

Q&A: LOCAL WRITERS

CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS: MARCH!

REGIONS: AROUND THE COUNTRY

2nd & Church

WHERE AMERICA'S WRITERS READ

A close-up portrait of Sena Jeter Naslund, a woman with short brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark purple turtleneck sweater under a textured, purple cardigan. The background is softly blurred, showing a lamp and a window with blinds.

Sena Jeter Naslund

Fiction's Fountain of Youth

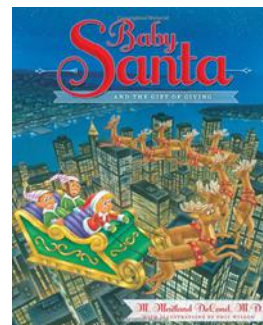
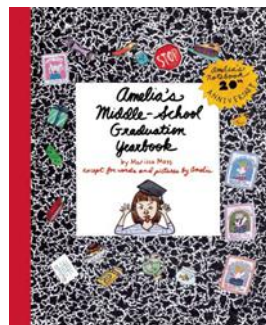
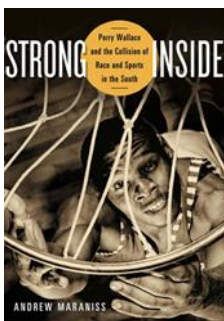
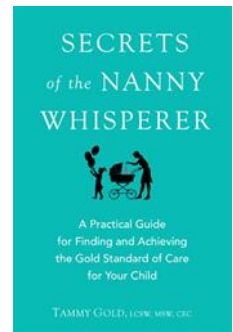
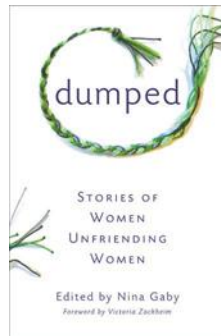
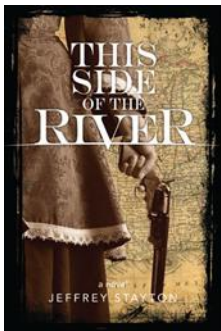
Fiction Issue

Becca Stevens:

Promoting Fair Wages for Women via Literature

Summer 2015
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Welcome to *2nd & Church*

2nd & Church is a literary journal by, for, and about writers, poets, and readers. We publish several issues a year, and readers may view a digital copy and/or purchase a traditional paper copy by visiting us online at www.2ndandchurch.com. Own an iPad? If so, then check out the MagCloud app. It's free and allows you to download all sorts of free publications, including *2nd & Church*.

Our mission

Our goal is to be inclusive of many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writing, literary fiction, W4C, poetry, translation, songwriting, and commercial fiction.

2nd & Church explores the creative writing life. What does it mean for a writer, poet, or reader to live a life of fine arts? Where can writers, poets, and readers gather? What do they write and read about? Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are they engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do they engage, entertain, and provoke readers? These are some of the questions we seek to answer.

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Submission guidelines

We welcome unsolicited manuscripts, but the expectation is that the work will support our mission. Send up to six poems and/or about 1,000 words of prose. For work over 1,000 words, query first. We will consider novel excerpts, but the selection of material must be able to stand alone — be self-contained. We prefer to assign book reviews and criticism; please don't submit those to us.

And in general, we don't publish essays on craft.

Please visit us online at www.2ndandchurch.com for complete writing and submission guidelines.

P.O. Box 198156
Nashville, TN. 37129-8156
Email: 2ndandchurch@gmail.com
On the Web: 2ndandchurch.com

Editor-in-chief: Roy Burkhead
Fiction editor: Roy Burkhead
Poetry editor: Alvin Knox
Factotum: Gayle Edlin

WKU Fall 2015 Editorial Assistant:
Brittany Eldridge

Columnists:

Chuck Beard
Gayle Edlin
Janelle Hederman
Les Kerr
Molly McCaffrey
Randy O'Brien
Julie Schoerke

Correspondents:

Charlotte Rains Dixon:
Portland, Oregon
Gayle Edlin:
La Crosse, Wisconsin
Alina Hunter-Grah:
Chattanooga, Tennessee
Jennifer Palley:
Sweden
Linda Busby Parker:
Mobile, Alabama
Mary Popham:
Louisville, Kentucky
Suzanne Craig Robertson:
Nashville, Tennessee
Deidre Woollard:
Los Angeles, California

Photographers

Gayle Edlin
Terry Price
Luke Seward

Web banner photo

Kim Miles

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A Word From the Editor ...

The Fact of Fiction

Is fiction relevant in 21st century America? Or—as one of my thoughtful, compassionate, undergraduate students once put it—*so what?*

Providing a thoughtful response to that question was my challenge that semester, long ago: to show that particular student that fiction and the arts both matter and are essential ingredients to living a meaningful life.

I think I did a satisfactory job; he performed well in the course and took another one of my English classes.

It has been my experience that many times students say and write shocking statements to get a rise out of an instructor, and I suspect that this was the case with this young man.

Had he never read a piece of fiction up to that point in his life, as he declared? Possibly. Maybe. It's impossible to tell what is and is not the truth...*with these kids today!* (Yep, I'm getting to the age where I think these sorts of things about people much younger than myself.)

The one thing I knew to be true, though, was that this exercise provided me with the opportunity to explore the "so what" of it all.

The result? A nice lecture—a conversation—that I use to kick off each semester.

Despite these rare encounters, I love working with students and young people—both in higher education and at the journal. I'm thrilled to share with you that we've added a few new faces to our writing and editing team.

Ms. Brittany Eldridge will serve as our first editorial assistant. Currently enrolled in Western Kentucky University's English Department, Brittany's stint with us will last throughout the coming semester. She's working through the English Department's internship program.

And please join us in welcoming Ms. Alina Hunter-Grah. Alina is a sophomore at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, majoring in Communications. Starting in the fall, Alina will be our correspondent for the Chattanooga, Tennessee area.

And finally there's Mr. K.J. Moore. K.J. is a high school student interested in the writing profession. He's doing a little volunteer work, writing book reviews.

In the spirit of full disclosure, we must reveal that the first half of this issue was launched last summer in a limited run on the campus of Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky, as our MFA Homecoming issue. That issue (and this one, as well) featured novelist Sena Jeter Naslund and work by and about writers and poets connected to Spalding's MFA in Writing program. Sena is a co-founder of the program, which started in 2001.

This summer's 60-page extended edition is double last summer's, and it contains many stories either about Nashville's literary community or written by local writers.

There are some short stories, of course! But we have plenty of poems, as well, and you'll see a Q&A with Kentucky's first African-American poet laureate, Professor Frank X. Walker. Oh, and Tennessee's Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn has been renewed as our state's poet laureate until 2020. We are including a nice write-up on our friend Maggi.

Between our reviews and press releases, we're covering well over a dozen books in this issue spanning fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. And for the first time, we are including a graphic novel. It's *March*, the multi-part graphic novel autobiography of Congressman John Lewis.

This issue is set to launch in late July at East Side Story Books in East Nashville. The owner happens to be one of our columnists, Mr. Chuck Beard. Chuck devotes and donates a great deal of his time and resources to promote local artists. His column in this issue continues that great work. In addition, Chuck published an anthology entitled, *Based On: Words, Notes, and Art from Nashville*. It is a collection of short stories, songs, and visual art prints arranged in a single book that includes a CD. We attended the book's launch, and we're thrilled to include a feature story about that night. If you like what you read, please consider purchasing a copy of the anthology. Money raised goes to benefit the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville.

It's the summer, and that means it's Shakespeare in the Park time again in Nashville. The Nashville Shakespeare Festival presents *Henry V*, from August 13 to September 13, Thursdays through Sundays and Labor Day Monday at the Centennial Park Bandshell. Please consider volunteering your time and talent. It's easy, fun, and needed. We're providing a full-page advert to help promote this wonderful event, and you can learn more at <http://nashvilleshakes.org/volunteer.htm>

We are not resting.

Already, our writers are traveling around the South and working on stories for our Southern Food issue, featuring James Beard Award-winning Chef Sean Brock as our In Depth interview. Alina (remember her!) has already been to South Pittsburg, Tennessee, to work on her cast iron story. Writer Katie McDougall is back from Mississippi, where she wrote a great story on The Southern Foodways Alliance. And...well, everyone is writing and working. You'll love both that issue and the one you're looking at now. Happy reading and thanks for your support! ☺

Gallery of Poems

Selected works from poets in Tennessee and beyond

Questions on the Curve of Light

By Kate Gale

The kitchen looks out on the storied glass of morning.
Our flowers with their backs against the wall.
They're observers as we spin straw into words.

We raised three sons here and a daughter.
The house boiled over onto the stove, caught fire.
That too became a myth, the fire walking.

Flames hanging in air. Even asleep there was noise.
Even asleep, I come to you, lie down in circle.
Even asleep, they talked, whispered secrets.

We talk about sky and forget spoons and forks.
Mostly we like questions on the curve of the light.
We miss little things. But they happen anyway.

The frame of a story, the sticky beginnings, stuffy middle,
should we unstuff it? The ending drooling in its porridge.
Did he get lost or was he on walkabout? That story.

We liked stories that fell off the earth like it was a table.
All flat, then riding hard over the edge.
We liked stories with too much plot. Not enough craft.

A whale of hips, limbs, cascade of the un-belongings.
One eyelash blinking morning light. Kitchen astir and dreaming.
Our daughter slept in the kitchen cupboard, broke dishes.

That too was a story. Light falling through the palms.
The cat climbing onto the roof. The tiny bird's nest empty.
In the yard, there are seeds, broken eggs. In the sky, wings.

I Am Not Good with Costumes, or, One-Woman Show with a Tragic Flaw

By Susan Martinello

*If this were played upon a stage now, I
would condemn it as an improbable fiction.*
Hamlet

*If only bankers could share a stage with salmon-suited girls
glinting their honest silver. No shades of mannered camel
or knife-edged slate bring round the girl I see in the mirror
from committing wardrobe sin. Yet the commandment is
imprinted on my soul: wear hippie to Harvard and thou
shalt be written out of scenes by men and women in well-
behaved attire. I learn to fear and revere clothes young,
with my mother wilting beside me in fitting rooms where
nothing fits. The grown-up day I dare to pull the drape
across a fitting room door, I emerge salmon-hot. No more
waistless schoolgirl dresses or Sunday Mass wools, my
mother in miniature. *The salmon suit appears for my job
interview at a Boston bank and does all the talking.* My
full-length, antique cape once delivered its own monologue
sweeping along the streets of Rome. On the daily stage
costumes can whisper or shout, but must never speak in
tongues. *The hands on the banker's watch clutch for
numerals to end the act.* Under a New Hampshire moon,
pond ripples will chuckle over me in the role of wool-
skirted Italian matron. Early on, Mother tried to take
clothing me into her own hands – smoothed fabric across
my body, pinched seams, folded hems, her lips prickly with
pins. I bear such love for elegance. But clothes itch on my
body like a foreign skin.*

The Dance, in Two Acts

By Susan Martinello

Lights dim for the last dance, always a slow dance, when
the cross-eyed boy asks me. The eyes that I search to meet
are brown, brown hair glances his face. He doesn't smile
when he asks, nor do I when I say yes to my first dance
with a boy all evening. He holds me with the flush of
success, and his arm feels good around my waist. I crook
my arm, light on the shoulder of his sports jacket, and peer
out, scan as we turn for who's looking. His hand clasps
mine, warm. I don't want "She Wore Blue Velvet" to come
to its final sigh. The lights come up too bright as they do at
a high school dance, and divide us without a word.

In typing class, I sit next to a guitar player in a band that
plays Friday nights at the "Y," and feel electric. We never
date, but on graduation night, we neck in his pickup. He
drops by to see me when he hears I am home from college.
I come down to the kitchen where a faded guy in jeans sits
at the table, a guy who has been to Vietnam and back, who
has long hair and a receding hairline, whose teeth were
never good. He reads me like a clock and is out the door
within minutes. Now we know how to cut and run.

Liquid is only liquid—evaporating as it does without a shape to contain it, to shore it up.

By Kate Buckley

What is a river without banks? Streams
would bury themselves back into soil.
Rain pulls itself away, falls back in the clouds.
Vapor is only visible against skin.
Even wine runs dark on the cellar floor
without a cask to give it form,
and our blood must be contained by veins.
I was your vessel, and you poured yourself
into me as the rain fills a willing basin.
Filled me till I was choking—my neck, my neck.
And yet, I was willing. Else, we'd have dissipated,
faded away leaving no mark, no trace.
But the bottle's tipped over, the ink's run out,
and everything's stained, everything ruined.

Consider the Lilies

By Kate Gale

Sit quietly while others eat.
Understand. This is not personal.

Walk the gutter.
Note sunlight on street. Not for you.

You were born without arms and legs.
You were born without face.

Without money in your pockets.
You have no pockets.

You were sowed on rocky ground.
Your parents had no land.

They are landless. Will never have land.
They are not an island. Or water.

They are not. You are not. Of this earth.
Nothing on earth conspires to sustain you.

Chalk it up to bad genes. And no lamp.
No meadow. Wood. Glade. Dappled sunlight.

Make the best of your red checkered tablecloth.
Of your corn. Canned fish.

Crackers. Tomato soup. Onions. Garlic.
You have eggs. There will be more of you.

Pray without ceasing. Imagine writing.
Or painting. Imagine music. Or don't.

You don't have time. You don't have eyes.
Or ears. Your hands work furiously.

But produce nothing. You can't reach
the sill of the well.

Consider the lilies.

Somewhere In West Glover

By Kevin McLellan

The windows: the tied curtains: the backs
of girl's heads with pigtails: these twins

unaware of the pine knot eyes in the paneling

that come alive at night nor the half buried
half propped up wagon wheel outdoors: it rests

against their cabin: these agoraphobic sisters

with eyes in the back of their heads look through
one another and into the tree line (interruption:

the blinking moths): clouds at dusk not predictably

moving and the 100's of bullfrogs warming up
for another final performance:

Alchemist

By Kathleen Thompson

-for N, at eighteen

You rendered this couple on kraft
paper in tones of earth, faces heavy
with desire. Brown clock clouds
loom over their chocolate-drop eyes.
Close beside one jar sits upright, another,
on its side, a heart spilling out, cracked.

Your portfolio is not so different
from the dream of Win and Reginé
a song whose lyrics put their hearts
into twenty thousand tiny jars
somewhere in a cannery
in Canada, locked away

with her accordion. Outsiders,
too, to society, they tried and tried
and tried and tried and tried
to push away the crowds
who would not understand
what they wanted to preserve.

Above the jars sun's fiery fingers
are fixed, a constant. No smile, no frown,
its face mirrors the mystery of Mona Lisa,
emotes a solid rainbow of warm pastels
oranges, reds, and yellows, circling above
a dark dividing seam, safe from all conflict,

centered, circling like the gold signet ring,
you finger upon your right hand, your elixir,
philosopher's stone. Your design as precise
as an architectural line, two matching bands
wed by a jeweler, as insoluble now as granite,
bonding your long-divorced mom and dad.



A Conversation With Sena Jeter Naslund

By Michael Morris

Michael Morris: Your characters are always so fully drawn. In your latest novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*, you manage to create two rich characters in different time periods – Kathryn, a writer in a contemporary Louisville, Kentucky and Elisabeth, an artist in France and a survivor of the French Revolution. How did you go about crafting these characters? Do you write a backstory on your characters before you begin writing the novel?

Sena Jeter Naslund: Creating complex characters, with depth and doubts, pride and regret, hopes and fears, creatures both active and passive (as real people are) is one of the major challenges to any serious novelist. When I was a student, back at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, I realized that if I couldn't create characters of this sort, I should give up trying to write fiction. After three months, almost a whole summer, of trying and failing (a real struggle), I hit upon a technique that has stood me in good stead to this day.

The long story or novella I wrote then (I think I was 26) was titled "The Death of Julius Geissler," and readers can find it in my much later short story collection *The Disobedience of Water*.

I begin by finding a part of myself that I can give the character. This characteristic is like a wormhole that lets me burrow into the depth of the fictional character. With Julius Geissler, what we had in common was a profound love of classical music, though he was a violinist, and I was a cellist. In my most recent novel, *Fountain/Portrait*, what I had in common with the painter was her profound love and appreciation of the intelligence and originality of her daughter. Of course there are other things I have in common with her, but this was the wormhole, the point of identification and of entry into this 18th century artist. I knew about Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun's relationship to her daughter by reading her memoir *Souvenirs*.

With the contemporary writer, Kathryn, the most important thing I had in common with her is her love of her neighborhood and her home. I let her live in my house, in fact, and gave her some of my furniture and paintings.

The next important step, back in Iowa days and now, after making common cause with the created character, was to recognize or create space between me and that character; it's this space that opens up imagination. With Julius Geissler, I made him male when I was female, old when I was young, German when I was American, a virtuoso performer when I had limited musical talent. With Elisabeth, my painter, I made her a realist, temperamentally, while I am something of a romantic. Elisabeth had a husband who was a gambler, a womanizer, and a spendthrift; she accepted his shortcomings, treated him with courtesy and friendship when in his presence, and poured her most intimate self into the art of painting. Given 18th century Catholic strictures against divorce this was the sensible course for her to take. I could never have endured such a man; I knew I had to imagine and come to understand in a realistic way Elisabeth's 18th century situation, and not only to respect her for her compromise but also to admire her for it.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund enjoying some down time during the Rome summer residency.



Photo by Luke Seward

Sena Jeter Naslund hangs out with the St. James Court Lamplighter, Rob Peterson's 2013 carving of a Victorian lamplighter and gas lamp from a 100-year-old oak stump. Learn more at robpetersoncarving.com

To create distance (and room for imagination) in inventing Kathryn, the writer, I gave her a close friend who was also another writer (Leslie), who has just moved in across St. James Court; these two women shared a background rooted in Montgomery, Alabama, an antebellum city. I don't have such a friend, and I'm from Birmingham, a post-Civil War city with a different engagement with the Civil Rights Movement than that of Montgomery. Leslie is a kind of composite of many women friends who have been supportive of me and/or my work. Kathryn's and Leslie's friendship is an important part of the structure of the book: we follow Kathryn through a 24-hour period, and her mid-afternoon conversation with Leslie about their writing and their lives is a quiet, but pivotal, scene.

So I sketch out a major character in terms of things I *know thoroughly, identify with, and completely understand* about him or her, and then I turn to characteristics and situations that separate me from the character, but interest and challenge me.

I also ask myself what is of sustaining value to my characters and what are their psychological needs or shortcomings that make them open to error—their strengths and weaknesses. One of the things I've always admired about Tolstoy's characters is how their strengths and weaknesses *are related* to each other. For example, Anna is a warm and wise character about the feelings of others, but it is her own need for warmth and understanding, for congeniality, that leads her into a disastrous extra-marital affair. Each of us is needy and flawed, and fiction needs to encompass that truth. But I do like courage and conviction, of one sort or another, and I'd find it hard to work with a major character whom I despise.

I don't have the characters completely outlined. They do things that surprise me. I give them as much freedom as I can. I never write out their backstories, but their backstories occur to me as they're needed, and the various backstories grow as the book progresses.

For example, in *Portrait/Fountain* I wanted to include a loving and successful marriage in my treatment of Kathryn's friends and neighbors, Daisy and Daniel. In a good marriage, both partners not only take

care of the other but also need being taken care of, usually, to a certain extent. After two or three complete drafts of the novels, I realized that Daniel would have had some remnants of post-traumatic stress disorder, and that he might have a special sensitivity to the presence of danger: so I wrote a new section about Daniel and Daisy in Part I, "Midnight: Crossing the Court," in which Daisy is taking care of Daniel's psychological needs. I had already shown his love and ready willingness to shepherd and care for his wife.

Aesthetically, it's important for me to commit myself to the inner lives of all the major characters: we're each the center of our own universe.

MM: I've read where you first discovered the artist, Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, while researching your bestselling novel *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette*. What drew you to come back to her, and while writing *Abundance* did you know that you would one day tell Elisabeth's story?

SIN: Through my research in the 18th century in preparing to write *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette*, I met a number of historical characters I wanted to know more about: the kings, old Louis XV and his fifteen-year-old grandson, the future Louis XVI, of course, Antoinette's mother, Maria Theresa the Empress of Austria, Antoinette's friend and possible lover the Swedish Count Axel von Fersen (internationally known for being especially handsome and referred to by the English as "The Picture"), Antoinette's true friend the Princess de Lamballe (who died refusing to testify against the queen and king), and others. I thought of writing four or five more "surround" novels, with *Abundance* as the centerpiece.

I wanted to enter the 18th century world as thoroughly as I could—the places, if not the time, but I listened to the music of the period and studied its architecture and visited its gardens. I traveled to France several times and lived for a month in the town of Versailles in an 18th century building. "Body research," I call it.

Of course I looked at many portraits of Antoinette and discovered the ones I admired most, aesthetically, were all painted by Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, and then I found out she was Antoinette's favorite portraitist and her friend as well, though a commoner.



Photo by Luke Seward

That Elisabeth established her identity through her talent and joyful hard work very much appealed to me. Detouring from the Antoinette narrative, I read everything I could find on the painter, including her memoir *Souvenirs*. What attracted me most to the painter, rather than the other figures I've mentioned, was her amazing success as a woman artist, against huge odds; that she was happy in the act of creating; that she was devoted to painting till she died in her mid eighties; that as she aged she established a lovely seasonal rhythm to her life, living in the city of Paris in winter and living in the country at Louveciennes in spring and summer. I admired the life she created for herself and her vitality in old age. That she was able to escape France with her daughter in order to survive the French Revolution of 1789 also spoke to my own sense of urgency about survival. (All my life I've had survival nightmares.) Elisabeth's interest and courage about engaging in extensive travel also spoke to my own impulse to travel and know the world. She was invested in music and literature as well as art, and she was a skilled conversationalist and *salonnière*. While Elisabeth was a professional success, she also loved and valued her family—first, her mother and father and brother and later her daughter—and her friends, many of whom were artists of various kinds, or who loved the arts. She did not let her disappointing marriage erode her joy in her life or work.

I knew I would like to tell her story, if I could find the right approach to doing so.

MM: So you were attracted to the painter's successful and rather amazing life, but what else factors into making a firm decision about a subject for a project that will take you several years to complete?

SJN: Before I decide on a subject for a novel, I ask myself if the novel *needs* to be written. Is there a gap in the literary landscape that needs to be filled? I also ask myself what do I know or what have I felt that has been *very important to me* but that has not been treated exhaustively (if at all) in fiction.

I wrote *Ahab's Wife* partly because I felt there was no big American novel focusing on a woman's quest story or her radical questions about the nature of the universe.

We had an important woman protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*, but it was written more than a century ago, and it is less bold in its overt philosophical questioning and questing than I felt was needed now. Also I wanted such a quest novel with a strong woman protagonist to exist for my own daughter and for other young women.

I chose to write a Civil Rights novel, *Four Spirits*, partly because I felt that the subject had been treated extensively with documentary material, but there was no big Civil Rights novel. Here was a subject of huge importance in American history (and to me personally) that had scarcely awakened the imagination of fiction writers.

I had written a number of contemporary short stories that dealt with the way art and creativity fill spiritual needs and confirm a sense of both selfhood and community, (for example, "The Disobedience of Water" in my story collection of the same title), but I felt the subject and its importance had not been written about convincingly enough nor did it have a large enough place in contemporary American fiction.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund in front of the Fountain of St. James Court.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund (L) and Marilyn Moss Rockefeller (R) in Buenos Aires: 2010 Summer Residency.

Non-artists depend a lot on artists for entertainment and insight, as interpreters and shapers of reality, as companions. Shouldn't people know more about who artists are, what their thought processes are, what influences them, how they live day to day? On book tours, curious readers often ask how I come by the ideas or stories central to my books.

