even one carefully hidden.

Jeff Kieliszewski explained the difference between evaluating someone for competency (must understand the judicial process) and sanity (must understand...
right from wrong) and also shared the importance of having an unpronounceable name so Nancy Grace cannot vilify you in front of a national audience.

The final speaker was Kathy Reichs, whose books I have not read and whose television show, *Bones*, I've never seen, so that was a little surreal to me. I do, however, have a spectacularly good lead on an entire series of books to read and I won't have to wait a year between stories as she already has 25 novels and novellas in print.

As an added special effect, the hotel and AG staff decided to set the thermostat in the room at 63 degrees "due to the number of people," totally disregarding the fact that the HVAC system should be set at the temperature the room should be, not at some arbitrary overcompensating temperature that kept us all feeling that an autopsy was being conducted nearby. The thermometer in the room naturally read 63 degrees also. After the first speaker several attendees went back to their hotel rooms and brought back their duvets and blankets to huddle under for the remainder of the day.

I was so hot under the collar due to the annoying behavior of those around me I was able to keep moderately warm despite the challenges. I was seated next to a woman who sent 37 texts during the first lecture (90 minutes). When I commented to her that her behavior was distracting she got all huffy and moved and her spot was taken by a man who had immersed himself in AXE body spray.

After lunch I returned to find my things moved to another chair and when I complained I was told I was imagining it. Umm, not really. I'd spent three hours sitting behind some people and now I was two seats down and no longer centered on the power point screen. Hadn't we just spent half the day being taught to spot evidence? I'd pushed the chair in front of me forward two inches and that chair was now two chairs down from me. Even Nancy Drew would have noticed that.

I decided I didn't want to be near people so relentlessly obnoxious, so I moved to the edge of the area where except for having to turn another chair sideways to block to my view of a guy rapidly jiggling his leg (Thumper we'll call him) I enjoyed the remainder of the day.

Next year's Colloquium is the day before the 2015 AG in Louisville, Kentucky. The topic is Brain Health and it is co-sponsored by the Alzheimer's Foundation. Registration is now open online at the national website. I won't be there as there is a quilt museum in Paducah, Kentucky, that needs a visit from me prior to the AG. If you're intrigued by the topic, Colloquium is a great way to immerse yourself in information presented by experts on a subject and to get all of your questions answered in the Q & A following each talk. Bring a sweater.

*Colloquium is a project of the Mensa Education & Research Foundation. Foundation President Dave Remine says, “To be able to provide an event that allows our members, as well as the public, to explore specific topics with the brightest minds in that field is just one of many ways we help engage and encourage knowledge seekers.” The event sold out.*