I've especially enjoyed reading works that deal with artists of one type or another; for example, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Mann's "Death in Venice," James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—English, German, and Irish contexts. That Joyce title especially caught my attention, being a good feminist-humanist. And what about the bias toward youth as a time of special interest? Actually in Joyce's novel, his Stephen is merely ambitious; he has accomplished next to nothing by the end of the book. The light-bulb realization was that the narrative of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun's life could be a 21st century feminist, non-ageist answer to Joyce's book. Who is an artist? Not just a young man full of rebellion, but a woman, an old one, very successful and content, still-active, a person of actual accomplishment.

Actually, this last time, I was torn between two subjects: I wanted to deal again with contemporary life, as I have in my short stories, and I also wanted to ease my sense of being haunted by the Vigée-Le Brun's historical narrative.

And then I thought of a novel-within-a-novel (a new form for me) which could engage the idea of how art speaks across time. The form would allow me to explore in depth the question about how a writer relates to her subject matter.

When focusing on a new big novel project, besides considering subject matter as carefully as I can -- whether such a book is needed to fill a gap in the literary landscape, whether the ideas are *important to me* -- technique plays a big part in my preliminary thinking. I couldn't envision repeating myself technically by again using a form that was structured like my Marie Antoinette novel: a simple, forward march in time, written in present tense--no framework. Because the fate of Antoinette is well known, it's a huge hook that pulls a reader through the days and years leading up to the guillotine. The absence of a highly dramatic and known conclusion to Elisabeth's life meant I needed to create some other kind of tension, a different structure. I needed to show the relevance of her life to that of a contemporary person.

It began to seem to me that from the two contending impulses—to write about contemporary life and to tell the story of Antoinette's favorite portrait painter—came the notion of combing the two.

MM: As a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing program at Spalding University where you are the program director, I've heard you discuss the importance of the inter-relatedness of the arts. In this new novel you vividly capture the life of a portrait artist and the process of creating a painting. What other art forms inspire your creative process?

SJN: I'm a sort of failed musician. While I was offered a college scholarship to study cello and play in the University of Alabama orchestra, I knew that if I practiced very hard, I could improve some—but not enough to play with the kind of freedom that I admire in top-notch performers. I turned down the scholarship, though I had very little money, and I chose to live at home and attend an excellent small liberal arts college—Birmingham Southern College. I felt that kind of education would let me explore my own mind and discover new possible directions.

My mother was a wonderful pianist (and had been a professional violinist), and from as early as I can remember I heard her play classical music throughout the day at home. I passionately loved hearing her play a wide range of composers—Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Scarlatti, Liszt, Debussy, Bartok, many others. I especially liked Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude," and whenever I was sick, she played it for me, and I immediately felt lifted from illness. (I also played piano, but again, I didn't have the right nervous system, much as I loved the music.) But I've always drawn inspiration from hearing live performances and recordings as well. When I had my breakthrough at Iowa, resulting in a complex character and narrative—the Julius Geissler narrative—I had just heard an inspiring performance of the Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin and viola. I came home from the concert and, encouraged by my husband, stayed up all night getting started on my musical tale.



Photo courtesy of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program

In 2011, Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program celebrated its tenth anniversary. Pictured (L-R) are Spalding University President (and Spalding MFA alumna) Tori Murden McClure; Sena Jeter Naslund, Program Director; Karen J. Mann, Administrative Director; and Kathleen Driskell, Associate Program Director.

Because of my own experience, I believe in the interrelatedness of all the arts, and their inspiring ability. The arts fulfill something in us that can never express itself in other ways. My novel *Adam & Eve* presents the impulse to create as one of the earliest characteristics of what makes human beings human, and I believe it is the antidote to our other innate inclination toward violence and destruction. To better understand what it means to be human, my characters of the future (the book is set in 2020) go back to view prehistoric cave paintings. My own interest in the visual arts began at Birmingham-Southern when I took a wonderful course in art history taught by Professor Virginia Rembert. And the amazing work of fellow students who gave eye-opening senior gallery talks—Patricia Ellisor (Gaines) and Ron Countryman—made me realize artistic achievement could begin in the here and now. Likewise, at BSC, I saw splendid student acting and developed an interest in live theatre and in the profound fun of musicals.

In designing the brief-residency MFA in Writing at Spalding University, I wanted to include in the curriculum—at least in an introductory way—some experiences with the sister arts, which had meant so much to me.

In creating my portrait painter, I studied her work, what critics said about her, and the context provided by the aesthetic of the time available to me in 18th century furniture, fashion, gardens, public and private buildings, and music. I drew on my own slight experimentation in watercolor, drawing, and photography and on conversations with artists and lecturers.

My interest in Elisabeth was enhanced because she was interested in music and literature as well as in painting, and it was important to me that her contemporary shadow, the writer Kathryn Callaghan, have her own interest in musical performance, theatre, her son's sculpture, and the poetry of her friends and former students.

I wanted my novel about living the life of an artist to be as inclusive as possible. Because many great artists have a profound interest in more than one art, I wanted the Spalding MFA experience to reflect that truth. In Louisville, we attend performances at Actors Theatre, the Kentucky Opera, the Moscow Symphony and Riverdance, when they came to town, the Speed Art Museum, Jazz clubs, etc. During the summer our residency is always at different international locations:

we've visited Gaudi's architecture in Barcelona, ballet at L'Opera and the Louvre in Paris, theatre in London, the Vatican museum and forum in Rome, flamenco dancing in Buenos Aires, the Uffizi museum in Florence, etc.

MM: In the novel at one point Kathryn seems to have trepidation over the quality of the manuscript she has just completed while Elisabeth expresses inner satisfaction – ecstasy to some degree – in presenting one of her paintings to her father. Can you elaborate on the complexities involved in being a writer or an artist – the tension between delight in the creation and turmoil over bringing the work before the public? What advice do you have for writers who face such feelings?

SJM: I think most artists experience moments of ecstasy and moments of doubt about their own achievement. To allay her doubts and to get help, even though it's midnight, Kathryn takes her work to a trusted friend and writer. I do that, too, but in spades. Besides my agent and my editor, before I seek their help, my books are read by ten or so people, and they go through many partial and complete revisions. A few very generous friends and my brother John Sims Jeter read my evolving manuscripts more than once, but mostly I show the revisions, as they are "finished," to new readers. I am extremely grateful to my readers, and I treasure their judgment, though of course I'm selective about the advice that I implement. Many of my manuscript readers are former students who have become published writers themselves. I am happy to read their manuscripts in return, if asked.

I try to use doubt as a tool to improve my work, a helpful tool. I enjoy revision—so necessary in my case, and so much easier than getting that first draft. I love returning to the work and refining it, developing it, or making it more powerful: it's a job I relish. It's the time of greatest pleasure in the creative process for me.

After I've done my best, after the last revision, I generally feel confident about my work. Of course it's not going to please everyone, but I've learned from some of my reviewers in terms of possible future directions and leanings. It helps me a lot to know what they see as positive about my writing. Some of the criticism is inspired; some is stupid, and I dismiss it. By nature, I'm pretty critical myself, so I feel turn about is fair play.

Becoming a successful writer was a long process for me, but like the painter Elisabeth, at this point I rejoice in what I've done and continue to try to do. Sometimes writing is very difficult, but I have faith that I can find my way. I expect a degree of frustration and doubt along the way. When I'm writing well (or think I am), I feel full of power and joy. Sometimes that feeling comes in the act of new writing; sometimes during the revising; sometimes in re-reading what is in published form. At such moments, it's a great pleasure to be a creative artist. Well worth the agony, discipline, public and private criticism, disappointment, and hard work that one must embrace.

MM: I enjoyed how the novel alternates between Kathryn's modern day story and Elisabeth's story set during the time just of the French Revolution. Was it difficult to alternate back and forth between the stories? Did you first write Kathryn's story and then weave in Elisabeth's narrative?

SJN: No, I composed them as intertwining. Something in one narrative would send me back to the other. It was refreshing to work this way, to change horses according to some unconscious nudge. Part of my thematic was the interrelatedness of life and art, how life sends us to art; how art returns us to life.

Kathryn's contemporary story takes place all in one autumn day, and she's living it with an awareness of Woolf's treatment of Clarissa Dalloway's day in *Mrs. Dalloway* (a day in June). There's a mounting angst: Kathryn dreads a possible visitation by her son's abusive ex-lover. Elisabeth's story starts out as a reminiscence of an old woman while at her country home, springtime, waiting for guests to arrive that evening—a dinner party. In the first three drafts, the backstories were told free-associatively, as they occurred to me. But in the last draft, with my book contract deadline only a month away, I felt Elisabeth's life needed a core chronology, one that takes her from her childhood to the marriage in Russia of her daughter; then it does drop back to an earlier time, Elisabeth's and a younger Julie's companionable experience in Italy. So I had quite a scramble making this revision and meeting my deadline. But it was a needed improvement. The book was too disorderly and confusing for the reader when I let both backstories be told so free-associatively.

The Elisabeth story exists partly as pages printed out and left by Kathryn at her friend Leslie's door; partly as Kathryn memory; partly as having an independent ontological being. *The Fountain of St. James Court* is just a draft, and at the very end (to capture something of the creative process of the writer), Kathryn realizes (as I did) that she's left out an important scene: the heart-breaking death of Julie.

MM: Kathryn and Elisabeth are not only from different time periods but also at different points in their lives. However, there seems to be a parallel, not only as artists but also as women seeking to forge new paths. How do you see the characters as similar and different?



Photo by Barry Drudge

Sena Jeter Naslund speaks at the Ireland summer residency.

SJN: Early in the novel, Kathryn says that she wrote the novel *Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman* partly to create a sort of mirror, or looking glass, by which, or through which, she might come to a better understanding of herself. Kathryn does feel a kinship with Elisabeth: they are both successful artists, though in different fields, living in eras (then and now) when many women of talent have lived unfulfilled lives, in terms of actual achievement. Both women very much love their children; both have been disappointed in marriage; both lost their fathers before adulthood. Both love music as well as their own art form. Friendship is important to both, and both are travelers.

But they have important differences as well. Kathryn's growth as an artist has been much more tentative, while Elisabeth's father recognized her particular talent at an early age and always encouraged her. Elisabeth's innate talent is a greater force for her than is Kathryn's desire to write, and being a productive and well-recognized artist is probably more central to Elisabeth's happiness than writing is to Kathryn, though she cares deeply about her work and identifies herself as a writer.

Kathryn suffers much more from her multiple failed marriages than Elisabeth does from her single, less than ideal marriage, even though the painter's husband profits greatly, financially, while Elisabeth sees next to nothing of the vast sums she's earned, until she flees France. (Her art-dealer husband, much less associated with the aristocracy, stays behind to try to protect his inventory.)

Kathryn has a more lasting and loving relationship with her gay son that Elisabeth does with her daughter.

Elisabeth has a closer spiritual relationship to nature than Kathryn, and Elisabeth also has a traditional orientation to the Catholic Church. Elisabeth accepts the social and po-

litical order into which she was born: she's a monarchist, but Kathryn and her friend Leslie form an early alliance against the social order of racial segregation in the American South.

While friendship is valued by both women, it's essential to Kathryn's happiness in a way that far exceeds Elisabeth's need for a kindred spirit in the form of a woman friend. In her memoir, *Souvenirs*, Elisabeth writes more about society than friendship. Elisabeth enjoys parties, while Kathryn focuses more on private conversations with just one or two people. To Kathryn, friendship and the arts are of sustaining spiritual value, while Elisabeth's spiritual life is church-oriented. Neighborhood and home as a physical place are of elevated importance to Kathryn—they cradle her—but are somewhat less defining to Elisabeth. However, she does love Louveciennes because living in the country brings her closer to nature and to a sense of God manifested in creation; Louveciennes also provides a simple and refreshing alternative to the culture of the busy city.

Both of these women artists are aging, and in some sense, the book as a whole provides a double portrait of aging women artists. Kathryn is entering her seventies, and she worries about Alzheimer's and mental impairment; in a tentative way, she still hopes for a romantic relationship with a man; her need for emotional connection causes her to appreciate special animals in an intense, imaginative way. Kathryn wants to experience a glorious autumn as her life begins to close, a time full of rich color and the warmth of hot chocolate. Elisabeth has arrived now at contentment: art continues to sustain her as it has throughout her life, back to her earliest memories. The seasonal rhythm to her life gives it a steady beat. Without anxiety, she rejoices once again in the renewal of spring.

MM: I've heard you say that you allowed the character Kathryn to borrow details of your life – she's a writer who lives in the same neighborhood as you in Louisville, Kentucky. Was there any hesitation to allow the character to take on aspects of your life or was it a liberating process? How did you come about this idea of letting Kathryn borrow details from your own identity?

SJN: I've always liked to tease the boundary between fact and fiction. It's an enticing liminal space. To borrow some from my things and from places I know well and to place them in an imaginary context was both fun and satisfying. And it saved research time. In some ways, I felt I was making the real more real, by giving it a place in fiction. I wanted to honor the places and things that have cradled me, like the twirly gray chair in my living room, by letting an imagined character enjoy them.

A friend and colleague at Spalding, Julie Brickman, once said to me that as soon as we write the word "I," even in writing nonfiction, we have created an entity apart from the self. I feel that *Ahab's Wife* is as autobiographical as *The Fountain of St. James Court*. Which is another way of saying that *Fountain*, despite trappings taken directly from my own life, is best understood as fiction.

On the other hand, all creations are about their authors or are revelatory about aspects of their authors. I think that truth adds to the pleasure, for me, when I read books by people I know: I'm getting to know them better and more intimately than ever before.

Nonetheless, I did want to establish distance between myself and Kathryn, so her part of the novel is written in the third person: *she*. On the other hand, I wanted to cultivate intimacy and immediacy with my 18th century character, so her section of the novel is written in first person.

MM: You are an encourager and mentor to many writers. I can still hear you say that as aspiring writers our competition is not with one another, our competition is in the library and bookstores. Who are some of the writers who have been your mentors and how have they helped shape your work?

SJN: Various teachers have been important mentors to me. One of the most important was a high school English teacher, Leslie Moss (Ainsworth), and I've named Kathryn's friend Leslie in honor of her. At Birmingham-Southern I started writing short stories under the tutelage of Richbourg Gaillard McWilliams and a full-length play with Arnold Powell. My most important fiction-writing teachers at Iowa were Angus Wilson, Richard Yates, and William Price Fox.

Just as important, maybe more so in some cases, as those who were my teachers were the authors whose works I've loved: Charles Dickens; the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf; Tolstoy; Shakespeare; William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter, Flannery O'Connor; Wordsworth, Keats, Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens. It's too dangerous to name contemporary writers: there are so many from whom I've drawn inspiration and insight. But I must mention childhood favorite novelists: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Louisa Mae Alcott, Lucy Maude Montgomery.

MM: What are you currently working on?

SJN: Although I've only just begun the research for a big novel about the American Civil War, what seemed a clear vision of the opening suddenly presented itself, and I sat down to begin the writing: two hours, four typed pages. Of course they will have to be revised many times.

MM: You lived in Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement. You've written about that time period in your novel *Four Spirits* and most recently a monument was erected in Birmingham memorializing the four young girls killed in the 16th Street Church bombing. The monument is called *Four Spirits*. How did it feel to have your work inspire the title of the monument and to be present during the unveiling?

SJN: I felt and feel deeply honored. Overwhelmed. The feeling engendered by that fact is beyond the power of my words to express. ☐

Review: *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*

Naslund Turns the Tables on a Classic With an Endearing Tale of Two Women

By Diana McQuady

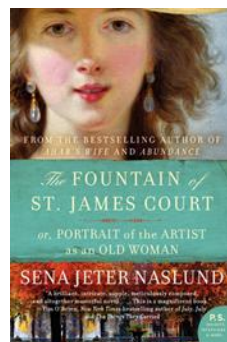
A hundred years ago, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* burst onto the literary scene and became the prevailing concept of the artist's life. James Joyce's novel portrayed a young man, hungry and excited to start his writing career. But how does an artist sustain the work for decades? What does an artist's career look like when viewed from the later years of the artist's life? And would a female version be different than the male one? All of these questions are at the heart of Sena Jeter Naslund's new novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*, which features two creative women who are "sustaining joyful work."

Kathryn Callaghan is a teacher and writer who lives in modern-day Louisville, Kentucky—specifically in Old Louisville on the very real St. James Court where there is a beautiful and well-known fountain. As she faces a third divorce and nears her seventieth birthday, Kathryn finishes writing her ninth novel. This work in particular becomes personal to her as she has written "a book about a woman who loved her art more than herself, whose life was her art."

The artist at the center of Kathryn's novel-within-the-novel is Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun. Fans of Naslund's 2007, *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette* might remember Élisabeth as a minor character, a French painter who became admired for her portraits of nobility and royalty, including several of Queen Marie Antoinette herself. In Kathryn's prose, Élisabeth pursues art from an early age when she is introduced to the creative and thinking people of her time by a supportive father. Sheer talent and an instinct for the humanity of her subjects provide a thriving career at a time when work was not fashionable for a woman. Élisabeth comes face to face with royalty and notable members of French society, offering the reader a luscious background of lovely gardens and palaces, elegant gowns, chic food and wine, and an insider's view of life during late eighteenth-century Paris and the French Revolution.

The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman alternates between the characters of Kathryn and Élisabeth. While the women live centuries and continents apart, they have much in common (children, divorce, careers), and their stories link and intertwine in such a way as to make the novel a delightful read. It is, however, as artists where the lives of the two women most conjoin. It is in their learning to be and becoming artists—finding themselves at the height of their careers, especially as women of a certain age in their later reflections about what it means to live the artistic life—that Kathryn and Élisabeth find that the art to which they have made certain sacrifices and given themselves fully and without regret has a central place in their quests for self. And the reader who goes along on the novel's journey will find, through Kathryn and Élisabeth, answers not found in Joyce's work, answers to questions that a younger artist could not even ask, answers important to those who create or enjoy art in any form.

Readers of *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman* will revel in the author's richly-layered story. Long after closing the book's covers, they will remain immersed in the meticulous prose, remember both protagonists for their depth and desires, and wish to revisit the enchantment of Paris and Old Louisville. But it is the art through the lives and thoughts of the two artists and Naslund's vivid descriptions that takes center stage, bringing an enlightenment to readers whether themselves artistic or simply wanting a peek inside the artist's creative world. ☐



Peeking In: Invoking the Senses at an MFA Residency

By Diana McQuady

In the summer of 2013, I attended my fourth of five residencies as a student in Spalding University's low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program. Residencies last for ten days and are a whirlwind of assignments, readings, lectures, workshops, interactions, food, excitement, exhaustion, and (for writers like me) bliss. Every residency is different from the one before, both in the requirements, which are based upon a student's current status, and in the schedule.

And there are always surprises.

Now, I'm working on my graduation lecture and reading, and in a week or so I will be doing a test run of it all with friends...I think. We're still solidifying the date and time for our practice runs. Workbooks come out this Friday, and my last MFA residency appears to be about to happen. As I prepare for my return trip to Louisville, Kentucky, I pause to think about my experiences there last summer:



Welcome home. It's Friday night, and I've had dinner with the group of people I'll workshop with over the next eight days. This is our first face-to-face meeting, but we're not strangers—I've met them on Facebook and have read their work. The tables are cleared of dishes, and the meeting room becomes hushed when Program Director Sena Jeter Naslund steps to the podium and speaks the words that begin every residency: "Welcome home." Raucous cheers follow. The people in this room have a deep common bond in writing. We are, indeed, home.

This is the best dorm ever. I overhear a student saying these words while waiting for an elevator, and I agree. During the residency, most students and faculty stay at the Brown Hotel, a short walk to Spalding University's campus in downtown Louisville. Our hotel was built in 1923 with great character and a beautiful, ornate lobby. I settle in without hesitation. For nine nights, we students will have our writing family under the same roof, food nearby, rooms cleaned, and will be immersed in learning the craft we adore. Is the Brown Hotel the best dorm ever? It has to be close.

Excuse me. Will you watch my cello? It's late morning on Saturday, and I'm sitting in the hotel's lobby. Our assignment: to write the beginning of a story, and I've rushed to this particular spot because words want to flow out of me. The page I will write will be set in Egypt, a place I've wanted to revisit in prose since a November 2011 trip. I am lost to my surroundings as my hand flies across the page, and then a man asks if I will watch his cello for a few minutes. I'm amused and say, "Sure." My writer's mind travels throughout the man's possible story. When he returns, we nod, and I go back to my assignment, but when I leave to meet friends for lunch, I ask if the musician is performing at a wedding that afternoon in the hotel. He considers my question and says, "That would make sense." Then he reveals that the cello and its musician are in Louisville to play for someone for whom they often play, the Dalai Lama, who is speaking at the Yum! Center. The man's name is Michael, and we become Facebook friends.

Where is the narrative heart of the story? I'm asking this on Sunday morning at 8:00 a.m. while leading a small group, a requirement for students entering the final semester. Weeks before the residency, I sent a story, "Silver Water" by Amy Bloom, to three other students—Brandi, Elizabeth, and Patrick. We discuss the story for about forty minutes, digging deep into the prose, and too soon we have to leave for a lecture titled, "The Dream Element in Writing."

Public passages. I'm sliding my fingers over a lemon verbena plant, touching ginseng, sniffing lavender and mint, learning about mandrake, and handing out sprigs of rosemary. My hands smell of things fresh and green. My friend, Shannon, is giving her graduation lecture on the use of herbs in literature and how we might incorporate them into our own writing. During the week there are many other lectures given by graduating students, each on topics they've chosen, including Jacob on werewolves in literature, Alice on memory in writing, Nicholas on magical realism, Joshua on choosing the right word, Renee on flashbacks... Graduating students also give a reading from their theses. There is a passage happening throughout the week for these people, a passage from student to graduate. It must be witnessed.

I'm called a Senior. This is the first residency in Louisville for Elizabeth, who is in my small group, and Kathryn, who is in my workshop. They ask lots of questions and call those of us who have been around for a few residencies, *Seniors*. This reflects a natural pattern in life: Constantly, we start over, gain experience, settle in for a time, and then graduate or become experts and go on with our lives—until it's time once more to start over. In this MFA program, we're people of all ages from all over the world. When new students apologize for asking so many questions, I tell them I'm glad to help. I remember those who helped me: Lora, April, Bob, Larry, Tom, many others. They've graduated and are gone, but I can still reach them with a few keystrokes.

I'll read that. Each semester arrives with a new mentor pairing, and that is fraught with equal parts excitement and tension. My new mentor, Robin, has agreed to read my entire novel manuscript, and then we'll decide which sections will be my thesis. I want to narrow in on a few chapters, to create an excerpt that can stand alone. I want my mentor's guidance in choosing those chapters. At Nancy's Bagel Box,



Photo by Luke Seward

just steps from the Brown, Robin and I plan other components of my final semester: how we'll communicate, my to-be-written graduation lecture, other assignments.

Are you taking a picture of that? It's Thursday already. There have been faculty lectures and meetings, and we are in the last days of my Novel Chapter Workshop. It's my writing's turn in the spotlight. I read a few lines of the excerpt from my novel-in-progress, then for the next forty minutes I'm not allowed to respond, clarify, or even speak at all. I'm to listen. Some get what I'm working toward more than others. They all make excellent points, and our workshop leader, Kirby, makes notes on a whiteboard. When we take a break, I take my phone up to snap a picture. Kirby finds this amusing, but he understands that I want to capture it all. These notes will be invaluable when I revise.

I'm estimating there are a thousand people here. My friend, Vicki, is visiting. She and I met on the first night of our first residency, and we had rooms next to one another. Now she's on break from the program because she is fighting cancer, but she's come to Louisville to see me and to hear Tim O'Brien speak about writing and his book, *The Things They Carried*. While we wait for O'Brien's talk, Vicki and I sit in the Brown lobby near the place where the cello rested in its case on Saturday, and I tell her about lectures, assignments, the workshop, and my new mentor. People stop by to say hello, and it's a sweet time. Finally, we head into the already-buzzing ballroom where O'Brien will speak in a session open to the public. It is Vicki's husband who makes the estimate about the size of the crowd. After O'Brien speaks, I walk Vicki to her car and hug goodbye. Three weeks later, in a Nashville hospital, Vicki dies—suddenly, yet not suddenly. I will later dedicate my thesis to her.

What if you... Several times over the last few days of the residency, I see my mentor from the previous two semesters. Luke has come to Louisville for thesis discussions. I manage to find a few private minutes with him and discuss a particular section of my novel, and he once again teaches me, asking, *What if you...* After two semesters of studying with him, he shouldn't be able to amaze me with his insight, but he does.

My name is called. It's the final Saturday afternoon and the last session of the residency before the graduation ceremony and a farewell dinner. Ten or so students will be called forward to read from their work, but no one knows which students. A faculty member who has led my workshop twice in previous residencies is at the podium, speaking about the piece he's selected. He's saying something about it setting place well and developing mystery, then he calls my name. I'm shocked and shaken, but I go forward. Over the next few minutes I transport the room to the Great Pyramid at Giza with a story that didn't exist a week before.

Day Ten, Sunday morning. All residency work is complete and all goodbyes but one have been said. I go to the sidewalk outside the Brown to the statue of an old man with a little dog. *Until next time*, I tell them. That will be May 2014, when I will make the transition from student to graduate, and what a fabulous residency that will be, full of work and exhaustion and surprises. But then, aren't they all? ☐

Spalding Abroad: A Visit to Ireland

By Drema Drudge



Photo courtesy of psyberartist

Trinity College

“Welcome home” heralds the beginning of every residency at Spalding University’s low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program, pronounced with great enthusiasm by Program Director Sena Jeter Naslund. In the summer of 2013, those words were heard at the program’s residency in Dublin and Galway, Ireland.

Even before that so-beloved official greeting that rings in the official beginning of nearly two weeks worth of workshop, lectures, and friendship, there’s always a welcome dinner where the aspiring reunites with classmates and faculty. The opening night on that particular summer was at The Belvedere Hotel in Dublin, where the students were treated to Belvedere Irish Nights, billed as “An Irish Dancing Experience,” a show that featured old style Irish dancing, jigs, reels, and live traditional Irish ballads. This, all after, was a sumptuous three-course meal.

Residency gets underway without delay. Having said hello to friends old and new alike, it’s time to begin workshoping, something that feels the same regardless of the country. In that bubble (the residency’s backbone), students practice their critiquing skills while accepting suggestions for their work with grace. The residency location is a bonus.

I had the honor of being in Sena’s novel workshop, and every workshop session was another opportunity to both absorb her astute critiquing skills and enjoy her unique, gentle perspective on life. While she never hesitated to point out when work was needed on a manuscript, she was just as swift to praise a section she enjoyed. I left Ireland invigorated and ready to make the suggested changes to my novel.

Since we were staying in the dorms of Trinity College (founded in 1592 and Ireland’s oldest university) where the famed *Book of Kells* is housed, a lunchtime visit was merited to see the book created by Celtic monks around 800 A.D. One of the oldest existing collections of the four Gospels, it is considered Ireland’s greatest national treasure. Even without the glimpse of the ornately embellished book, the library is worth a visit, conjuring up scenes from Hogwarts of grand shelves full of ancient volumes and gorgeously-carved wooden stairways.

The program always conducts walking tours abroad, and these are informative historically and, in Dublin's case, literarily. The likes of Swift, Wilde, and Joyce spent much time in Ireland, where Joyce set his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Our tour led us past many of the novel's locations. We also saw the General Post Office (GPO), site of the Easter Rising of 1916, the rebellion that inspired much poetry.

While in Dublin, we witnessed a bit of a rebellion ourselves: in the wake of recently passed abortion legislation allowing abortion in life-threatening cases, pro-life protestors of all sexes and ages paraded the streets with signs and banners.

Graduation abroad often necessitates improvisation.

The summer's ceremony was held in Trinity College's Swift Theater where the six of us graduating marched in to the spontaneous humming of "Pomp and Circumstance" while tears of joy and happiness flowed as we were hooded.

Spalding summer residencies abroad allow for both the structured time needed for the workshops and lectures and the flex time that allows the attendees to fit in sightseeing and fellowship opportunities. Some trips are optional. My husband and I chose the Swift Satire Festival in Trim. We both are fans of Swift, and when we learned that Ireland's President Michael D. Higgins was giving the inaugural speech at the festival, we went. President Higgins gave a compelling, inspiring talk, and afterwards he shook a few hands—my husband Barry and I were privileged to be among those few.

From the Spartan accommodations of Trinity College (my husband and I had twin dorm beds), our group moved on to Galway, staying a bit outside the city in a delightful little village called Oranmore where our classrooms were held a lovely mile's (or bus ride's) walk from where we all stayed at The Oranmore Hotel. The best feature in our pleasant room was the king-sized bed.

At The Galway Film Fleagh, Ireland's largest film festival, we studied films of all styles and learned of the Irish film industry. One of the films we saw was *Yellow Man, Gray Man*, a biopic about artist Pauline Bewick. Afterwards we were able to interact with the director, and he contacted me on Facebook to let me know when we could buy a copy, the first shipped to the United States.

The residency ended with a farewell dinner at the Oranmore Hotel (complete with dancing by Tim, our jiggging bus driver), at which tearful goodbyes were said, flights checked, and people left to pack, only to meet up outdoors and sing song after song, reluctant to say goodbye. With Spalding, one never has to say goodbye. Spalding has an active, supportive alumni group. While this may have been my last semester as a student, this doesn't have to have been my last trip abroad with Spalding: I am welcome to return as an alumna. But better yet, my husband became so enamored of the program that he has applied. Either way, I'm going to Prague and Berlin with Spalding in 2014. ☐



Dunguaire Castle, Galway

A Conversation with Frank X Walker: 2013–2014 Kentucky Poet Laureate

A Danville, Kentucky native and a graduate of the University of Kentucky and Spalding University, where he earned his Master of Fine Arts in creative writing, Frank X Walker's six collections of poetry have earned him numerous awards, including a Lannan Literary Poetry Fellowship, a Lillian Smith Book Award, and the 2014 NAACP Image Award for Poetry. He is a former executive director of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts and a Full Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, where he is the editor of *PLUCK! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*. Oh yeah, and he's wrapping up his term as the 2013–2014 Kentucky Poet Laureate. (Discover more about Professor Walker at frankxwalker.com.)

Roy Burkhead: It's been about a year since Governor Steve Beshear appointed you to serve as Kentucky Poet Laureate. With the term lasting a single year, and understanding all of your other life duties and responsibilities, exactly how tired are you right now? You glad it's soon over, or do you wish you could serve for another year?

Frank X Walker: Actually it's a two-year term, but I'm honestly extremely exhausted from the extra opportunities I inherited with the position, as if I needed more to do. I don't imagine being able to keep the pace of the last year, so I'm going to try to figure out how to do it smarter without losing any momentum for this next twelve months and then graciously pass the baton to the next victim.

RB: One of the poet laureate's duties is to promote the arts in Kentucky. Over the year, how have you been able to engage with the community and strengthen literary connections within the Commonwealth?

FXW: Well, most of my previous hosts have invited me in to read from my work exclusively, but I've been trying to teach writing workshops and to have more conversations while at conferences, libraries, community colleges, and public and private school classrooms. I have learned that it's not as impactful to give people an hour of my time and leave, but if we engage in something deeper that impacts their lives directly as writers or as readers then we both leave with something worth having.

RB: Not long ago, you and six past poets laureate (Maureen Morehead, Gurney Norman, Jane Gentry Vance, Sena Jeter Naslund, Joe Survant, and Richard Taylor.) gathered in the Capitol Rotunda for readings and book signings in celebration of Kentucky Writers' Day. Would you share a little bit about that day and the readings? That's not exactly a typical, everyday poetry reading in the round, I suspect.

FXW: That particular line up occurred last year at my induction as PL, but this year because of an accident on I-75, Sena and Maureen didn't make it on time for the program and Jane was too ill to attend, so it was just the guys. It didn't have the same pomp and enthusiasm as the 2013 celebration, and we certainly missed having the women there, but it was still a good turn out and a big deal for all of us. The highlight for me was hearing our special guest, Aline Dolinh, speak and share her poetry. She is Kentucky's and the Southeast Region's representative on the National Student Poet Program. Though only a 15-year-old high school sophomore, she was an amazing presenter and really added some pizzazz to the program.

RB: You are the youngest Kentucky Poet Laureate, as well as the first African American to hold the position. Have you felt any extra responsibilities or expectations because of your age and/or heritage?

FXW: I feel like the youth angle implies that I can travel and present more. I've given over forty readings this year already, five of them in the last week alone. I don't feel any extra responsibilities because of my heritage, but I have recognized what I interpret as a great deal of pride in young people of color around the state, who perhaps see me as a role model. And I do take every opportunity to sing the praises of William Wells Brown, Effie Waller Smith, Gayl Jones, Etheridge Knight, Marvin Gaye, George C. Wolfe, and bell hooks—all of whom are some of the major voices in African American letters and on whose shoulders I stand.

RB: I believe that you're the originator of the term "Affrilachia," which describes Appalachian African Americans and their



Frank X. Walker (Photo by Angel Clark)

work and culture, and you're the founder of the Affrilachian Poets, a collective of writers of color with Appalachian ties. Would you talk a little about the Affrilachian Poets and what it's like to have something that you create become a literary movement or category?

FXW: I am the inventor of the term and am proud to know it's actually in the Oxford American Dictionary. I'm very proud to be associated with a "Movement" though when we first started writing and sharing our work as a collective we didn't think of what we were doing in such grand terms. The word by itself has done more than any one person could ever do to challenge the negative stereotypes and caricatures of the region. I'm still baffled at how little people know about the region and its history and how easily they accept the traditional representations which I'm happy to challenge every chance I get it, on and off the page. What is even more interesting is that almost all of the original core members are not only award winning published authors, but many of them teach creative writing at regional and national colleges and universities. Crystal Wilkinson and Ricardo Nazario Colon are at Morehead University. Kelly Norman Ellis is at Chicago State University. Mitchell L. H. Douglas is at IUPUI. Paul Taylor is at Penn State. Nikky Finney is at the University of South Carolina, and I'm back at the University of Kentucky.

RB: It's Kentucky Derby time in Louisville. Could you talk a bit about your poetry collection, *Isaac Murphy: I Dedicate This Ride*? For any of our readers who may not have read it yet, what will s/he discover?

FXW: I'm still waiting to turn on the TV every year and hear Bob Costas reading from Isaac Murphy. I would hope that readers would have the opportunity to be introduced to a Muhammad Ali-sized figure who has long been ignored and left out of the legacy of thoroughbred racing in Kentucky. Lexington should be celebrating this man and the contributions African Americans made to horse racing in a much larger way. Ali has a street and a museum. His image is three stories tall downtown in Louisville. Lexington is still seeking funds to help build a small park in Murphy's honor. Some Kentucky schools have figured it out and use the book in their classroom, but most schools in the Commonwealth don't even teach Kentucky writers, not even Wendell Berry, James Still, or Gayl Jones. We can do better. We can do a whole lot better. ☐

Editorial note: This interview was originally published last summer when Professor Walker was still the Kentucky Poet Laureate.

Kirby Gann Provides Answers for Aspiring Writers

by Molly McCaffrey

If Brad Pitt were a regular person, he would be Kirby Gann.

Gann has long-ish blonde hair, see-into-your-soul ice blue eyes, facial hair that is the perfect cross between beard and scruff, and a soft but clear voice that moves throughout a room of would-be writers as naturally as water.

Brad Pitt all the way.

Gann, a Kentuckian who has a day job as managing editor at Sarabande Books in Louisville, has published three novels—*Ghosting* (Ig, 2012), *Our Napoleon in Rags* (Ig, 2005), and *The Barbarian Parade* (Hill Street Press, 2004)—the most recent of which was a finalist for the Kentucky Literary Award up against Kentucky heavyweight Sena Jeter Naslund.

In the fall of 2013, Gann visited the Warren County Public Library in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to talk about the craft of fiction writing. Wearing his signature shoulder-length hair in a ponytail, Gann perched on the back of his chair rather than sit or stand and spoke to a crowd of thirty aspiring writers like a surfer cum prophet who could impart the wisdom they needed to become successful writers.

The crowd was an even mix of students from Western Kentucky University and members of the Bowling Green community, all of them eager to learn Gann's secrets.

Gann started off the morning workshop by talking about the two things he said a story must do: generate interest and add expectation, the latter achieved through a conflict of some kind—not necessarily an explosion of sorts, but rather a question posed or an expectation subverted.

Gann explained, too, that a writer needs to satisfy expectations quickly in a short story to keep the reader interested, and that writers can do this with surprising turns, dramatic action, and emotional resonance. A good opening, he claimed, has to establish a conflict, the characters, a clear voice or style, and an identifiable point of view. He added as well that the word "but" could be used to turn the story in a different direction from where the narrative began. Gann talked passionately about the "point of authority," that is, the point at which the author asserts his or her pull on you, the point at which the reader feels the author has something to say and is confident in the way the writer is saying it. Gann then described a short story as a way to "put a character alone with a rat in a cage," giving the example of two people stuck in a pickup truck on a long drive as metaphorical rats in a metaphorical cage.

Later in the morning, Gann discussed the importance of revision, advising that "Once you've finished a story, set it aside for weeks or months. Work on something else. When you come back to that story, you don't have that same investment or associations to not see what's working. Read it aloud in two different ways; read it out loud to yourself. If it's not easy to read out loud, you know when your prose is troublesome and clunky. If you have the guts, go to someone with infinite patience and read it out loud to them to gauge their response... and you'll know if it's not working."

One of Gann's most important points had to do with reading, not writing. He said that "No matter how many exercises you do, the way you become a good writer is to learn to read closely." To that end, he urged budding writers to re-read their favorite novels and take them apart, thereby learning more about how to cast a spell over readers while also learning what they like and how it's done.

After talking for over an hour, Gann gave the workshop attendees an exercise in which he asked them to write about a dramatic moment and to evoke the emotion of that moment on the page through imagery rather than stating it, an elegant way of re-stating the old creative writing truism, "show don't tell." Gann noted as evidence the famous Flannery O'Connor quote in which the author said, "If you know how it tastes, smells, and feels, then you know it," meaning that writers need to invoke at least three of the senses to capture a character on the page.

After students finished and shared their exercises, there were a few minutes left for questions, and during that time, one of the attendees asked Gann about how he became a writer. Gann explained that: "You start writing before you realize you want to write. Any writer starts as a lover of reading, and that's how I began. My mother, when I was a kid, would take us to the library on the weekend. And it was a big deal when I got my first library card. I wanted to check out the biggest book in the library, and I just loved reading. My mother read to us all the time when we were kids. I would say, as a teenager, I thought very naively to myself, it would be really cool to be a writer."

The irony is that Gann is the epitome of the cool writer... the long hair, the scruffy beard, the intense eyes, the soft voice—making me wonder if sometimes the dreams we have when we're kids really can come true. ☐



Short Story: “The Mommies”

By Flora K. Schildknecht

We are the mommies. We’re all still young, or young enough, and we are hip. We have one child each, so far. Our group meets every Wednesday for baby-centered fun, snacks, and play. We’re expert mothers. If you find yourself in need of parenting advice, feel free to refer to our online posts on OrganicBabyZone.com and SuperNaturalMommy.net. Our screen names are Mommylicious, SweetBabyLove, Mamaholic, and HotMilk28. You can find our comments under topics such as *Is baby eating enough?* (Probably not.), *Weaning from the breast—is my toddler ready?* (What kind of mother would rush their toddler to stop nursing?), and *Getting rid of stretch marks* (If you’re concerned about superficial things like stretch marks, you shouldn’t be posting on a holistic parenting site.).

Our real names are Kendra, Adrian, Mica, and Ashley. We met at an hour-long attachment parenting class at a breastfeeding support boutique. Now we meet every week at one of our homes, which is great because we can have the entire afternoon to spend with each other and our darling children. Sometimes one of us will invite other mothers to one of our meetings, but they are never as dedicated to natural parenting as we are; many of them aren’t even stay-at-home moms. We’re all relieved when they leave and don’t come back. Of course we never say this aloud—we’re too nice.

We’ve been planning to be perfect mommies for a long time. We all made sure to give our babies the right kind of names. Studies have shown that this matters—a baby’s name affects more than his or her popularity, and choosing the wrong one can have disastrous results. Did you know that almost seventy-five percent of boys named Kevin are convicted of a felony before they turn thirty? The ideal name should be uncommon enough to sound original, but not too weird or overly ethnic. Something in the top 100 but not the top 20 is best. Adrian named her son Oscar, which is currently the 30th most popular name for boys, according to the census bureau. Names with a literary connection have the added bonus of showing off how well-read the parents are; Mica’s little girl is named Harper. Old-lady names for girls are also trending, and for good reason. What better way to announce that you have a timeless sense of style and are not subject to current fads than to name your daughter Agatha, as Ashley did. Kendra’s son is named Noah—the Old Testament is also hot right now.

To an outsider, it might seem that we’re overly focused on our roles as mothers or that we have no interests besides being exceptional, perfect parents. Not so! We have degrees in anthropology, sociology, English literature, and studio art. It is true that we quit our jobs as bank tellers, restaurant general managers, data-entry specialists, and ESL tutors so we can stay home, but this was our choice. After all, even the most liberated woman understands that young children benefit from having one parent at home fulltime. Yes, it’s a sacrifice, but when you see how healthy and well adjusted your free-range, organic baby looks next to the runny-nosed, pre-schooled children of working mothers, you realize it’s all worth it and you’ve made the right decision. Besides, our husbands work. Our husbands are hip, too; Adrian and Mica’s husbands have beards. They love us unconditionally. We love them too, but our babies come first, and our husbands understand that. What our husbands do for work is not important; they have jobs we find boring. They are not invited to our meetings.

We’ve been meeting for about six months, and most of our babies eat solid food now, in addition to nursing. We are committed to feeding them only organic, non-gmo, conflict-free fruits and vegetables. Eating non-organic vegetables can lead to Autism. Mica is the most dedicated—Harper’s food is always made from produce that is both fresh and local. Because of this she is the de-facto group leader. You’ve probably seen Mica shopping at the farmers’ market, 11-month-old Harper swaddled on her hip, howling and kicking. Mica is never embarrassed; public tantrums are a sign that baby is developing a sense of individuality. Every time Harper screams, Mica gives her another gentle

kiss on her forehead and lets her yank out handfuls of her hair while she focuses on picking out the best sugar beets, carrots, and turnips—it’s winter, so root vegetables are about the only local thing available. Mica allots three hours each day to steam and process fresh food for Harper. Fresh is best, so performing the task daily is worth the extra effort.

Adrian, on the other hand, is lazy when it comes to baby food. She buys the little squeezable, single-serve portions of organic baby purees. But then, we expected her to. She stopped letting little Oscar nurse because he got his first tooth—she pumps now. Our lactation consultants have warned us that pumping exclusively can cause low milk production, which can lead to supplementing with formula. And it’s well-known that exclusively-breastfed babies are superior to babies fed with formula in every possible way—they are smarter, healthier, and prettier.

Our babies use cloth diapers. The only time we ever use disposables is for travel, and even then we use the organic, biodegradable kind. Unfortunately, those diapers are so environmentally friendly that they often begin to biodegrade while still on the baby, so this means mommy has to do a diaper change about every thirty-five minutes. Cloth diapering is easy, as long as you don’t mind dedicating a portion of each day to spraying them off with a hose you hook up to your washing machine. It’s not fun, we will admit, but it’s so worth it in the long run. Do you know the difference between cloth-diapered babies and the ones who use disposables? Obviously, their butts are smarter.

Today we are having a birthday party for Mica’s baby, Harper, who is turning one. We are serving homemade lemonade and beer from the local microbrewery and whiskey sours served in Mason jars. We bought a case of Chardonnay from a local winery, even though it tastes awful. We have made cupcakes—both the regular kind and gluten free—Adrian can’t tolerate gluten. All of our childless friends have been invited, so they can worship at the altar of our parental bliss. Everyone in our group loves parties because they give us an excuse to drink and talk about the wonderful journey of motherhood, starting with the birth experience. We all gave birth naturally, sans anesthesia. Except for Kendra. She got an epidural after forty-three hours of natural labor. Each of us thinks, privately, that we would have held out longer. We’ve all read about the bad effects of anesthesia on baby’s brain and suspect that Kendra’s epidural is perhaps the reason her child has yet to say more than three words. We love telling people that our babies were delivered vaginally. We know the V-word makes many people uncomfortable, and we relish having that power. Drinks in hand, we corner Mica’s mother and father.

“You must be so proud that Harper was delivered *vaginally*,” we say.

They smile and nod politely, but we can tell they want the afternoon to be over. We stare down our single friends while we tell our birth stories, daring them to change the subject. They never do.

Our husbands drink the whisky sours from the mason jars and show each other sexy photos of us in our nursing lingerie on their iPhones. They joke with each other about how they never get laid anymore, and they chase the kids across Kendra’s fair-trade organic wool rug, grabbing them by the legs and making them squeal with delight. After awhile we remind them in our best mommy voices, “We are *gentle* with baby.” They sulk but relent, and go into the kitchen to pour more drinks.

Mica opens Harper’s presents—Harper is asleep in the guest bedroom after a long crying jag. The childless guests mostly bring toys. The presents are for Mica and Harper, but we all sit near her and *ooh* and *ahh* over the gifts as if they are for us. Mica’s parents have brought a thoughtful gift; a set of finger-paints made from organic, non-toxic vegetable dye. They’ve made an effort—good for them. But the crown jewel of all the presents is our gift to Mica: the BioButt® starter kit. You use it to compost the contents of baby’s dirty diapers into organic fertilizer for your garden. We all pour another drink to congratulate

ourselves, because we know we've chosen the perfect gift—useful, sustainable and gender-neutral. Mica loves it. The one bad gift is from Mica's friend, Tony, a book titled *Disciplining Your Toddler*. Poor Tony. He doesn't know that Mica practices Empowerment Parenting, which means Harper will never hear the word *no* until she is at least ten years old.

On the drive home, we are flush with wine and motherly pride.

"Wasn't that party the best?" we say to our husbands, as we ride home in our Subaru Foresters, NPR whispering on the radio, so as not to wake our sleeping babies. They only grunt, but we forgive them for being less enthusiastic than we are. We are realizing that being moth-

ers is our purpose, our calling—something we share with each other, and not with our men.

That night we nurse our babies while our husbands snore beside us in our beds, their bourbon-scented breath making the air hot and musky. We should be content, but we become uneasy. We begin to worry that as our little ones grow, they will need us less. All too soon, they will stop nursing. We fret that when they start school, we will be forced to do something besides be mothers. What if we have to go back to our old jobs or get advanced degrees? Then all at once, an answer presents itself. There is a single solution for us all. Soon, it will be time to have more babies. ☐

Reading throughout the Ages

By Janelle Hederman

Several years ago I applied for an Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing at Spalding University. One of the program directors asked if I was interested in the Writing for Children (W4C) program since that's where my application sample seemed to fit. Writing for Children? It had never occurred to me that there was a specific genre for writing for children, outside of picture books, board books, or anything beyond a middle-grade reader. I'm pleased to say that at the end of my studies with an emphasis in W4C, diploma in hand, I had learned a thing or two—or several—about writing for children and more importantly about myself and my fascination with young adult literature.

When I was in elementary school, we headed to the local independent bookseller to pick up our summer reading selections. They were displayed with the school name and grade name, and then as a special bonus we would get to pick out another book or two. Perhaps it was the bookstore's small space that kept me from recognizing and reading the labels of age groups that define the larger bookstores I patron these days. There were simply the required summer reading, the award winners, the learn-to-read books, and then rows of gloriously-illustrated picture books that never aged...even though I did.

And as I began my MFA, those picture books were a staple because I had a preschooler at home. A blessing of the MFA

program was the extensive reading list that included all types of genres and age groups. I found myself re-reading the middle-grade *American Girl Library* series, the copies that I had dogeared from when I had read them two decades ago during the days before the chain stores where you could build a doll to look like you. I reread one of the *Nancy Drew* mysteries which was still as girly to me as an adult as it was when I was turned off as a preteen. But then I began to read the older books, the books we read in junior high and high school English. Books like *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee took on real meaning beyond racism in the South. The symbolism of green and red lights in *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald that I had struggled so hard to understand in high school became as real and evident as another character in my adult eyes. Even Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* alongside Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* became prominent real-life threats and not something that only a sci-fi fiction work could imagine. And now here we are in a brave new century, and J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has rocked the world as a 'cross-over'genre—one that both kids and adults alike read and enjoy.

At Spalding, our mentors often lectured on the importance of how children will "read up" and for us to not downplay to their emotions or what we as adult writers imagine their responses or emotional capabilities would be. Perhaps that is why we started reading the

classics so early, even though we could not appreciate them to the degree we could today. But isn't that what a story is? A good story is a good story: nothing short of that. And a great story is timeless...one that you keep coming back to over the ages. Perhaps some of the books kids read should be a bit more difficult for them, a bit more challenging, and over time, ones that they will return to, understand more of, and glean ideas and perspectives from as they mature and change.

Willie Morris wrote one of my favorite books of all time—*Good Ol' Boy*. As a sixth grade reader, it encompassed my whole dream world of a tomboy and joining Spit Magee and the boys as they played tricks on the Yankee visitors in town and rolled the back hills of Yazoo City in a Ford as kids. I trembled with excitement at the notion of giant Indians tattooing themselves in haunted houses and how powerful Spit Magee's BB gun had to be. Surely, it was better than the Daisy BB rifle I'd had for years at the time. Despite knowing each of its pages and plot, I reread that book every year with a renewed sense of joy. It is the transportation of place, of time, of memory, even of the memory of the first time I opened its pages on a train in Europe. The suspension of disbelief, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, takes us out of the reality of questions and the requirement of proof and takes us straight into another world. And perhaps sometimes in that other world, we become kids ourselves again. ☐



The Gift of New York

By Richard Goodman



The best thing ever written about New York City is “Here is New York” by E.B. White. It was published in 1949 in a magazine called *Holiday*, now long gone. White more or less disowned the piece when he included it in a collection of his essays published in 1977. He thought New York City had changed too much for his words to stand. Though I think White was the most honest of writers, I feel in this instance he wasn’t being completely sincere. If he had been, he would have excluded the essay altogether. He didn’t. Wisely, I would say. Just as wisely, the publisher Little Bookroom issued this essay in book form in 2000 with an introduction by White’s stepson, Roger Angell. I couldn’t have been happier to see that 58-page beauty appear on the counters of bookstores everywhere. White, his reservations aside, captures the soul of New York in those pages, as well as its mannerisms, eccentricities, and traits, both endearing and maddening. Even if you loathe New York—and there are legions of New York loathers—it’s so well written you’ll be compelled to dispense with your enmity for a few hours at least.

Toward the beginning of the essay, White writes about New York, “It can destroy an individual, or it can fulfill him, depending a good deal on luck. No one should come to New York to live unless he is willing to be lucky.” That’s my cue. I arrived in New York City to live in 1975. I was thirty years old. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was willing to be lucky. And indeed, I *was* lucky. Up until that moment when I walked out of the Port Authority Bus Terminal on a steaming August day, one suitcase in hand, bewildered and overcome by the tidal mass of humanity that greeted me, I’d been a vagabond. I’d felt restless everywhere I’d lived. But after just two weeks in New York City, I knew I’d found my home. We may or may not have had a good home when we were children, but once grown, it’s up to us to find it. I had. I was as certain as I’d been certain of anything. The city paused in its mighty, careless endeavors for the briefest instant, looked down at this eager little soul, and said, “Welcome.”

I moved into an apartment on West Tenth Street between Second and Third Avenues in the East Village. The three-story building had been a hospital during the Civil War. My second-story window faced the street, and I could look easily out on the leafy dappled street with its elegant ochre brownstone apartments one after the other. This was a kind of architectural elegance I hadn’t experienced before. My apartment, which was small, even had a little fireplace. My neighborhood was teeming with discoveries. Second Avenue below Fourteenth Street at that time was a mighty adventure. I would walk by a magnificent Polish butcher shop, creator of the most savory ham this side of Smithfield, Virginia. I’d pass the Second Avenue Deli, with its contrary waiters and pastrami sandwiches that God had made. I walked to the Jewish bakery with its two brothers and their sister, all three of whom had something conflicting to say about anything anyone ordered. I bought real rye bread there for the first time in my life, heavy caraway-infused loaves that sent me to a culinary realm I never knew existed.

New York was my instructor, day after day, in all ways imaginable. And I was an avid, insatiable learner. I walked every street in my neighborhood, then every street in neighborhoods adjacent, then every street in neighborhoods adjacent to those. I was a modern-day Columbus on foot, turning corners and discovering worlds. Just the plaques affixed to nearby buildings declaring who had lived there once—from Allen Ginsberg to Antonín Dvořák—provided romantic surprises. The sharp air of fall was the ideal time to walk, and walk I did on those strong legs I’d been blessed with, hour after hour, falling deeper and deeper in love with the city.

It wasn’t just the scintillating topography that thrilled me. It was the people I met. The range of aspirations, talents, and passions. They were like me! No one describes them better than E.B. White, and when someone says something the best way it can be said, I step aside: “Whether it’s a young girl arriving from a small town in Mississippi to escape the indignity of being observed by her neighbors, or a boy arriving from the Corn Belt with a manuscript in his suitcase and a pain in his heart, it makes no difference: each embraces New York with the intense excitement of first love, each absorbs New York with the fresh eyes of an adventurer, each generates heat and light to dwarf the Consolidated Edison Company.”

I met those kindred spirits in coffee shops, at loft parties, at poetry



Photo by Schuyler Shepherd

readings, at tossed-together dinners, and at that great Manhattan public meeting place: on the stoops of brownstones as the summer twilight eased into evening. I met grown men and women—in their fifties and sixties—who were still pursuing their dreams, who were photographers and painters and writers and designers and actors. Who had never given up, who were themselves, unadorned and free. Poor, maybe. Struggling, maybe. Harried, maybe. Even desperate at times, maybe. But free. New York was the place they could wholeheartedly strive to be the individuals they were meant to be, regardless of age or of anything else.

I wanted that. I wanted that freedom. And, for thirty-five years, that’s what New York City gave me every single day. □

Review: *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*

Complicated Heroine Delivers Joyful Escape

By Gayle Edlin

Emma Jean's Bad Behavior by Charlotte Rains Dixon is a thoughtful romp. If that sounds like inconsistent terminology, it won't after you make Emma Jean's acquaintance...the character is a delicious blend of contradictions, and that makes her all the more lively, relatable, and real.

I wasn't sure I was going to like Emma Jean at first. Sassy, fearless, impulsive, determined...Emma Jean didn't seem like someone with whom I could identify. But something in the back-cover blurb overrode whatever objections were scratching at my subconscious that day, and it's a good thing, too: not only did I like Emma Jean, I remember her and her story quite well, even nearly a year after reading about her.

"Emma Jean was a storyteller, and as she told her students, stories were everywhere; you just had to be open to receive them."

In *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, Charlotte Rains Dixon has crafted a deeply flawed character who is also beautifully well-rounded. If you don't identify with Emma Jean at first, it won't take long before you do, "bad behavior" and all. Why? Because the fictional folk with which we can connect the most profoundly are the most human ones, and what, after all, is more human than imperfection? Emma Jean will draw you in to her, whether or not she is superficially similar to you.

Emma Jean has convinced herself that she likes her life the way it is. While there is value in appreciating what you have, Emma Jean has gone above and beyond the call of mere gratitude...in fact, she's worn herself a rut of canyon-esque proportions as she's painted the glowing, imaginary self-portrait of her life. What she discovers in the fallout of her "bad behavior" is that she can want more than what she's told herself she has. Not only that, but she can have more and she can *be* more, too.

It's a testament to Charlotte's excellent story-crafting that Emma Jean is such a robust character: making mistakes and dealing with her consequences without losing her frivolously serious essence. You'll want to comfort her sometimes and chastise her at others; she is written as a dear friend, the person you adore even in full understanding of her flaws.

"I love you to death, Emma Jean, but honestly? The world does not revolve around you."

Emma Jean ignored the dig, a very *friendly* thing to do, she felt.

While Emma Jean does have people in her life who help her as she flounders, she does an admirable job accomplishing her own growth through the trials in which she finds herself involved. Charlotte Rains Dixon keeps you connected to Emma Jean, so you never wonder if this character would actually do the things she is described as doing... you know Emma Jean would do it. Exasperating, hilarious, frustrating, or ferocious, Emma Jean is always believable, and that makes her memorable.

"Dear God, it was quiet in the mountains. It was quiet here in a way she'd never experienced before, like a giant down comforter had been pulled over the world to muffle all sound. You could breathe in the quiet. You could inhabit it. You could *smell* it, and quiet smelled like pine needles, loamy earth, and a cool mountain stream."

"At the moment, the quiet made her want to scream."

When faced with adversity, it's easy to fall into the trap of believing that we are living a cautionary tale, even as we dream of winding up as lauded success stories. We meet Emma Jean when she is in the opposite situation, fully invested in the bill of goods she's sold herself about her "successful" life thus far. When Emma Jean's fairytale is shattered by inconvenient, imperfect, incredible reality, she drives herself beyond her imagination and muddles her way to this delicious truth: life can be so much more—so much better—than what we convince ourselves it is.

Get to know Emma Jean ... you'll be glad you did!

Get to know the talented author of *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, Charlotte Rains Dixon, too. Read her blog (www.charlotterainsdixon.com) and follow her on Twitter (@Wordstrumpet).



Photo by Suzanne Peters, Lifewishes Photography

Charlotte Rains Dixon

A Peek Inside

Bestselling novelist Emma Jean Sullivan longed for a baby for years, but after she and her husband Peter were unable to conceive, she staunchly vowed to become the standard bearer for all childless couples.

And she succeeds spectacularly.

At age 48 (43 according to her blog, *Life, Full Tilt*) Emma Jean enjoys a rabid anti-baby fan base and her novels have sold millions. But now she confronts a dilemma larger than any that her heroines have faced: she's pregnant. And the baby's father is not her husband.

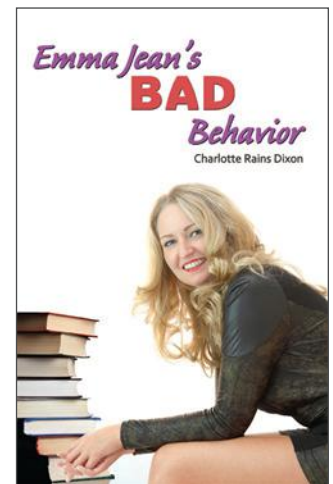
Through no fault of her own (he was just so damned adorable), Emma Jean had begun a passionate affair with Riley, a fetching airplane mechanic she met at a book signing in L.A.

Terrified of losing both her fan base and her identity, she struggles to maintain her sham brand and her marriage. But Peter is busy embezzling Emma Jean's money and is completely uninterested in fatherhood, and Riley has his hands full with problems of his own. Not only that, her latest novel is a miserable failure, and a *Vanity Fair* reporter, who plans to out Emma Jean's pregnancy to her fans, is stalking her.

What's a suddenly broke, failing, middle-aged, pregnant novelist to do?

Why, flee to a glamorous resort town, of course.

There, Emma Jean plots her next move. ☞



Review: *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems*

Engaging Collection Should Not Be Rushed Into

By Alvin Knox

Once, around some anniversary or another of 9-11, at a poetry reading in an art gallery in Nashville, Tennessee, the readers were asked to say, as they came to the microphone, what they loved most about the USA. and so it went as one poet after another took the stage: "The right to vote," one boomed, another, "Our solidarity," a third, "The freedom to be me," and of course, someone said, "Freedom of speech," for which he was rewarded with tumultuous applause. As the litany of American virtues marched on, I had ample time to consider what I'd share. When at last it was my turn at the lonely podium, I leaned close to the microphone and articulated carefully, "Heated, vibrating nipple clamps." The room became very quiet and an eagle-ruffling gust of disbelief changed smiles to puzzled question marks, my girlfriend attempted to become invisible, and a sole woman in the second row burst into unrepentant giggles. It seemed an explanation was in order. I continued, "Any society with the time, energy, and resources to develop something as frivolous as heated, vibrating nipple clamps must be doing something right." Many people, though not all, seemed relieved of the imaginary burden of interpretation, my girlfriend reappeared from behind her hands, and the woman in the second row kept on giggling. I proceeded to read some poems. The point of this story? Of course: If you are reading this to hear the poetry patriot's voice praise Billy Collins' *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems*, perhaps you should revise your expectations. After all, what am I going to say in a standard book review that has not already been said?

One of the things I liked best about the book was the way it ended. No, not the last poem (a 9-11 tribute), nor the attributions or author note, not the three blank pages at the very end, though all of those were very nice indeed. The very last printed page in the Advance Reader's Edition (don't be that impressed; I didn't read the collection until well after it was on bookstore shelves) is "About the Type," a brief note on the typeface and its designer. Filosofia, it seems, "was designed in 1996 by Zuzana Licko" as a digital rendition of "the sixteenth-century typeface Bodoni." Presumably it was selected for its "strong vertical feeling, softened by rounded droplike serifs." Egad, how beautiful is that? Not the language of the note, though it is well crafted, but the



Photo by Suzannah Gilman

Billy Collins

crafty way it forces one to reopen the book to a random page to examine those serifs, an act that places you right back in the midst of a poem, in the echo of nearly forgotten language recently read.

I cannot say I savored this book the way I would like to have, a poem at a time, two or three or four a day, in such a way that each has time to leave a scar. Whoever said, "You can't put a good book down," was not a reader of poetry. I read the book quite fast, all 142 poems in a few short days, perhaps in just four or five brief sittings. This style

of reading does not suit poetry well. Although I was able to appreciate the craft of Collins' poems, especially his deft use of simile, I hope the sublimity of most went unabsorbed, for if not, they were superficial, which I greatly doubt. I usually judge a book's overall success by the number of pages I've dog-eared as I read, yet only eleven poems are marked and, except for one near the end, all of those are in the first one hundred pages. This is not necessarily a fault of the text but

may, in fact, be a testimony to it. Reading at a fast pace, the images become hypnotic, the experiences flashing one to the next, dreamlike, but this also creates an effect not unlike that of many streams flowing into rivers and then into a still sea, where no single wave stands out as particularly different from any other, yet together they create an almost deafening roar. The voice flattens, and perspective's horizon, initially only inches before your eyes, grows distant. It's very much the effect Collins describes in

the poem "The Music of the Spheres":

*that chord of seven notes,
one for each of the visible planets,*

*which has been sounding
since the beginning of the universe,
and which we can never hear,*

*according to Pythagoras
because we hear it all the time
so it sounds the same as silence.
(5-12)*

Although reading in this manner can allow you to see overarching patterns of theme and content in a collection of poetry, such as Collins' (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) exploration of artistic elitism, it doesn't allow you to access each poem at an intimate level. Consumed slowly, and preferably aloud, poetry can grant us perception of the subtle beauty and insights our world offers, those "little shift[s] / I sensed a while ago / as I walked down in the rain to get the mail" ("Tipping Point" 21-23), or to fall "in love with a wren / and later in the day with a mouse" ("Aimless Love" 2-3). Even poems that present a sense of quiet tranquility, when read with care, are loud, the way the street musician we barely hear draws us to the corner and holds us until the stoplight has turned to hold us longer still, the way a graffiti'd wall before which we linger long enough forces glances each way down the street to remember where we were going.

No, I didn't get to read *Aimless Love* the way I'd have preferred, but I'll return to it, not the way a bird returns in the spring to roost through the hot months, but the way one returns to a very good but overpriced restaurant, occasionally, when the usual forage of fast food cuisine has dulled my palate, and I need to remember what exquisite feels like in my mouth. ☐

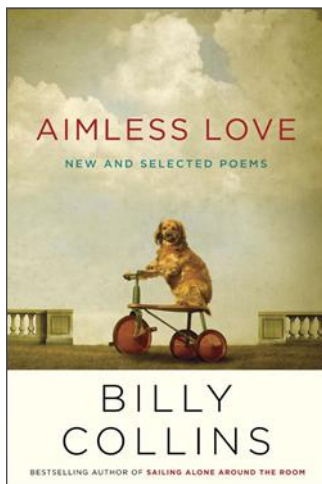




Photo by Karen Redding

Julie Brickman.

A Conversation with author Julie Brickman

By Deidre Woollard

Q: How does the writing process generally begin for you? What sorts of things spark your inspiration?

A: The actual writing usually begins with two things: an anecdote, idea, or subject that grips me and a voice writing or speaking in my head. Once I have these two, I can settle into writing a story or a book. Sometimes, though, it can be a false start— something that doesn't hold me for the big picture or a narrative voice that doesn't quite work. Then I fiddle and experiment and play with different ways to tell until I hit the right one. Plus I love to challenge myself to try new techniques. In *Two Deserts*, almost every story contained some aspect of writing I wanted to test my chops on, a technical challenge. "Message from Ayshah" was epistolary, "An Empty Quarter" second person. "Gear of a Marriage" is a list story, an arc with no narrative. "The Cop, the Hooker and the Ridealong" was associative, a romp for the writing mind. "Supermax" was a story based on something historical that I read that compelled me—the fact that America's worst surviving terrorists were in the same jail, allowed to exercise together, become friends. That and "The Lonely Priest" experimented with omniscience. "Iggies" was for fun, for humor, based on the kinds of work I'd seen in the "Shouts & Murmurs" feature in *The New Yorker*, which I love. "Lust's End" was satire, intended to skewer injustice by making fun of it.

Q: What sort of research do you do for your characters?

A: Often for me, characters come out of some unconscious place, and it's only later that I recognize some aspect of them as belonging to someone I knew or to myself or to a cultural, historical, or fictional figure. Once I see their traits, I do the research. Or I add a trait or two that fascinate me or spice up the story. For specific characters, I may have to do specific research. For the priest, I read a lot about Catholicism, about the internecine fights over celibacy, about the history of the church and rogue priests. For "Supermax," I read biographies, ar-

ticles, and some court records. For the Arabian characters, I read what seems like a gazillion books and articles on the country, the culture, the desert; I read what fiction there was (very little); I visited; I went to the Middle East Studies conference; I joined an organization called the Society for Gulf Arab Studies (SGAS). Truly, I find most of the research I do is about detail.

Q: Your characters often have flaws and make mistakes but are still likeable, how do you craft characters that are well-rounded?

A: I think their roundness comes out of my fascination with interior life. It's so complex and compelling, and I'm just completely unsatisfied if a character has only one emotion or reaction. I mean, part of why we write or read is to explore and discover, and that's what I do, keep pushing further and further into a character to find out what's really going on. I just love that part.

Q: You've written both short stories and novels, what do you think are the unique benefits of each style of writing?

A: Frank O'Connor is the only writer I've ever seen able to articulate the essential difference between the forms. To stay with a novel, the reader (and writer) has to identify with the protagonist, find something about them that is attractive or likable or transformative. But a short story does not have these limits; therefore, a story can really give voice to the voiceless, the really submerged and often unlikeable aspects of people and humanity.

Q: You have a background in psychology, how has that informed your ability to understand motivation and emotion and how does it translate into your writing?

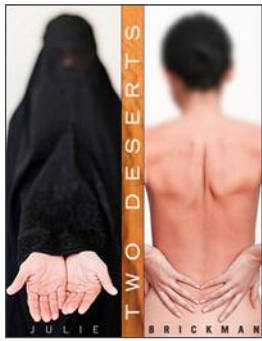
A: I really think it's again about interiors, the love of the interior characters being both fields. Also, the ability to hear truth when it emerges. It has its own ring, a distinctive tone, and I can always tell the difference. That doesn't mean I can get there, but I know when I don't. And when I do. ☐

Review: *Two Deserts*

Complex Story Unfolds an Engaging Read

By Deidre Woollard

One of the most powerful things about reading fiction is the way it can transport the reader not just to another location but also to another headspace. We don't often get a window into the way another person thinks and feels. A good short story collection is a mind's boutique, delivering up opportunities to explore a world beyond our own consciousness. In *Two Deserts*, Julie Brickman



offers up many characters, some of which dazzle the mind with their heart and intensity. Working with multiple voices and points of view, Brickman centers the stories around two main circles: the world of an American woman working in the Middle East and a writer living in Southern California whose husband is suffering from a terminal illness.

The book begins with two stories, each written in first person, which ground the reader in the worlds the book will explore. Adventure travel agent Emma Solace is in an Arabian souk, trying on an abayah for the first time, seeing herself in foreign dress and wondering if she can truly inhabit this strange new land. The reader is with her behind the veil, peering out at a world that is both foreboding and alluring. Writer Livia Skyer lives in a world stilled by illness and finds herself both looking out the window at her neighborhood and inside at her own past.

In "An Empty Quarter" Brickman uses the second-person voice to bring the reader inside the head and heart of a Muslim mother who is frantic to save her son from involvement with a jihadist movement and sneaks into his bedroom to search his belongings. The longing of a mother to protect her son is universal, but Brickman uses specific details such as the Arabian garments in the drawers to make the experience both familiar and uniquely distant.

By using the third person, Brickman is able to take us through a panoply of worlds, each defined and inhabited to the fullest. One of the pleasurable luxuries of a short story collection as richly thought out as this one is the varying landscapes, from the frozen gray and white tundra of the Yukon Territory to the vivid jewel-like landscape of an Arabian desert. However it is the characters that are the center of each story, drawing and holding the reader's attention.

It's a rare writer who can navigate the complicated worlds of both female and male desire with equal dexterity, but Brickman does this whether exploring the world of a priapic professor battling a sudden loss of interest or that of a prostitute whose own sexual appetite is her greatest skill. The flipside of desire is deprivation and here perhaps is the book's core, the desert of living without love, and how we experience loss, grief, heartbreak, and still manage to continue on, to be of value to ourselves and our community. At its best, fiction offers us not just entertainment, but comfort and the knowledge that in our deepest selves, we are not alone in the world. ☐

Linda Busby Parker reports from Mobile, Alabama



Photo by Nancy Hoffman

Roy Hoffman.

Review: *Come Landfall*

Hoffman Again Captures Soul of Characters

By Linda Busby Parker

Fiction isn't spawned totally from the imagination—it's generally hatched from an inkling of truth that is combined with inspiration and a flight of fancy. Such can be said of Roy Hoffman's latest novel, *Come Landfall* (University of Alabama Press, 2014). For Hoffman, the inkling of truth was the loss of his uncle, Major Roy Robinton, U.S. Marine Corps, WWII. Major Robinton was captured and held on a Japanese "Hellship" and disappeared with no record of his final days. The story of this lost uncle (Roy's namesake) has become part of Hoffman family history, and via *Come Landfall*, Roy allows readers to share part of this history.

The novel is set on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August 2005 when Hurricane Katrina barreled toward the stately antebellum homes (old Mississippi) and upscale casinos (new Mississippi) that lined U.S. 90. Hoffman knows the Alabama/Mississippi Gulf Coast because, as a journalist, he covered this area for many years. His understanding of the place, the people, and the culture is a hallmark of his writing—*Come Landfall* is no exception. Roy Hoffman is at home in this place, amongst these people—his place, his people.

Come Landfall is the story of three disparately different women and the men they love—Nana, an elderly woman who resides in a nursing home, Angela, a young woman who works at the Cotton Gin Casino, and Cam, a sixteen-year-old Vietnamese teenager. These women all fall for men in uniforms (various kinds of uniforms) under varying circumstances. The story is narrowly focused, yet it expands across time and place to encompass three lives, which Hoffman expertly weaves together.

As a fan of Hoffman's writing, I have read his two earlier novels, *Almost Family* and *Chicken Dreaming Corn*, and while those books make for good reading, I find *Come Landfall* to be his strongest work of fiction to date. Roy Hoffman makes the weaving of this complex story appear simple. In this regard, such writers as Ernest Gaines come to mind, and that's good company indeed! *Come Landfall* is rich in both its history and in its story. ☐

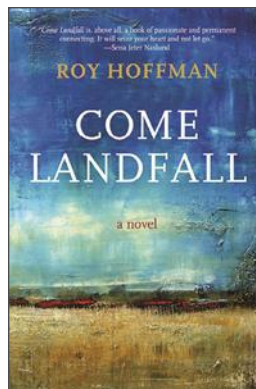




Photo by Franklin and Esther Schmidt

Mary Popham reports from Louisville ...

Review: *Old Louisville: Exuberant, Elegant, and Alive*

A Peek Inside Some of Louisville's Famed Mansions

By Mary Popham

A resident of historic Old Louisville, author David Dominé met with world-famous photographers Franklin and Esther Schmidt, and they began a massive undertaking, having “discovered that no book comprehensively illustrated Old Louisville’s history, architectural elements, streetscapes, and a broad sampling of its homes’ interiors.”

Throughout every season, the partners visited home owners taking photographs and listening to stories; researching libraries, city records and newspapers; perusing old guides and encyclopedias. In the resulting book, *Old Louisville: Exuberant, Elegant, and Alive*, the author names the architects and occupants of more than sixty buildings and tells how the original owners amassed the fortunes which built their mansions. Some current residents did their own restorations, while others contracted for massive updates in wiring, plumbing, and structure. All share a love of artistry as shown in the fine woodwork, stone carvings, stained-glass, and other natural elements of their gracious homes.

Dominé provides a “Louisville Timeline from Settlement to Preservation” and writes of early navigation down the Ohio River in 1778 when George Rogers Clark secured a rough camp on Corn Island, regarded as Louisville’s founding settlement. Thomas Hutchins’s map depicts the river’s treacherous two-mile section where narrow channels and a twenty-six-foot-tall waterfall had impeded passage. The author explains that the 1830 opening of the Louisville and Portland Canal, along with steamboat travel, facilitated the portage business, and the city boomed. Louisville businessmen secured fortunes in logging, furniture, cement, hemp, cottonseed oil, pork, tobacco, bourbon, woolen mills, leather tanneries, and thoroughbred racing. In 1880, the Louisville Board of Trade showcased the city’s development with the Southern Exposition. After the display buildings were dismantled, the wealthy built their prestigious homes.

“Residential designs of every fashionable style reflected the exuberance of its inhabitants and their architects. Elegant mansions featuring turrets and parapets and adorned with gargoyles, stained glass, and filigree competed for attention on the broad avenues and quiet courts of the urban enclave we now call Old Louisville.” Instead of abandoning inner city homes, preservationists formed Restoration, Inc. and in 1975 attained a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dominé writes, “These are historic homes, but that is not to say they are museum pieces. True, Old Louisville has often been described as a time capsule of Victorian architecture, but it is a living time cap-

sule. The neighborhood is alive with some 18,000 residents, and they work and play and tend their homes there.”

Within a forty-five-square block are examples of the eclectic design and style used in the heyday of the Victorian era, which Dominé and the Schmidts highlight: “St. James Court was designed to provide an oasis in the city, modeled conceptually on London’s St. James Court. The fountain at its center is a partial replica of the J. L. Mott Iron Works fountain at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876.”

Today, many of the homes near the flowing water have fascinating inhabitants. Celebrated author Sena Jeter Naslund resides in the Madison Cawein House, c. 1901, built by architect William J. Dodd. She writes about the neighborhood in her novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*.

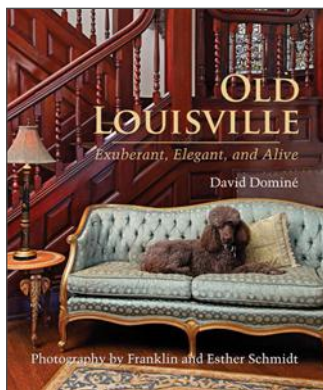
Other stylistic treasures await: Gothic, Tudor, Classical Revival, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and Richardsonian Romanesque. The Spalding Mansion, c. 1871, was built at the height of the Italianate Renaissance Revival for Joseph T. Tompkins, a well-known importer who spared no expense with spacious rooms, oriental carpets, hand-carved furniture, and ornate light fixtures. The home was soon purchased by Rhodes B. Rankin, a distiller, and subsequently bought by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth whose school later became Spalding University. The refined building now hosts students “...

casually lounging on antique settees and davenport, and the teaching body gathers for frequent receptions and department meetings.”

Another lavish home on South Fourth Street is the DuPont Mansion, c. 1879. A fortune from a paper mill, a newspaper, and gunpowder allowed “...towering ceilings, handcrafted moldings, and glossy hardwood floors...and intricate marble fireplace surrounds in every room.” The property is now the DuPont Mansion Bed & Breakfast.

Dominé has compiled a seminal work with a comprehensive look at the prestigious homes in exuberant Old Louisville. His narrative is complemented perfectly by the Schmidts’ stunning photographs and illustrations of the mansions from façade to small interior detail. The public has a chance to see representatives of the exquisite neighborhood for themselves. In October is the famous St. James Court Art Show, and there are several inns and places to visit: the Ferguson Mansion serves as headquarters for the Filson Historical Society; the Brennan House provides group tours; and a must-see is the Conrad-Caldwell House Museum.

Come to Old Louisville and luxuriate in its Victorian Past. □



Review: *Tenth of December*

Classic Horror in an Unlikely Place

By Tamara Scott

Today's macabre, mysterious, or overly graphic suspense and horror genres often deviate from horror's classic roots in the psychological suspense novels of the 19th century. Horror's power comes from its sense of reality. A well-developed willful suspension of disbelief is required to be truly scared with much of today's so-called horror, but classic horror taps into the reader's deepest fears.

In his 2013 National Book Award nominated collection of short stories *Tenth of December*, George Saunders asks the same "What if?" questions he asked with his previous works, but in the scariest place of all: the mind of the character. He uses either a first-person or third-person omniscient point of view for all of these stories (the second piece in the collection, "Sticks," is more of a vignette, written in second person), and seven of the ten are family-oriented. With these tools

at his disposal, Saunders works at the fears of middle-America and uses classic horror tropes for a psychological landscape that is as varied, sweet, or sickening as people themselves: who needs blood and guts when you can inhabit the mind of a madman?

Take the title character from "Al Roosten." He's a small-town shop owner with a twisted sense of morality who defers to his Jiminy Cricket-style, but dead, mother. As pitiable and hateful as Al becomes during this story, Al's sense of self worth continues to rise as he gets further from redemption. Where most authors would separate themselves from this character with a third person limited point of view, Saunders takes the reader on that ride with Roosten. This is a tale of the small rationalizations we tell ourselves everyday, and how those rationalizations build our reality, however skewed it may be.

Saunders opens the collection innocently enough with "Victory Lap," a story of two teenage neighbors worrying about after-school duties and suburban life. The beauty of the story comes with Saunders' ability to

pull on and off the teenage female and male dialects as easily as young Kyle pulls off his socks to keep from leaving oil spots on the carpet for his overbearing parents to find. Did I mention that Kyle is the child of neurotics? That's just half the fun. Saunders lulls the reader with the safety of Alison's ballerina fantasy, perks the anxiety with Kyle's house, and kicks it into the red when a strange man in the van shows up.

"Victory Lap" is more closely related to our contemporary notions of horror

derstood child, the parents who think they are doing their best. What makes these horror themes stand the test of time is that they are all about perspective. When we see ourselves through someone else's eyes, are we the monster?

Saunders uses perspective throughout this collection to focus a tight lens on the specific choices that characters make, and the immediate and long-term consequences those choices have on the characters' lives and the lives of those around them. In "My Chivalric

Fiasco," the boss makes a succession of decisions that ruin two lives. "Home" asks where home is and if you can go back there, but like "Escape from Spiderhead" and "Exhortation," there is a pertinent piece of backstory missing that leaves the reader feeling disoriented and wanting more.

The title piece and the final story in the book is the book's catharsis. "Tenth of December" follows two men, teenage Robin and middle aged Eber, on a ten degree day in December. Robin, a lonely teen boy playing with imaginary frienemies, and Eber, a suicidal cancer patient, are irrevocably intertwined because of time,

place, and circumstance.

"Tenth of December" deceives the reader in its simple form, structure, and narration. Every time I think of it, every time I look at it, it reveals something new. Saunders raises questions of manhood, personhood, life and death, birth and rebirth, growing up, and love in this story. And yet, it is horror in the classic sense. We go along on the psychological journey with both of these characters; we face death. The call isn't coming from inside the house; it's coming from inside ourselves.

Just like every story in this book, Saunders shows with "Tenth of December" that there are at least two choices for every situation. There is the moral path or the immoral path, you can help someone or you can turn away, you can continue the cycle or you can end it. In the end, for all of horror's darkness, it's still obsessed with the light. ☐

Above: Photo by Gayle Edlin



than other stories in this collection. The plot follows the general triangular pattern, with a spike at the end: watch out for the hand that comes out of the grave that signals the possible sequel. Without the last section of "Victory Lap," the story is well-crafted and suspenseful, but the ending's psychological echoes are almost too close for comfort.

"Puppy" continues Saunders' character study by giving two sides of a dirty coin when a well-off, fun-loving Mother and two children travel the country to buy a puppy "for cheap." It's city mother verses country mother, a case of misunderstood values, and in the end, the puppy is left behind in the country to a worse fate.

A lesser author might show favoritism to either mother, but Saunders shoots straight down the middle in "Puppy." Both mother-narrators are equally protective of their children and their lifestyles, and neither mother's decisions can be judged too harshly when seen from her perspective. Saunders includes classic horror tropes in this story; however, the unwanted spawn, the misun-

Review: *The Woman of La Mancha*

Karen Mann: A Kentucky Homecoming

By Mary Popham

After a whirlwind circuit of public readings, as well as radio and television interviews in Indiana and Kentucky, Karen Mann was welcomed home last summer to Spalding University's low residency MFA in Writing program, where she serves as the program's administrative director.

On May 24, 2014, she received a standing ovation in The Egan Leadership Center (ELC). Affectionately known as the Lectorium by students, teachers, and visitors, the ELC has hosted a multitude of lectures, panel discussions, and interviews since the program's inception in 2001. Karen and the program's director—novelist Sena Jeter Naslund—both founded the program back in 2001.

The ELC is especially packed at the beginning of each semester, which is kicked-off with a ten-day on-campus residency when classmates and faculty gather for intensive learning experiences and public readings. Located in the heart of Spalding's sprawling campus at South Fourth Street in Louisville, the Lectorium's auditorium—which holds about two hundred people—was an appropriate place for a Homecoming greeting to Karen. Featured in the Homecoming's "Celebration of Recently Published Books by Faculty," Karen read with program mentors Roy Hoffman, Shane McCrae, and Sam Zalutsky.

"*The Woman of La Mancha* is dedicated to all MFAers, but my thanks to-night goes only to Sena," Karen said amid thunderous applause after Sena introduced her at the lectern.

Since her first days at the program, Karen has worked to make the path easier for other writers. Since 2001, the program has produced over 500 graduates, some of whom return as Post-Graduate Residency Assistants (PGRAs), while others travel to special summer residencies in such attractive international locales as Paris, London, Barcelona, and Dublin. It is the ever-welcoming and enriching Homecomings at each residency that bring older graduates back again and again to meet, greet, and share the on-going process of the life of a writer. Now Karen is seeing her own work in print.

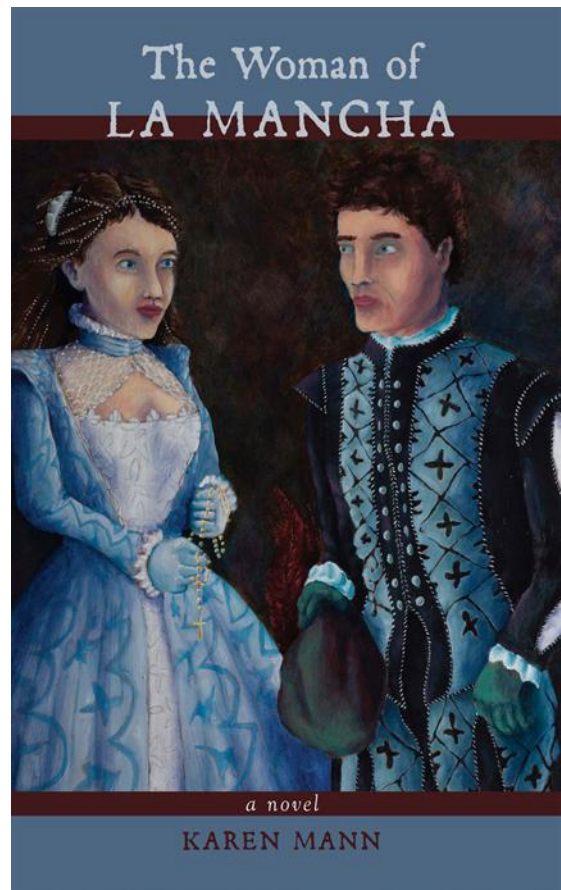
"I started my book in 1998," said Karen last May before the packed auditorium. "I am excited to announce that I have two books out this month! My historical novel *The Woman of La Mancha* is a companion book to *Don Quixote*, but you don't have to have read *Don Quixote* to enjoy it."

Karen told Katerina Stoykova-Klemer, another Spalding MFA grad, in a radio interview last year on WRFL in Lexington, Kentucky, that she always wanted to be a writer but studied English literature before she took the step toward creative writing in 1988. Studying under—and becoming friends with—Sena Jeter Naslund at the University of Louisville, Karen said that she was able to begin her dream. Just as Sena's novel *Ahab's Wife* is the companion piece to *Moby Dick* from a woman's point of view, and while very little has been taken from Cervantes' work, Karen said that her book is the woman's story of *Don Quixote*. (Discover more about *The Woman of La Mancha* at <http://karennmannwrites.com>)

Karen's second novel, *The Saved Man*, is the story of four men in the first century who find themselves immortal. Now, in the present, they decide to tell their two-thousand-year-old stories of searching for their soulmates, who have been reincarnated in various lives throughout the years. *The Saved Man*, a paranormal romance, is available in e-book format on <http://amazon.com> □

Book Details

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Praise for *The Woman of La Mancha*

A rip-roaring, thumping good story, set in the time and place that gave birth to *Don Quixote*. Faithful to the spirit of those times and driven by a lively and beguiling central character, *The Woman of La Mancha* brings us the full sweep of human capability: generosity and tenderness, hope and persistence, brutality and treachery. Steeped in medieval roots, this tale poses modern questions about men and women: the suffering that springs from perversity and violation, the longing and loneliness that accompany young adulthood, and the rare and joyful flourishing of reciprocal love. This book will inspire and warm your heart.

—Eleanor Morse, author of *White Dog Fell from the Sky* and *Chopin's Garden*

Karen Mann's take-off on *Don Quixote* is a marvelous creation all its own. While remaining faithful to the spirit and style of Cervantes' masterpiece, Mann turns the narrative on its head. This Dulcinea—only one of her guises—is not only an object of romantic obsession, but also a picaresque figure in her own right, adventuring, learning, and loving in a perilous but enchanting world. Read *The Woman of La Mancha* to journey with this colorful heroine and others by way of a wondrous, delightful tale.

—Roy Hoffman, author of the novels *Chicken Dreaming Corn* and *Come Landfall*

Review: *Eden Rise*

An Alabama Author's Two-Lane Road to Truth

By Candace White

Imagine it is the end of your freshman year in college. You are driving back to your childhood home in the black belt of Alabama, so called because of the rich black soil, to spend the summer eating your Mama's cooking and working the fields on your family's farm as you have...all your life. Your first year at Duke University is finished. Your future is almost certain. You are giving a ride to a good friend and to an acquaintance who are both working at the Freedom School near your hometown to help underprivileged black children from segregated schools for the summer. It is 1965. Your friends are black. You are white.

After hours of driving in the sweltering heat, the long dusty two-lane road has started to cool a bit as the sun starts to set in southern Alabama. You stop at a country store for gas and to use the restroom, something you have done all your life.

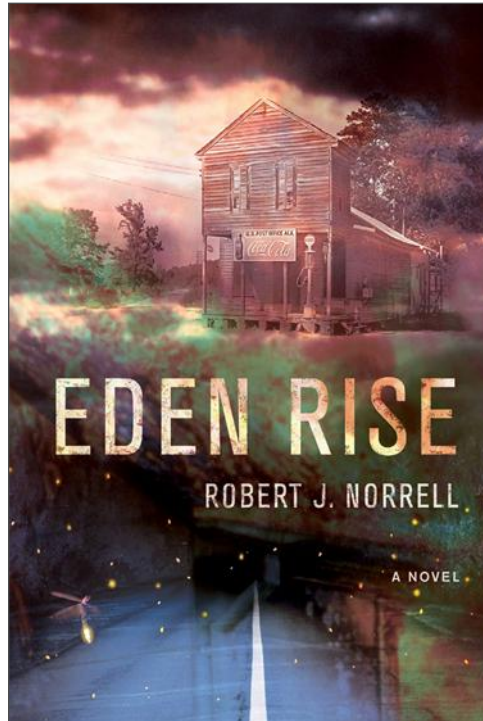
Abruptly...ignorance and racial hatred explode on that lonely road. You are washed in the blood of the violent racial divide that is the South in the summer of 1965. There is no longer certainty in who you are or even where you come from. Home is no longer home. Friends and family turn against you. What you know to be true is bruised and bleeding on the ground in the golden light of a fading day.

Eden Rise is Robert J. Norrell's first book of fiction. He won the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award in 1986 for his nonfiction work, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*. Mr. Norrell is well known for his accurate and unrelentingly true accounts of the history of the South. As a southerner (he grew up in Hazel Green, Alabama), he understands the nuance of southern families: the unspoken truths, the harsh realities, our cultural memory, our cultural amnesia. His historical certainty informs this character-driven narrative and gives the reader a vision of that time and place in 1965 when Alabama was on fire with racial problems and cultural change.

Through the eyes of Tom McKee, a young man—a southern planter's son, *Eden Rise* exposes firsthand the complexities and truths that underlie the massive conflict that defined the South in 1965. Alabama was perhaps the worst hotbed of this racial strife and conflict, endorsed by the governor himself, George Wallace. Governor Wallace was its executor and enabler. Hate-filled words spoken with dismissive arrogance were his public sword and rod, used to re-enforce the power that white people had over black people. Mr. Norrell's reference to the real conflicts—the March to Freedom in Selma, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, the killing of Medgar Evers—all serve as a background to this compelling

story that takes place at the beginning of the racial revolution in Alabama.

And yet...as Mr. Norrell reveals, there was also another truth, an almost bucolic agrarian community that produced kind and familial relationships between blacks and whites. That world was filled with lifelong friendships and with-oftentimes-blood relations. Those close relationships enabled some southerners to see the immorality of the segregated South. That is the world that Tom McKee has known his entire life. That is the world that is blown apart on a lonely Alabama two-lane road with a shotgun blast and a bloody summons to manhood.



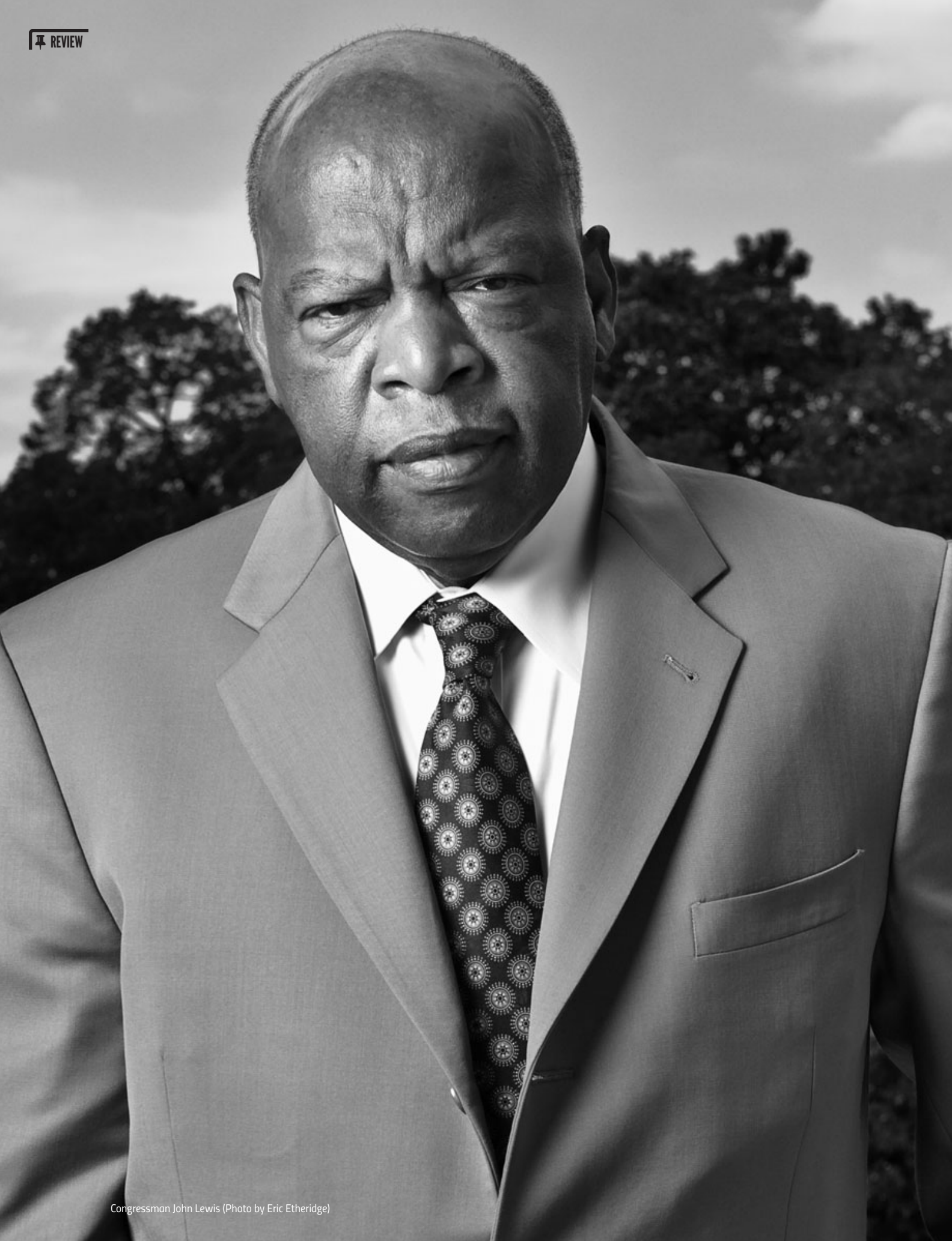
If, like me, you were born in the 1950s South and remember Her as I do, where you played with black children daily but weren't allowed to invite them to join you at the municipal pool, then read *Eden Rise*. It will remind you of the lives lost and the blood spilled to get us as far along the road to understanding and acceptance as we have gotten. It was years later that I learned to read the crudely-worded sign scratched into bare metal at the pool that read, "whites only." If you didn't grow up during the late fifties and early sixties and have only read about this aspect of the United States in history class, then you need to read this book as well. It harkens back to the period when the words of The 15th Amendment to the Constitution, Ratified February 3, 1870, began their journey to the truth in Alabama. ☐

Additional Publications from the Author

- *The House I Live In: Race in the American Century*
- *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*
- *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*
- *A Promising Field: Engineering at Alabama, 1837-1987*
- *James Bowron: The Autobiography of a New South Industrialist*
- "Labor at the Ballot Box: Unions in Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement," *Journal of Southern History*
- "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History*
- *Labor Trouble: George Wallace and Union Politics in Alabama*, in Robert Zieger, ed., *Twentieth-Century Southern Labor History*
- *One Thing We Did Right: Protest, History, and the Civil Rights Movement*, in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*
- "After Thirty Years of 'New' Labour History, There Is Still No Socialism in Reagan Country," *Historical Journal*
- *Steelworkers and Storekeepers: Social Mobility Among Italian Immigrants in Birmingham*, in Rocco Caporale, ed., *The Italian Americans Through the Generations*

"I'm not sure that I always believe in voodoo conjuring, but somehow Robert Norrell has summoned the exemplary storytelling voices of both Harper Lee and John Grisham, then swirled them into one of the best Civil Rights-era novels I've read since Lewis Nordan's *Wolf Whistle*. I cringe by using the term "Civil Rights-era," for *Eden Rise* stands as a novel in and of itself. Mr. Norrell knows the landscape, the people, and the inexorable beliefs of 1960s Alabama. I guarantee that anyone who reads the first chapter will postpone whatever he or she has planned—childbirth, major surgery, a family reunion—in order to find out what happens to Tom McKee."

-- Bestselling author George Singleton



Congressman John Lewis (Photo by Eric Etheridge)

Review: *March: Book One*

Congressman John Lewis: Still Marching!

By Cynthia A. Minor

Congressman John Lewis represents Georgia's fifth congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives. He is one of the key figures of the American Civil Rights Movement, and his willingness to give his life for freedom lifts him to a status few achieve. This commitment to justice took him from the bitter and hot cotton fields of an Alabama sharecropper to the vacillating corridors of the U.S. Congress. His story is uniquely American as it includes segregated schoolrooms, public accommodations, and legal restraints on voting for African Americans, for no other reason than race. He was instrumental in helping to organize students for the 1963 March on Washington and received death defying beatings at the hands of state troopers for attempting to cross a public bridge. His sacrifice ultimately led to his receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from the first African-American President.

Now, he shares this remarkable story with new generations in *March*, a graphic novel trilogy, in collaboration with co-writer Andrew Aydin and *New York Times* bestselling artist Nate Powell (winner of the Eisner Award and *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize finalist for *Swallow Me Whole*). *March* is rooted in Lewis's memoir of the movement, *Walking With the Wind* (coauthored with Michael D'Orso).

March provides a vivid first-hand account of John Lewis's lifelong struggle for civil and human rights. He invites the reader into the days of Jim Crow and segregation, where Lewis's personal story reflects on the highs and lows of the broader legal segregationist policies of the United States.

Book One captures John Lewis's youth in rural Alabama, his life-changing meeting with Martin Luther King, Jr., the birth of the Nashville Student Movement, and his organizing Fisk and Tennessee State students as they fought—through non-violent means—to tear down segregation with lunch counter sit-ins and marches that led to a stunning climax on the steps of city hall. Many students were arrested and jailed.

As comics (and literature for that matter) are replete with stories about heroic figures, none are as heroic as those in real life, especially those whose sacrifices a half-century ago continue to positively impact the world of today.

Long before Congressman Lewis was elected, he was largely known as a high-



Photo by Marion Trikosko

Congressman John Lewis (GA-5)

profile and dedicated supporter of the Civil Rights Movement in the American South. He's probably best remembered as the co-organizer of a planned peaceful march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama that was met with force by state police in the oft-called Bloody Sunday incident in 1965.

The narrative is told as it should be, in the Congressman's own words both as co-writer of the story and from his own character recollecting his youth. Powell's style captures the dusty, poor, and downtrodden look of the South with black and white images. His washed-out grey tones combine with Congressman Lewis's and Aydin's captivating words and story to give the entire account the feel of a compelling, period documentary. Anyone who has heard

Congressman Lewis speak on the evening news or cable news networks will immediately hear his voice as he relays his tale of discontent and determination.

Best of all, the story compels refrains of hope and inspiration throughout. As a result, the entire story is uplifting. It is a rare, dark, and troubling aspect of American history told from a positive perspective. It is a must read about a man, victimized for demanding equal treatment under the United States Constitution. John Lewis is more than a comic book hero. He's more than an American hero.

March propels Lewis into the stature of a cosmic hero, as he put his life on the line for the notion of freed and justice for all. □

Praise for *March: Book One*

"With *March*, Congressman John Lewis takes us behind the scenes of some of the most pivotal moments of the Civil Rights Movement. In graphic novel form, his first-hand account makes these historic events both accessible and relevant to an entire new generation of Americans."

— LeVar Burton

"Congressman John Lewis has been a resounding moral voice in the quest for equality for more than 50 years, and I'm so pleased that he is sharing his memories of the Civil Rights Movement with America's young leaders. In *March*, he brings a whole new generation with him across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, from a past of clenched fists into a future of outstretched hands."

— President Bill Clinton

"Brave acts of civil disobedience... [give] *March* its educational value even as Powell's drawings give Lewis's crisp narration an emotional power."

— *The New York Times*

"Riveting and beautiful...should be stocked in every school and shelved at every library."

— *The Washington Post*



Congressman John Lewis Recruits Another Generation to *March*

John Lewis has been many things in his career: a civil rights activist, a featured speaker at the March on Washington, a leader of the “Bloody Sunday” march in Selma, a respected member of Congress, a recipient of the Medal of Freedom, and a worldwide symbol of the power of nonviolent protest.

With his latest project, he’s added “#1 bestselling author,” as his multi-part graphic novel autobiography, *March*, has become a smash success. Now, the long-awaited *March: Book Two* reaches store shelves, poised to be even bigger than its predecessor—and perhaps even more relevant to this day and age. With *March: Book Two*, Congressman Lewis, co-writer Andrew Aydin, and artist Nate Powell give us a first-hand experience of milestone events that transformed the nation, including the 1961 Freedom Rides and the 1963 March on Washington.

At a time when, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the majority of states earn a D or F grade in teaching the Civil Rights Movement to their young people, *March* has quickly become a key resource for schools, libraries, activists,

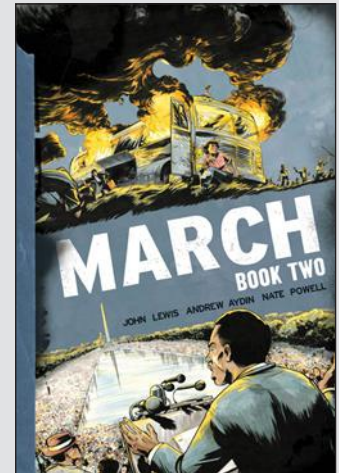
and the general reader. It’s been adopted in classrooms nationwide, spent 40 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller List, and even become the first graphic novel to win a Robert F. Kennedy Book Award. What’s more, three major universities have planned their freshman orientations around *March*, compelling 15,000 students nationwide to read and discuss it in a single month.

Why a graphic novel? Because John Lewis remembers the impact that a 1957 comic book *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* had on him and his whole generation, inspiring them to take up nonviolence and join the Civil Rights Movement. Now he’s having the same impact on young people today.

As America continues to grapple with issues of race and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, *March* offers an unforgettable success story and a way forward—one that’s already been embraced by countless readers who are looking for hope today.

Congressman John Lewis is an international icon, and his story is now more essential than ever.

See why this project has become such a phenomenon — join the *March!* ☐



In case you missed it...

March: Book One

#1 *New York Times* and *Washington Post* Bestseller

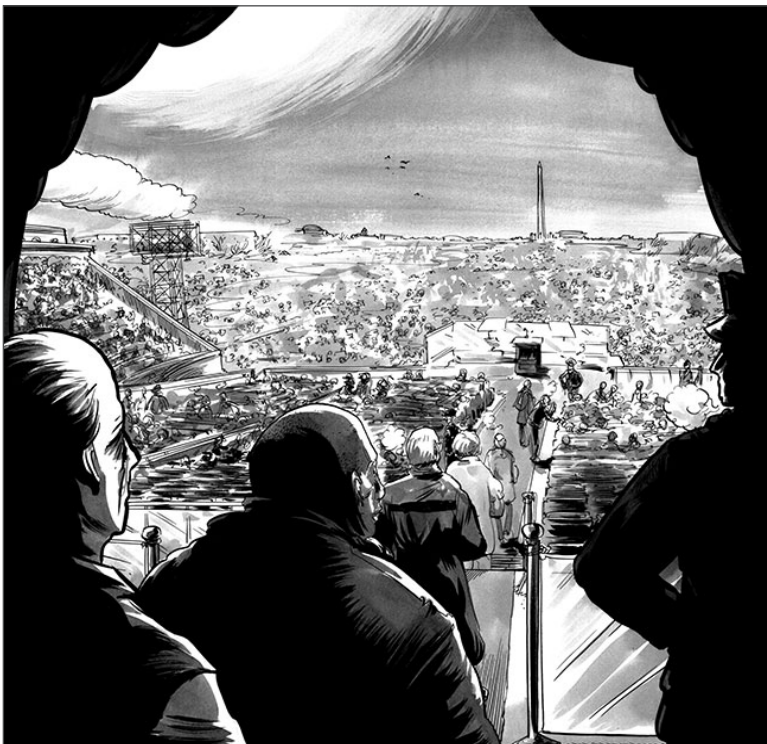
A Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award Recipients

First graphic novel to win a Robert F. Kennedy Book Award

One of Young Adult Library Services Association’s (YALSA) Outstanding Books for the College Bound

Featured on *The Colbert Report*, *Rachel Maddow*, *State of the Union*, *Charlie Rose*, & *MTV News*

Adopted by first-year reading programs at Michigan State, Georgia State, & Marquette University



Courtesy of Top Shelf Productions / IDW



Many years ago, John Lewis and other student activists drew inspiration from the 1950s comic book *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. Now, his own comics bring those days to life for a new audience, testifying to a movement whose echoes will be heard for generations.



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Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn Renewed as Poet Laureate of Tennessee Until 2020



Photo by Floyd A. Craig

Journalist Bill Moyers talks poetry in Tennessee with Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn. The host of public television's *Bill Moyers Journal* was in town a few years ago visiting friends. While having lunch at the Bell Buckle Cafe, they went searching for Tennessee's poet laureate, who lives just down the road.

Tennessee's Poet Laureate Renewed

She's done it once again!

Tennessee's Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn has been designated Poet Laureate of Tennessee for a term to expire April 1, 2020. Senate Joint Resolution 241 was introduced into the Tennessee General Assembly at the end of March, 2015. The resolution passed on April 22 (Ayes 94, Nays 0, PNV 0), and Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed it on April 24, 2015.

A resident of Bell Buckle, Tennessee, Maggi Britton Vaughn has been Poet Laureate of Tennessee for over 20 years.

She is the author of fourteen books (and counting!), her first book being published by *The Tennessean* in 1975. She has written the official Bicentennial Poem of Tennessee and the official poem commemorating the Tennessee state quarter. Vaughn is the writer of the gubernatorial inauguration poems for Gov. Sundquist, Gov. Bredesen and Gov. Haslam. Maggi penned the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Poem for U.S. Air Force which was read into the *Congressional Record* of Washington, D.C.

She is the only poet ever to receive a Mark Twain Fellowship from Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies in Elmira, New York. (This fellowship has only been offered to scholars who write biographies about Mark Twain.)

In 2007, she received The Literary Award from the Germantown Arts Alliance chosen from writers all over the South and Southeast. Former winners include Eudora Welty, John Grisham, and Shelby Foote.

She represented Tennessee at the First National Poets Laureate Conference in New Hampshire in 2003 and was quoted in the *New York Times* coverage of the event. She has represented Tennessee in other national Poet Laureate conventions.

Vaughn's books have been taught in colleges and universities as well as in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. She has made a major contribution to education by teaching teachers and students, from kindergarten to the university graduate level, and in giving

in-services for educators throughout the country.

She has traveled several hundred thousand miles throughout Tennessee and America as Tennessee's Poet Laureate.

Vaughn received the Governor's Award as an Outstanding Tennessean in 2003.

Her poems have appeared in magazines, literary journals, and newspapers, and have been read on nationwide television and radio shows, including National Public Radio.

She's been published in journals such as *The Thomas Wolfe Review*, *The Distillery*, *Alcalines of Radford University*, *The Elk Review*, *The Tennessee English Journal*, and several journals at MTSU. She has been included in anthologies such as *The Other Side of Sorrow* and *Southern Voices in Every Direction* as well as in other national publications and articles. Vaughn was quoted in Ted Turner's nationwide book on country music.

Vaughn was the subject of a historical two CD set called *A Southern Voice*, a compilation of her original readings which was highlighted on PBS nationwide in 2006.

She has appeared on *Tennessee Crossroads*, *The Arts Break*, *A Century of Country Music on CBS*, Ted Turner's national TV documentary about country music, and numerous other TV and radio shows throughout the U.S.

Vaughn creates her inspiring poems that reverberate with the magical incantatory power of family and roots. As she says, "Poetry is for everyone, and we need to keep alive the message that is understood by all walks of life."

In addition, Vaughn is a well known country music songwriter whose songs have been recorded by Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Ernest Tubbs, Charlie Louvin, and other legendary stars. In fact, Vaughn was asked to write a poem for the funeral of Jeanette Carter, daughter of A.P. Carter who is well known as the Original Song Catcher of historical country music. ☐

Novelists Ellison & Lawhon: in Conversation at Parnassus Books

J.T. Unveils Latest Samantha Owens Novel

By Roy Burkhead

It happened on a Music City evening in late May, as spring was preparing to surrender to summer's June arrival. Short bursts of showers throughout the day had left steam rising from the blacktop, and the air was a bit too humid. In short, it was the perfect moment to be inside Nashville's famous Parnassus Books to celebrate the launch of J.T. Ellison's newest novel.

The *New York Times* bestselling author of thirteen critically-acclaimed novels, including this day's selection of *What Lies Behind*, was on site that May 26 evening for a literary conversation with Ariel Lawhon, co-founder of the online book club *She Reads* (<http://www.shereads.org/>) and the author of *The Wife, the Maid, and the Mistress*.

"This is my favorite forum for a book signing; it's easy for the author, in general," said Lawhon. "J.T.'s new book is *What Lies Behind*, book 4 in the series. I don't lose sleep for many things, but I lost sleep for this, and I loved it."

But wait!

She didn't say that yet. Not...yet. First, there was the celebration...

"Remember, J.T. spoke to our group last year, telling us her triumphs and travails as a writer," wrote Nashville Writers Meetup Organizer Michael Turner in an e-mail blast that went out to hundreds of the group's members throughout Middle Tennessee a few days before the event. "If you can, show up.

"And there will be wine!"

And there was wine...and cookies...and pastries...and healthy stuff (those veggies that always vanish fast)...and little round crackers—you know the kind: an edible celebration spread out on a homey olive green tablecloth atop a table in front of a charming piano, a scene that reminds one of the living room in the Walton's mountain home...or on the show's set, at any rate.

While J.T.'s other half (Randy!) poured and smiled and supported, old friends reconnected as they sat, shared gossip, and spoke of hometown tales.

"Hey!" a passerby yelled with a glint of recognition across the room to a new arrival. (It was more like a squeal!) "How are you?"

Randy continued to open beverages that sparkled once released with a pop. Most everyone hugged, and someone else said—commanded, actually—"Get a plate."

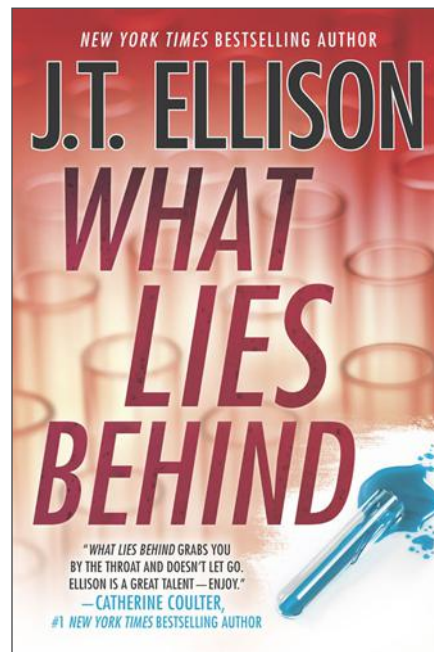
"Look at you turning red," a voice declared from somewhere in the room. "We made you blush!"

"I'm glad you waited," Nashville novelist River Jordan said with a smile as she walked in the door, passed the stack of local author selectons, and moved toward the gathering. While in motion, she slipped in hugs and

sincere greetings.

And just when those in attendance thought the event couldn't get any better, they took their seats—filling all of them!—and discovered goodie bags stuffed with bookmarks, sample chapters, ink pens, and...well...cash. \$2 bills. Who knew those were even in circulation any longer?

"Use that at the counter for an instant discount on your copy of *What Lies Behind*," J.T. said to the crowd as she and fellow novelist Ariel Lawhon took their seats before those in attendance.



"I'm Niki Coffman, and I'm so glad that you're here; we are very, very, very excited," said the director of events and marketing to the crowd about both the evening's event and the upcoming literary calendar at Parnassus Books, which includes presidential literary "names that rhyme with Smarter!"

"Waking to sirens in the night is hardly unusual for Samantha Owens. No longer a medical examiner, she doesn't lose sleep over them, but a routine police investigation in her neighborhood has her curious," those in attendance read from within their goodie bags.

And when they looked up and made eye contact with the author, J.T. said, "I want to give you the best book I possibly can," and she followed the statement up by explaining to everyone about the five months that it took her to write her new book.

"*What Lies Behind* has five different story lines, and it's a tricky method," J.T. said.

"When working with multiple points of views, it can be difficult in bringing those multiple strands together."

J.T. also revealed to the crowd her desire

to write in an original way, not taking story ideas from mainstream media's headlines, and how it was tricky writing about bioterrorism when there was an Ebola virus outbreak in Africa which spilled into the United States.

"The zeitgeist takes over, and suddenly it's everywhere," J.T. said.

The novelist also spoke to the audience about her editing methods and research tactics: "The story was initially about a cancer vaccine when the book proposal was written, but during the research, I was told by one of my medical experts that 'this could never happen' and for me, there has to be some element of it being able to happen."

And what did the author have to say about her new book's ending?

"I was 98,000 words into this story when the *Oh!* moment happened," J.T. said. "I knew how to end the book four days before the deadline.

"I have a natural inclination toward suspense." ☑

J.T. Ellison is the *New York Times* bestselling author of thirteen critically-acclaimed novels, including *What Lies Behind*, *When Shadows Fall* and *All The Pretty Girls*, and is the co-author of the A Brit in the FBI series with #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Catherine Coulter. Her work has been published in more than twenty countries. Her novel *The Cold Room* won the ITW Thriller Award for Best Paperback Original, and *Where All The Dead Lie* was a RITA® Nominee for Best Romantic Suspense. She lives in Nashville with her husband and twin kittens, where she enjoys fine wine and good notebooks. Visit JTEllison.com for more insight into her wicked imagination, or follow her on Twitter @Thrillerchick or Facebook.com/JTEllison14.

Ariel Lawhon is co-founder of the popular online book club, *She Reads*, a novelist, blogger, and life-long reader. She lives in the rolling hills outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband and four young sons (aka The Wild Rumpus). Her novel, *The Wife, the Maid, and the Mistress*, is centered around the still-unsolved disappearance of New York State Supreme Court Judge, Joseph Crater. Ariel believes that Story is the shortest distance to the human heart.

From our Nashville Literary Scene Columnist: Chuck Beard



Photo by Terry Price

Chuck Beard.

The future of Nashville literature is now!

With all of the spotlight of the outside world starting to take real notice of the words and stories coming from the minds of Nashville writers, it might be easier for some people to get lost wondering which direction that Nashville literature will head into the future. I'm here to help you not get lost. I'm here to tell you that the Nashville literary community is in great hands. Four of those hands are connected to two of the brightest literary stars currently taking enormous leaps of creative faith to ensure they will help Nashville's light shine for decades to come. I'm talking about Tiana Clark and Dave Wright.

Knowing both Tiana and Dave, having featured their work on the East Side Storytelling series and being a fan of both long before their epic appearances, I took time recently to sit down and learn more about what makes them so passionate about literature and Nashville moving forward. Special note: the thought of interviewing these two came nearly a week after both were accepted into very prestigious graduate programs for creative writing: Tiana into Vanderbilt University's MFA Program in Creative Writing for poetry and Dave into the Sewanee School of Letters, University of the South's MFA Program in Creative Writing.

Can you describe the journey of getting accepted into each of your graduate writing programs?

Tiana: The story of my acceptance begins with rejection! Four years ago, I applied to Vanderbilt's program and was crushed to read those words: "We regret to inform you..." And, for a time, I let those words defeat me. I felt like a failure and for a time I stopped writing. Or, at least, I attempted to. My poetry kept finding its way onto sticky notes at work and into the margins of my books, and eventually I had to

make a choice. If poetry was my passion, I had to take responsibility for myself and make it happen on my own. I had to take my writing into my own hands and redefine what success was going to look like for me. If I wasn't accepted into an MFA program, I was going to make my own. That year, I committed myself to take advantage of the Nashville literary community, showing up to open mic nights, writing groups, readings, and workshops. I met so many wonderful writers who inspired me to push myself further and further, and I grew so much as both a writer and a professional. In the fall of 2014, I attended a Porch workshop led by Kendra Decolo that lit my poetry bones on fire. She inspired me so much that I resolved to apply to Vanderbilt's MFA program one more time. When Kate Daniels (who directs Vanderbilt's MFA Program in Creative Writing) called me to let me know that I had been accepted, I began crying immediately. I don't think I attempted to keep my cool at all. I couldn't believe it. My "dream deferred" had become a dream come true! Though it had been a long journey full of self-doubt, I firmly believe I had to walk through failure to be where I am now.

Dave: Honestly I decided not too long ago. It was always a goal of mine to pursue a degree in creative writing, or at least be in an environment where I could discuss my craft with like-minded individuals. I was managing a finance company when I decided to make the leap. And it wasn't necessarily an easy leap to make. I left a well paying job, job security, benefits, the whole nine yards for the opportunity of following my heart, as cliché as that may sound. When I knew this is what I wanted to do, I consulted three people who I trusted very much and who I knew had my best writing interest in mind, and they all felt it was a good move.

What are the steps that you have taken that you feel have made you better writers up to this point?

Tiana: What has done more for my writing life than anything else is to take advantage of the literary resources in Nashville. There are many local resources that I would recommend: the Porch Writers' Collective provides wonderful workshops and retreats for poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction; Middle Tennessee State University has a mentorship program called MTSU Write (formally known as The Writer's Loft) where you can work one-on-one with a writer for a whole semester—I have gone through this program twice myself and benefited immensely from working with the local poets Bill Brown and Jeff Hardin. Finally, attend as many readings as you can. Show up, listen, ask questions, and write down the books or essays they mention. Then read them.

Dave: I'm not sure I'm any better writer now than when I first started. But if I am, I'd say it's because of these steps:

I read everything I find interesting: fiction, poetry, nonfiction, drama, history, philosophy, sociology, theoretical physics, celebrity news, comic strips (lol), just everything. Also, write all the time; make time to write; make myself write when I don't want to; treat it, first and foremost, like a job; don't wait for inspiration; try not to second guess myself too often; and trust my intuition.

I know (generally) what I'm going to write before I start, but I leave room to improvise and play, never take myself too seriously

What are you most excited about regarding the graduate programs you are about to enter?

Tiana: I'm looking forward to the opportunity to gain teaching experience and work on the *Nashville Review*, Vanderbilt's online literary magazine. Reading and examining the diverse voices of other poets as I learn how to negotiate what brings energy and excitement to the page is thrilling to me. But most of all, I am excited about working with the other MFA students and the amazing poetry faculty (Beth Bachmann, Kate Daniels, Rick Hilles, and Mark Jarman). Vanderbilt's MFA program is very small and already it feels like family. I'm so blessed to have two years to invest in my work with such talented and inspiring people.

Dave: Reading and writing with great readers and writers.

Do you have any lofty goals in mind that you plan on tackling that you'd like to share with others right now?

Tiana: I'm looking forward to completing my first book someday. Until then, it would be nice if my submittal page was lit with more green acceptances! I like to hang my poems on the walls of my office, reserving one wall for all my published poems—more acceptances would really help balance out the room.

Dave: I've recently finished a novel called *Parade*, which is set in a small fictional Southern town called River Grove. It spans five generations of this town and its people. Eventually (it seems) the town could be engulfed by an ever-expanding Metropolis called New Oakton. I'd like to expand that universe and those characters into a series of inter-related novels. The idea of sagas has always interested me. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels. Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine*. Works like that. Lofty I know; I am dreaming. But hey, if you're gonna dream, dream big, right?

Selfish question alert: What did you enjoy most about being a part of East Side Storytelling when you were the featured local author?

Tiana: Well, you know how to put together an awesome reading.

I love the setup, and it was such a pleasure to share the stage with the beautiful music of Deli. However, my memories of that moment are highlighted by the fact that the night before I read at East Side Storytelling I had just submitted my application to Vanderbilt. Clicking that "submit" button felt like giving birth. The relief, the excitement, the exhaustion and terror all seemed to inhabit my body at once. That reading represented a culmination for me. It felt like I had just put something big in the universe, and it was such a lovely, serendipitous moment to have a reading on the poems that I just submitted for the next chapter of my life. Most of the poems I read were in my application, so my night at Storytelling felt a little like tying a bow on everything that I had worked so hard on for months. I was able to relax and not agonize over every line break and verb tense. I could just stay in the present and not worry. It was nice to kind of put the MFA decision in God's hands and get back to doing what I love most: performing my poetry. It was a surreal, dreamy moment of staring out into the audience and having peace about my journey. If I seemed a little off that night, it was because I was having a spiritual awakening! It was also fun pretending to be a rock star signing the awesome posters you have made for the reading! I noticed, however, that my signature needs work: my handwriting looks like a serial killer's.

Dave: It was the first time my mom got to here me read those poems I read. And those poems are very close to my heart. I wrote them right after my dad passed.

If each of you were granted one wish with literature and its future, what would it be?

Tiana: My one wish for the future of literature is for Nashville to become known, not only as the Music City, but also a literary city. I would love for more cafés and bars to include rounds of literary writers in addition to their songwriter nights. I would love for Nashville to embody the essence of Harlem in the 20s, New York in the 60s, and 27 rue de Fleurus at The Stein Salon of Paris. Right now, our city is featured in articles around the nation that talk about how quickly our city is growing or how "hip" it may or may not be, and I would like to see the literary community be at the center of that discussion and a leader in our cultural expansion.

Dave: That everyone everywhere has access to it.

* * *

After reading the preceding, you can see why it's so easy for me to smile, knowing that the future of Nashville's literary scene is in the hands and hearts and minds of writers such as Tiana Clark and Dave Wright. They continue to inspire everyone around them by sharing their words and stories and by constantly finding ways to inspire themselves to become better writers day after day. If you like what you've read, you're going to love hearing them both read live. Be on the look out for their names on bills around town as you start to venture around the city to any number of the great literary events going on.

For more on Tiana Clark, visit <http://www.tianaclark.com>
For more on Dave Wright, visit <http://www.digthatbook.com>

For more information on me, Chuck Beard, visit East Side Story (1108 Woodland Street, Unit B, or <http://eastsidestorytn.com>)

Thanks for your time. Please remember to be nice to one another out there. Until the next good word, stay busy and happy.

Salud,
Chuck

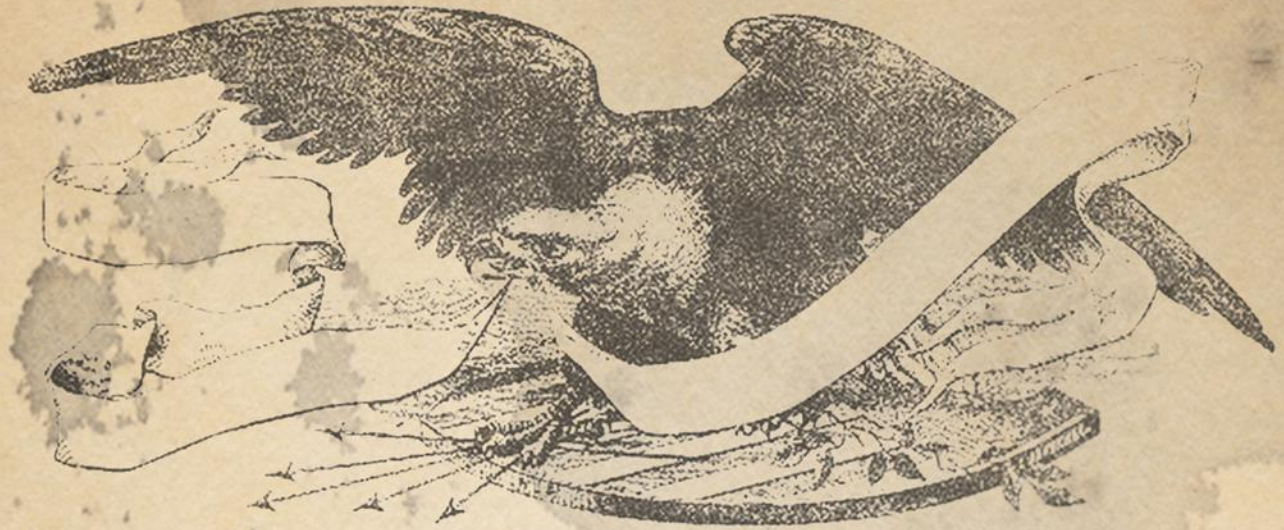


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A Cup of Tea with Becca Stevens

By Mary Popham

Recently, while accepting the Muhammad Ali Daughters of Greatness award in the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Becca Stevens shared her personal story.

The childhood trauma of sexual abuse by someone her family had trusted was the main influence behind her wish to found Magdalene. The house of healing was begun in 1997 for women seeking to escape prostitution, trafficking, drugs, and jail. Becca related to the large group attending the Daughters of Greatness breakfast that part of her therapy had been to confront her abuser. She went to him and his family to discuss what he had done. The man's self-centered response, "Who have you told?" assured her she was on the right path of releasing the secret of what had happened to her.

"I knew right then that talking about it was good news," Becca said. "The world needs to know this."

Serving for many years as an Episcopal priest at St. Augustine's Chapel at Vanderbilt University, the Reverend Becca Stevens said that she feels as if she has more in common with the women she treats than their counselors may have had with them, that prisons and a large majority of half-way houses don't work. Authority figures often present more problems to the women who have been through cycles of abuse linked to prostitution, to drugs, and to jail.

These women who may often be described by some as the dregs of existence need more than a place; they need a home.

When they come to Magdalene, they make a two-year commitment to a program of rest and recovery. There is no rent to pay, no authority in the house. There is no outside work, no other responsibilities. This is a time only for classes, rest, and healing. Time to let go of shame, learn that violence and the bearing of shame go together. Each resident is paid a stipend of \$50.00 a week for personal items, freeing them from having to earn money until they are healed.

The Magdalene program is tailored to the individual needs, and one factor is regaining custody of children. After recovery, there is a long journey but a rewarding outcome when mothers get back the legal guardianship of their kids. Eighty-two percent of the women at Magdalene go on to graduate.

"Women do recover: women do come in off the streets," Becca said.

Magdalene is about lifting them up.

"After we were curing women, we realized their economic futures needed to be addressed," said Becca. As part of the healing process, the graduates obtain job training and financial security working at Thistle Farms, established in 2001. "We are Thistle Farmers."

The bath, beauty oils, candles, paper creations—all are products that the women make with the attitude, *Love Heals Every Body*. As one worker said, "We put love in every box, so people can feel it."

The name of their farms was chosen specifically for its symbolism.

"Consider the thistle," Becca explained. (It has sharp prick-



Photo by Daniel DuBois

les over most of its surfaces, but the center is soft and downy.) “No one says, ‘Don’t pick our thistle! They are saying, ‘Thank you for taking that thistle weed!’ And we make paper.”

Thistle Farmers dry the down of the thistle and mix it with water, shredding throwaway pieces of paper, cardboard, and old t-shirts. From there it is put into a grinder and then pressed into paper, cards, and stationery.

“It’s not trash anymore but something that is part of beauty,” Becca said.

A subsidiary of Thistle Farms is the Thistle Stop Café. After the success of Magdalene and their farming businesses, people from around the world arrived to learn from the models. Becca realized that these visitors needed a place to eat! And it would also provide another workplace for her healing graduates. Her book, *The Way of Tea and Justice: Rescuing the World’s Favorite Beverage from Its Violent History*, details the planning, fund-raising, and a multitude of efforts from many people to launch the café. They bought a building, took a while to renovate it using flooring salvaged from Albert Gore Sr.’s old farm building, and had tables built by men in a Tennessee prison. With teacups received from around the world, they made chandeliers. The book is filled with stories from the café workers, laborers in the tea fields, and volunteers who make the Thistle Stop Café hugely successful. It also creates jobs for women who learn the process of running a business as well as working as baristas.

Becca Stevens has become a savior to women of the streets. In 2014 she received the Espiritu Award from the Isabel Allende Foundation for her work against human trafficking, and with her team was invited to the famous author’s home. With that significant grant, she was enabled to begin a global mission called Shared Trade: A Fair Share for Women. Seeing the connection between her café workers and the tea laborers, she designed the program to bring women out of poverty. It is a self-sustaining method of helping all women support themselves. Shared Trade is committed to enabling both the woman farmer in Rwanda and the rose geranium grower in the United States to get a fair share of profit from each product sold.

“Social justice is a non-competitive sport,” Becca said. “We share everything we know with anyone who asks.”

The work continues.

“We sit in a circle each morning, and we light one candle for all the women, the babies, the addicts, the young girl going out for the first time,” Becca said.

Becca Stevens sees no limits to the needs of women in all parts of the world. Through the efforts of her programs, she affirms her belief:

“Love is the most powerful force for change in the world.” ☑

To discover more about Thistle Farms, including information on tours, volunteer opportunities, donating, education workshops, and more, check them out using the below contact information:

Thistle Farms
<http://www.thistlefarms.org/>
 5122 Charlotte Pike, Nashville, TN 37209
 615.298.1140, info@thistlefarms.org
 Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
 Closed Saturday–Sunday

Review: *The Way of Tea and Justice: Rescuing the World’s Favorite Beverage From its Violent History*

Thistle Stop Café Founder’s Book: A Remarkable Story of Courage!

By Mary Popham

Becca Stevens knows tea. She studies it, drinks it, sells it, and advocates its use. As the 1997 founder of Magdalene, a resident program that assists women who seek the way out of violence, prostitution, addiction, and jail, and subsequent founder of Thistle Farms—where the recovering women reenter the job market—Stevens has written about tea’s history, properties, and how it guides her in business and in personal ways.

In her book, *The Way of Tea and Justice: Rescuing the World’s Favorite Beverage from Its Violent History*, the author begins by speaking of the power of tea and its importance in her programs. With its history of oppressive labor practices on tea estates in India as part of the entrenched East India Company that benefited from the slave trade and as “witness to war and treaties,” there were negative connotations of tea for women. Even the mental associations of Japanese teahouses that held women in a lesser place as geishas who made and served the tea are powerful stories. Becca writes, “Because the reaction was strong, it confirmed for us that tea would be a vehicle for healing all of us.”

Reading the history of tea, knowing it is one leaf that is harvested at different times and that basic teas are built upon to make endless varieties, Becca Stevens’ idea blossomed into starting a teahouse. Thistle Stop Café would provide jobs for the graduates of her Magdalene program along with those who work at Thistle Farms.

The author recounts how tea facilitates the goals of her non-profit organizations. Tea is the unifier, and Becca begins each chapter with a recipe.

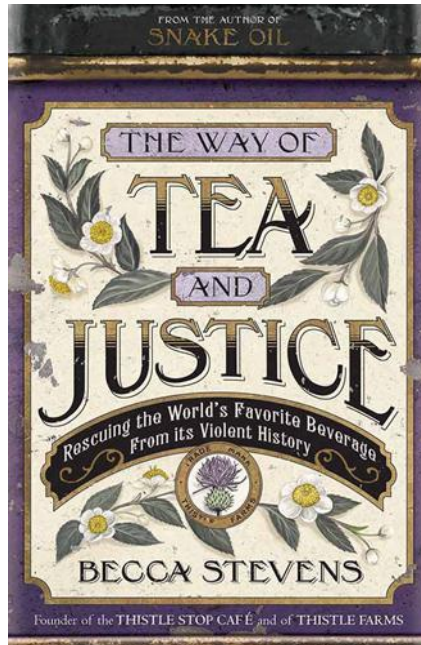
Black Kenyan Justice Tea. This is a specialty tea served in the café. “To enjoy: fill a small tea ball halfway with the loose leaves. Steep this tea, like most black teas, in hot water for 3 minutes. After steeping, a bit of lemon juice brings out the best flavors.” Thus begins the chapter “Reading

Tea Leaves.”

Can one read her fortune in the swirl of loose leaves upended into a saucer from the bottom of a tea cup? Perhaps it is the result of contemplation in a quiet moment, the sipping of a warm brew and inhaling soothing aromas. Tea gives us a sacred space to think, plan, receive insights, not as a burst, but as what comes to dwell within us a little at a time. At the end of mellowed relaxation, we often find the answers, the insight from success and failure. Doesn’t it follow that in reflection we gauge the past and let the wisdom of experience tell our future? And wouldn’t the answers we seek surely be as forthcoming if we wind the string around the tea bag and place it in the saucer to use the second time?

Becca explains: “These leaves of wisdom are rooted back before time was recorded. It is not enough to dump them onto a saucer and fall in a certain way that spells out something magical. Instead these leaves are a launching pad for a spiritual path. Staring at the leaves when I began dreaming of a café, I got the message that it was time to dive into this cup, study the books, and learn how to read all that the leaves had to teach.”

In *The Way of Tea and Justice*, Becca gives reasons for establishing Thistle Stop Café. As recovering women graduated from the two-year healing program at Magdalene, her group anticipated needs for survivors of the streets to support themselves. In 2001, she founded Thistle Farms. In 2013, she had the ribbon cutting for Thistle Stop



Café.

"I wanted to hold as sacred the stories of the hired women, the tea producers, and the customers," said Becca. "The café would support real economic development for the individual working women by training them as baristas and cashiers, offering full-time living wages, and providing a healing community. . ."

The chapter heading "Drinking Tea in Community" tells of fund-raising, a never-ending requirement. There are ". . . times when things are so lean that you can feel the skin of your teeth."

In another chapter, "Tea's Mysterious Calling," Becca describes expanding the reach of her programs by participating in a global conference committed to working for justice and peace: "Small and large social enterprises around the globe could come together in the alliance to share best practices and marketing strategies for economic leverage."

Thus began the development of Shared Trade in 2012 to close the gap between producers and consumers. The success of Magdalene, Thistle Farms, the Thistle Stop Café, and Shared Trade owes much to Stevens' work as a preacher and speaker. *The Way of Tea and Justice: Rescuing the World's Favorite Beverage From its Violent History* reflects her charismatic charm. She continues her studies of the traditions and history of tea and writes of visits to plantations in the southern United States, as well as around the world. She relates stories of her own disappointments: when the opening of Thistle Stop Café is delayed for lack of funds; when there is no money to buy raw materials for the

businesses; when Thistle Farms loses its total crop of sage, yet she sustains a hopeful message.

The book expands its heat and energy as the author moves into the forces of asking and letting go to receive. She speaks candidly about the tragedy of losing her sister, her retreat from the world, and how she finds a way to come back from the mountains to the valley of work.

She tells of transcending moments: While carrying cups of tea into the woods, she and a friend come upon a stunning blend of greens and floral arrangements—beauty ". . . that makes the back of your teeth clench with joy."

Reverend Becca Stevens is an Episcopal priest serving as chaplain at St. Augustine's chapel at Vanderbilt University. Her achievements have been praised in the *New York Times*, ABC World News, NPR, CNN, PBS, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Christian Century*. The White House named her one of 15 Champions of Change in 2011 for combating violence against women. In 2014, the Small Business Council of America named her Humanitarian of the Year, and she received the Espiritu Award from the Isabel Allende Foundation for her work against human trafficking. In 2015 she was honored as a Muhammad Ali Daughters of Greatness, and is interviewed in the PBS Documentary, *A Path Appears*, with Pulitzer Prize-winners Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn.

Her book, *The Way of Tea and Justice*, is a remarkable story of courage told by a fascinating and endearing woman.

Every reader will be uplifted. ☐

Knoxville & Chattanooga Part of "The America the Beautiful" Tour

A Prairie Home Companion: On Tour!

Garrison Keillor will be embarking on what may be his most ambitious tour to date—30 cities in 36 days—a coast-to-coast, sea to shining sea bus tour to celebrate his popular radio show *A Prairie Home Companion's* 41st anniversary. The celebration will take place throughout July and August.

The tour will stop in Knoxville, Tennessee on Thursday, August 13 at the Historic Tennessee Theatre. After a couple days in North Carolina, it will return to Tennessee for an August 16 performance in Chattanooga's Memorial Auditorium.

A Prairie Home Companion's 2015 America the Beautiful Tour's show will be over two hours of Sweet Harmony with Mr. Garrison Keillor and singer Sarah Jarosz, Piano Master Richard Dworsky and Fred Newman World's Greatest SFX Man & The Radio Rhubarb Band with Fiddling Richard Kriehn & Chris Siebold Boy Guitarist, Guy Noir, Private Eye & News from Lake Wobegon & Audience Chorale & Poetry Declamation & Other Classics from 41 Years of Radio History. ☐



Garrison Keillor - *A Prairie Home Companion*

Photo courtesy of Prairie Home Productions

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Visit www.prairiehome.org

Review: *Soundtrack Not Included*

Anthology Packed with Literary Treasures!

By Ralph Bland

In the introduction to the anthology *Soundtrack Not Included*, organizer Mike Turner for the Nashville Writers Meetup declares this book to be “the meal, the various dishes offered up to you (the reader)—pass a few along to the others at the table.”

With 42 selections to choose from, there is plenty to sample and digest, with several of these stories, poems, and visions good enough to not only share with others, but to also play the glutton some and go back for an individual second helping. Maybe there are a few items on this menu that are not quite up to snuff with the others, but that is the beauty of a collective anthology. The reader is free to indulge in what he deems are his favorites until his appetite is satisfied.

There is a lot to like here.

From the haunting narrative of the returning soldier in Brian Resinger’s “The Blessed Virgin” to the informative and upbeat voice of Luke Woodard’s serial killer in “The Ministry of Gibson Pierce,” there are stories in this collection that intrigue and tantalize and make one wonder where the ideas for such things come from in a music town like Nashville. Maybe, one may conjecture, all the good words aren’t completely set to music around these parts.

Local color does exist in this tome, for Judy Klass presents a Nashville flavor in her story, “Real Country,” a tale of two songwriters playing the songwriting game with several personal issues they’d just as soon keep hidden. The scene shifts from local climes to Afghanistan in Kathleen Cosgrove’s “Nku,” the story of a con artist assuming a dead G.I.’s identity. An anthropologist has a tragic affair with a Bedouin woman in K.C.T. Webber’s well-written “The Observations of Doctor Bryant,” and Katie McDougall turns in a deliciously descriptive story of the breakup of a young schoolteacher’s relationship while she is on a camping trip in Colorado with her not-so perfect boyfriend in “Canyon Country.” Among four worthwhile selections from

Mandy Haynes, the best is “Elma and Roy,” a fine first-person diatribe about the end of a long relationship between two elderly blacks in a small Southern town. Ms. Haynes’ use of dialect is superb, and the reader will find himself rooting for someone to win this war of wills. Vampires and zombies are in attendance in this volume for the sci-fi reader, offered admirably by A.J. Lee and D. Alan Lewis. Nicole Nelson-Hicks introduces a truly Southern Gothic revenge story with “Black Cherry,” a disturbing yet entertaining

reviewer particularly likes “The Review Mirror”—Ruby Thomas’ “Tennessee Waitress,” and a touching elegy from Michael F. Kipp about the passing of a jazz DJ who was also a friend, that are certainly worth perusing. There is an informative essay on writing mistakes from Tracy Lucas, while Mr. Kipp and Ms. Klass prove they are not just one-trick ponies in the realm of writing, with Mr. Kipp checking in with an entertaining treatise on leadership and Ms. Klass with a one act play where—believe it or not!—a wife and



Photo courtesy of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau

piece about how an older brother gets even with the ex-wife who did his younger brother wrong. Evil emotions and dark intentions like this would do Cormac McCarthy proud, which makes Ms. Nelson-Hicks own description of herself as an “unholy love-child of Flannery O’Connor and H.P. Lovecraft” ring very true.

Perhaps the best of the stories in *Soundtrack Not Included* comes from Lisa Berryhill. She is represented by a fine Southern piece entitled “Past Imperfect.” Her protagonist, Linda Lou Turner Kennedy Levin, tells a literate and pleasing first-person tale of her problems with her family and aging floozy mother and the numerous twists and turns and turmoil she must undertake to survive her family and earn her legitimate birthright from her departed father. Move over, Lee Smith and Jill McCorkle. It could be you have company.

Not all of the material in *Soundtrack Not Included* is short stories.

There are poems from David Harris—the

a mistress do lunch.

During the Southern Festival of Books—not too long ago, it was my pleasure to attend a panel discussion with four of the authors from this collection, in which they discussed their work and the evolution of the Nashville Writers Meetup. While each of the writers represented differing fields of art (sci-fi, steampunk,

poetry, prose, and essay), I was struck by each person’s attitude toward broadening and strengthening the group by showcasing talent and learning from each other in a united effort to involve more and more people in the creative writing process. What was apparent in the meeting is what comes across on paper in *Soundtrack Not Included*—this is a collection of people and creative endeavors worth listening to and reading. As the back cover says: “You’ll laugh, you’ll cry, and then, we’ll see you at one of our meetings.”

In Nashville. Even if you’re not a singer. ☐



Bowling Green, Kentucky

Fiction: "You're Really Killing Me"

By Molly McCaffrey

For World Party

Al is finally and completely alone.

It is his forty-second birthday, but he sits by himself in the kitchen. No friends, no family, no birthday cake. Certainly no candles to blow out. Candles have been outlawed since his thirty-ninth birthday. Oh, what Al wouldn't do for a birthday candle, a friend to share his cake.

Yes, he wants all that as much as anyone, but what he really wants, what he desperately longs to have back, is his family. But that is not meant to be. For his family left him the year before—with all the others.

Al has to admit the truth to himself—he's the only one left. In Alvaton and maybe in the whole state of Kentucky for all he knows.

The truth is he has no idea who's out there. Al doesn't watch the news anymore. The cable, the internet, the cell phone, the electricity? They all stopped working long ago. He has no connection to the world outside of Alvaton, the world he can't get to on his own two feet. Or on his new wheels. At least that's what he likes to call them—his wheels—to make himself feel better about the fact that his pick-up will never again leave the garage. No, his wheels aren't new or flashy—just two worn-out tires on a rusty old Schwinn that used to belong to his father when he was still young.

Al couldn't be more relieved he never threw the thing out, keeping it for reasons of nostalgia—*My God, who rides a bike?* he thought when he came across the decaying relic in the basement—but now he is forever grateful to his father for keeping it all those years. It is, in fact, the only way he can get farther than fifteen miles in a day, the only way to make the trip to Bowling Green and back for food and water.

But even that isn't an option anymore. Like Alvaton, the city is now as deserted as the moon. Or at least it seems that way to Al, who

hasn't been able to find anyone there in weeks. The last shop—the Sip-and-Save on the Bypass—is finally closed, abandoned like everything else Al comes across on his dad's red Schwinn.

Al thinks about all this, all that is now gone—his family, his friends, the people, the stores—at his kitchen table on the morning of his forty-second birthday as he stares out the window. Or at least the space where the window used to be. There isn't a window there anymore—just a rectangular hole in the wall where the glass used to be, the heat ultimately causing the thick glass to crack from the pressure of trying to withstand 120 degrees on both sides.

Al kicked out the glass after that, not being able to bear seeing those cracks, a constant reminder of what is happening to him and his world. Funny thing is he likes the view better without the glass. He can see farther and more clearly.

Today the scene has him mesmerized. No, the rolling hills before him are no longer green. They're a dry and brittle brown, almost a non-color, and the landscape is void of any life, the Babylonians having had their way with it.

But Al still sees it all as it used to be—green and lush and full of life. He sees the horses grazing in the fields, the chickens milling around the barn, his kids playing tag in the yard until it's too dark to see. And then he sees her.

Annie.

His wife.

She's leaning over in the garden, bending at the knee even though he's warned her not to do that, scooping up the kitten the kids found near the road one day. Probably thrown out the window by some asshole who didn't have the guts to take care of his own or to tell his kids they had to neuter the family cat. But when Annie turns to look at him—her eyes meeting his—all of his anger, all of his worries, are erased.

Her hair is piled on top of her head like a delicate crown, but a

few strands have escaped her messy bun, framing her lovely gray eyes. Yes, he can picture her that clearly and seeing Annie there—in the yard, with the kids and the animals, the verdant fields behind them—he understands so clearly what he always suspected: his life is perfection.

Or at least it was.

*

An hour later, Al is in his bedroom—their bedroom, the one he used to share with Annie. He's supposed to be packing, but he can't focus. He's thinking about the last time he was there, with her.

"We have no choice," Annie had said as she folded clothes to put in the suitcase sitting open on the bed. "We have to go."

"We don't *have* to do anything." Al stood at the end of the bed, watching Annie but wanting to pick up her suitcase and hurl it out the window. "They can't *make* us leave."

"If we don't go, Al, we'll die."

"That's just what they want us to believe, Annie. So they can control us. They've lied to us before. Why not now?"

"It's not a lie, Al," Annie said, stopping what she was doing so she could look him in the eye. "Think about it. Every single animal is already gone—the horses and cows, the chickens, even the mice are gone. First it will be the kids. Then it will be our turn. If we stay here, we will all die. Do you want to watch our children go through that? Do you want to watch our children die?"

"I don't believe it," he said, shaking his head. "I don't believe this is the end."

"It's not the end, Al, but it *is* the end of our time here."

"But, Annie—" He stopped, not knowing how to finish. He looked across the room. The furniture—the dresser, the bed, the chest—had all been in his family for four generations, dating back to his great-grandparents.

"I know," she said, moving towards Al and wrapping her arms around him.

As always, she smelled of the lilacs she crushed into the shampoo she made herself. He inhaled deeply before he went on. "But this is our home, Annie." Al didn't want to be one of those men who wouldn't cry. He wanted to be able to weep, and just then he could feel the tears inside of him. They were as real as the water that used to drip from the faucet at night—that is, before the pipes dried up. But even though he could feel them, he couldn't make the tears come.

"I know," Annie said again, and she squeezed him harder. "This is our home, Al. That will never change." Then, for the first time since he'd lost his father, Al did cry. They weren't the same kind of tears—not the uncontrollable sobbing he'd experienced after losing his dad—but something quieter, a more resigned kind of sorrow, but he still felt them as deeply, as if he were swallowing his emotions rather than sharing them.

*

But Annie hadn't been able to convince him. He just couldn't leave. He didn't want to admit it out loud, but he was scared.

If he left Alvaton, he would be leaving behind everything he'd ever known—the house where he'd been raised, where he'd raised his kids, the library that had been his sanctuary until he went to high school in Bowling Green, the fields he loved as much as he loved his wife, the cemetery at the end of the road where both of his parents—and every generation of his family to stand on this ground before him—were buried. If he left Alvaton, he'd be leaving all of that, all of his life, and everyone in it. He'd be leaving himself. And he'd be giving up on the dream he'd always had of growing old there—with Annie, with all of them.

These were the reasons he hadn't left, but now—alone in the house that had been in his family for over a hundred years—he understood. Everything he loved about his home, his life, was gone, never to return. How could he have been so stupid? How could he have let it all slip away?

When Al had gone to college, he'd studied the classics—Homer, Aristotle, Woolf—and lately he finds himself thinking back on Plato in particular. He realizes he's become like the people in the cave. He's afraid to leave the world he knows, afraid to venture outside his

prison. But he has good reasons, better reasons than the people Plato described: he knows that once he leaves, the world outside will not be as welcoming as the one he has come to so dearly love.

*

The Schwinn is sitting out front, Al's duffle mounted above the rear tire like a nylon rocket booster. There's nothing left to do but the leaving. But Al stalls a bit longer. He walks through the rooms of the house—revisiting memories he fears he'll never see again...

His sixth birthday—at his request, his mother had made him a cake in the shape of a yellow bunny rabbit.

The night he graduated from Western—when he'd posed in front of the fireplace between his parents like a person who could do anything.

And the sun-filled morning Annie had come home from the hospital with Hazel, their first-born.

Outside, he walks to the barn, wanting to believe it is not void of life, wanting to believe he'll slide open the gate and see a cow chewing its cud, a cat scurrying out of his way.

Of course, it's a fool's wish.

No living thing has been in the barn since even before Annie and the kids left. And seeing the empty barn again, the withered hay, makes Al angry. He's lost everything. They all have—the earth is parched, drying underneath their feet like a leaf in winter.

And for what?

For a full tank in the SUV? For a cool house on a sunny day? They'd killed people—innocent people—by the hundreds of thousands for less, taking their lives simply to lower the price at the gas pump, to keep voters happy. He'd always known it wasn't worth it, none of it, but what could he do? He was just one man. It would've been easier to move mountains than to convince people to give up their little luxuries.

As Al walks back across the yard towards the Schwinn, he looks to the sky. As usual, the clouds are absent, and it is so hot he can see a wave of feverish air moving towards him. He won't be able to get far that day—probably only to Bowling Green—it's already too late, too hot, to make it much father, and he'll be both parched and drenched by the time he arrives in that ghost town. But the next day, he'll rise early, before the sun, and get maybe forty miles in before the heat becomes unbearable, picking up another forty after dusk. At that rate, he can probably get to Antarctica in four months.

Annie had been right—he should have left with the others the year before on the buses. But he had been too stubborn. And now this is the price he'll have to pay—his penance is having to travel nine thousand miles by himself to be reunited with his family, most of it on a beat-up old bike. Of course, that's only if—and this is a big if—he survives the trip, survives the heat and the elements and any outlaws he comes across along the way. They'd heard talk of lawlessness between the cities before Annie and the kids left. It's possible he'll have to deal with that, but he's packed his grandfather's .38 Smith and Wesson and five boxes of shells. There has been no gas and very little food or water in Kentucky for months, but there is no lack of ammunition. Al laughs out loud when he has this thought. All his neighbors had been armed to the gills—waiting for the revolution that never came. In the end, all they would really desire when crisis struck was water. They'd all been so damn ignorant. What was it his father used to say? *Providence looks out for dummies and alcoholics.*

Providence.

Now that's a laugh, Al thinks.

What god would let this happen? What god would let the Earth wither and die? But when Al looks back to the sky, he knows immediately what a stupid question it is. The moon is visible in the morning sky, staring back at him like a flat-faced accusation. God hadn't done this. They'd done it to themselves. It was all their fault, and if he could talk to God right then—if there even is a god—he knows any just or righteous god would feel as devastated as he does: like he's experiencing a death that keeps happening over and over and over.

This is Al's last thought as he climbs on his father's ancient Schwinn. Then he looks over his shoulder one last time at the home he's known all his life, wipes his sweaty forehead, and starts his long ride to the bottom of the world. ☐



Review: *The Goldfinch*

Tartt's Coming-of-Age Story Dazzling, Sly

By Michelle Palmer

Donna Tartt's newest novel *The Goldfinch* is, in every sense, epic. The nearly 800-page book evokes other coming-of-age stories, from Dickens' *David Copperfield* to JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but Theo Decker's story is uniquely his own. With a dazzling mix of characters and sly humor intertwined with the darkest depression, Tartt's story of a young boy changed forever by a single act of terrorism will resonate with readers long after the final page.

The Goldfinch opens in a seedy hotel in Amsterdam, where Theo Decker awakens from a fever-induced dream of his mother, the first he's had in many years. In the dream, Theo's mother appears as she did the last time Theo saw her...beautiful, luminous, and vibrant with youth, but like everything in Theo's world, she vanishes as if in a vapor. As the dream dissipates, Theo, *Goldfinch's* hero and narrator, begins our journey through his tragic, twisted life, beginning with that fateful day fourteen years before.

On a spring morning in New York City, thirteen-year-old Theo and his mother are on their way to school to discuss Theo's smoking on school property. Caught in a sudden downpour, Theo's mother insists that they make a quick stop at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see a few of her favorite paintings. What happens next divides Theo's life into a clear delineation of "before" and "after"... a bomb explodes in the museum, and Theo's mother is gone.

In a matter of moments, Theo's world is destroyed. When he regains consciousness, Theo is in a "ragged white cave," surrounded by bodies and devastation. As he staggers through the debris, Theo stumbles upon an elderly gentleman who is near death. He begs Theo to take the painting near them, a masterpiece by Dutch master Carel Fabritius known as *The Goldfinch*, and then gives Theo a ring. As he struggles for breath, the man instructs Theo to return the ring to his friend Hobie, who owns an antique store in the Village. Theo makes his way through a nightmare of body parts and broken glass to an exit, holding the ring and the painting, with his only thought of finding his mother.

Back at the apartment, alone and terrified, Theo waits for his mother to return. Theo's father, an alcoholic gambler, has long since abandoned them, and there are no other relatives to take him in. Theo is temporarily placed with wealthy childhood friend Andy Balfour and his family, and thus begins the "after" part of Theo's life, from the upscale

apartments of Park Place and James Hobart's (Hobie's) timeless antique shop, to the barren landscape of Las Vegas.

When Theo's reluctant father finally turns up, Theo must pack up the apartment he shared with his mother and move to Las Vegas. With a colorfully drawn cast of characters, featuring sketchy Ukrainian classmate Boris and Theo's dad's girlfriend Xander, Theo begins a new life. His alcoholic father has turned to drugs and a high-stakes gambling habit, resulting in visits from shady loan

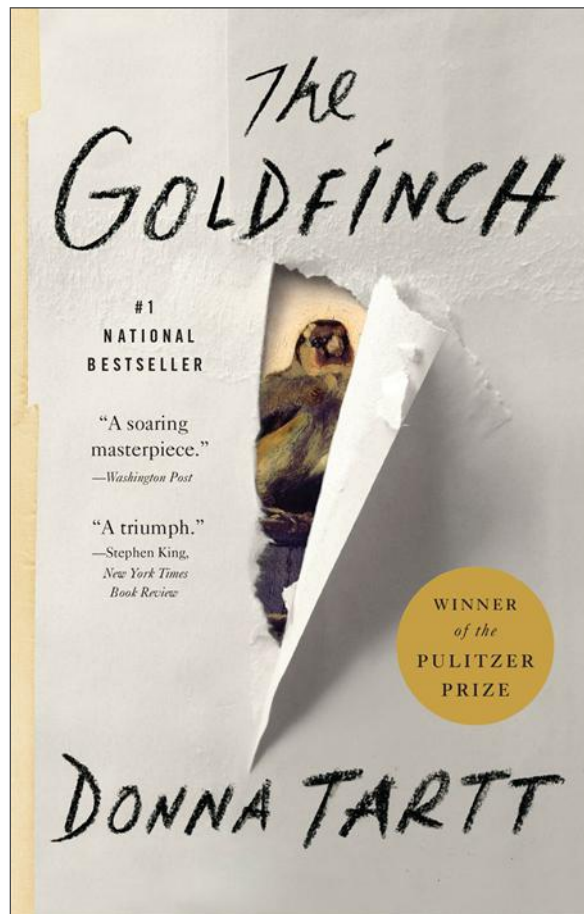
frozen, sealed-off," says Theo, "now, in the shower, I would turn the water up as hard as it would go and howl, silently. Everything was raw and painful and confusing and wrong and yet it was as if I'd been dragged from freezing water through a break in the ice, into sun and blazing cold."

It is Theo's intelligence and ability to rise above that allows him to join antique dealer Hobie as a partner in the business, and eventually climb the social ladder in New York. But one secret from that tragic day

April threatens to ruin everything that Theo holds dear: Theo still carries with him *The Goldfinch*, his mother's favorite painting, which was long-considered to be burned in the explosion. Though initially taken on impulse, *The Goldfinch* has become inextricably linked with Theo's mother's death. "The painting, the magic and aliveness of it, was like that odd airy moment of the snow falling... When I looked at the painting I felt the same convergence on a single point: a glancing sunstruck instant that existed now and forever. Only occasionally did I notice the chain on the finch's ankle, or think what a cruel life for a little living creature—fluttering briefly, forced always to land in the same hopeless place." Sadly, like the goldfinch, Theo is trapped; despite making a new life for himself, he is incapable of moving forward.

Despite its hefty weight (both in terms of size and bleak subject matter), *The Goldfinch* is highly readable. Tartt's descriptive writing style and well-rounded characters make this a book to be savored. While at times the story seems to stall—particularly when Tartt focuses on the minutiae of furniture repair or painting technique—there is always another upheaval in Theo's life, or the reappearance of a favorite character to move the story forward.

To reveal too much more would spoil the caper-like ending to the novel (with the hilariously menacing Boris making another appearance) but eventually Theo is able to release his overwhelming burden of guilt. In the last lines of the novel, Theo addresses his "non-existent reader" with these words of wisdom: "For if disaster and oblivion have followed this painting down through time—so too has love. Insofar as it is immortal (and it is) I have a small, bright, immutable part in that immortality." Like the famous painting, Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* will enjoy its own immortality, as her finest work to date. □



sharks and enforcers with aluminum bats. Unsurprisingly, Theo's father betrays and abandons him once again, and before long, Theo makes his way back to New York—older, jaded, and still unable to move past the day of his mother's death.

Unlike characters such as Harry Potter, Theo is far from innocent: petty crimes, shoplifting, drugs and alcohol become a way of life as Theo struggles to cope with survivor's guilt and depression. Still, we are still drawn to him, this imperfect child who has suffered such great tragedy. Tartt's descriptions of not only the horror of the bombing itself (strongly evocative of the 9/11 attack) but of Theo's overwhelming grief can't help but endear him to us. "For weeks I'd been

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Press Release

Introducing... *Bohemian Gospel*

Thirteenth-century Bohemia is a dangerous place for a girl, especially one as odd as Mouse, born with unnatural senses and an uncanny intellect. Some call her a witch. Others call her an angel. Even Mouse doesn't know who—or what—she is. But she means to find out.

When young King Ottakar shows up at the Abbey wounded by a traitor's arrow, Mouse breaks church law to save him and then agrees to accompany him back to

Prague as his personal healer. Caught in the undertow of court politics at the castle, Ottakar and Mouse find themselves drawn to each other as they work to uncover the threat against him and to unravel the mystery of her past. But when Mouse's unusual gifts give rise to a violence and strength that surprise every-

one—especially herself—she is forced to ask herself: Will she be prepared for the future that awaits her?

The novel is imaginative and full, with such a complete depiction of the world that it's almost hard to believe that this is a debut novel, but indeed it is by Nashville-based Lipscomb University creative writing professor Dana Carpenter, who won the 2014 Claymore Award from Killer Nashville for her draft of *Bohemian Gospel*. *Bohemian Gospel* heralds the arrival of a fresh new voice for historical fiction. □

Advance Praise for *Bohemian Gospel*

"A grand, thought-provoking adventure in sorrow, joy and magic, *Bohemian Gospel* is a majestic historical novel. One of the most intriguing novels you'll read this year. Carpenter has crafted an unforgettable debut with an enchanting, compelling lead."

—J. T. Ellison, *New York Times* bestselling author of *What Lies Behind*

"A fast-moving, seductive read. A fascinating mix of dark fantasy and rich historical detail."

—Linda Lafferty, author of *The Bloodletter's Daughter*

"One of the best novels I've read in years. Wonderful writing, great characters, a fantastic story—everything a reader of historical fiction could want."

—Philip Freeman, author of *Saint Brigid's Bones*

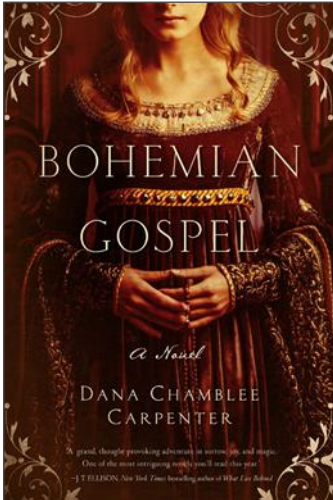


Photo by Moments By Moser Photography

Dennis Bryon

Press Release

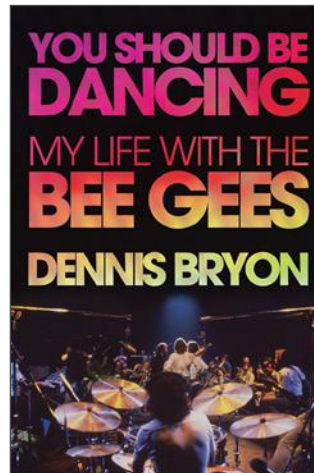
You Should Be Dancing: My Life with the Bee Gees

With worldwide sales of over 220 million records, the Bee Gees are the sixth bestselling music artists in history. Now—for the first time ever—acclaimed

musician Dennis Bryon tells the story of how he became the Bee Gees drummer for eight years during their peak period, including the *Saturday Night Fever* explosion, in his new book *You Should Be Dancing: My Life with the Bee Gees* (ECW Press, August 1, 2015).

Dennis goes behind the scenes to present never-before-told stories of his experience on one of the wildest rides in pop/rock history. Along the way, he shares his unforgettable personal encounters with many of the world's most famous musicians, including the Bee Gees themselves, Michael Jackson, Jimi Hendrix, Stephen Stills, Olivia Newton-John, Andy Gibb, and Bruce Johnston of the Beach Boys.

Peppered with photographs from Dennis's personal collection and rare Bee Gees memorabilia, *You Should Be Dancing* is a



must-have for any Bee Gees fan, drummer, or pop/rock junkie.

Dennis Bryon is the acclaimed drummer who first tasted success with Amen Corner, the celebrated Welsh rock band that had six hits in the U.K., including a number one. In 1973, Dennis joined the Bee Gees and played drums on nine #1 singles and on the 40-million-copy album *Saturday Night Fever*. Dennis lives in Nashville, Tennessee. □

Order your copy on Amazon or at <http://ecwpress.com/beegees>

Launch Event at Belmont University's McAfee Concert Hall: *Based On: Words, Notes, and Art from Nashville*

Anthology Proceeds Help Nashville Council

By Roy Burkhead

At the south end of Belmont University's Belmont Heights complex, there are 876 of the luckiest seats in Music City.

They are nestled within a structure that has been described as the best new venue in Nashville and a treasure. Developed by the same folks who designed the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, McAfee Concert Hall has hosted instrumental ensembles, *Christmas at Belmont*, and the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

And on June 15, the hall was the home of another artistic celebration. "I've never seen anything quite like this," said Craig Havighurst of the celebration for *Based On: Words, Notes, and Art from Nashville*. Havighurst was the event's host...as well as a local writer, commentator, and producer.

East Side Story, Nashville's only all-local bookstore, published the anthology, the sell of which will benefit the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville (ABC).

This project is a rich collection of short stories, songs, and visual art prints inspired by one another and thoughtfully arranged in a single printed book that includes a CD of 12 songs.

"It is no secret that Nashville has an incredibly rich creative community," said Chuck Beard, proprietor of East Side Story. "Authors, musicians, and visual artists all thrive here and share a similar end goal: storytelling. Since opening the bookstore in 2012, I have worked to provide a platform for these stories to find their audience. I believe that the anthology, *Based On*, is a beautiful snap-shot of the variety of talent Nashville hosts."

Back at the hall, Nashville novelist River Jordan had something else to say as she took the stage to read from her piece in the anthology: "Wow, you guys are still here."

She said that at about 10:00 p.m. for an event that was planned to be over at least an hour earlier, but no one made an attempt to leave, and nearly all of those 876 seats were filled.

"And thank you Chuck, wherever you are, for coming up with this."

Where was Chuck? Keeping the show running, walking the aisles to connect audience members, and checking with the sound guy. And every now and then, he'd pause to shake hands, hug, and welcome guests.

Starting at 6:30 p.m., audience members began filling the hall, and as the lights went down a child's voice spoke aloud, "Ohhh, it's pretty in here."

Casey Summar, ABC's executive director, walked to the lectern, explained a little about the council, and added, "I wanted to take a moment to thank Chuck Beard for organizing this incredible program."

The audience erupted in applause. "That's well deserved."

"Evening, y'all," author J.T. Ellison said in an easy-going style as she took control of the podium. "When Chuck approached me about the idea, I was floored and knew I had to be a part of it. I love the concept of *Based On...* with the talent in this city, our literary strength will be highlighted by the songs and art. I want to say thank you to Chuck for putting this all together. It's all amazing."

Paige Crutcher writes YA and reports for *Publishers Weekly*, and she was a part of the anthology as well.

"Nashville is a hub of talent, and it has been a joy to create a story for the anthology alongside some of the finest artists in Music City," Crutcher said. "Chuck Beard is a wonder, and I am so grateful to his passion and love for writers, musicians, and artists."

And what did Chuck have to say once he paused long enough from working?

"I'm so hungry right now, I can't even see straight."

Of course, he didn't pause to eat. He personally greeted every single person in attendance as folks purchased books.

"It was wonderful of Chuck to invite me to do this," Havighurst said.

"He didn't even do it as a for profit. Visit East Side Story. It's a special place. He treats his authors so well." □



Photo by Terry Price

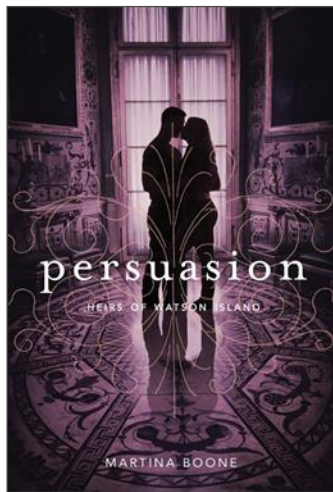
Chuck Beard, in front of East Side Story Books



Press Release

Persuasion (Heirs of Watson Island)

Grieving the death of her godfather and haunted by her cousin Cassie's betrayal, Barrie returns from a trip to San Francisco to find the Watson plantation under siege. Ghost hunters hope to glimpse the ancient spirit who sets the river on fire each night, and reporters chase rumors of a stolen shipment of Civil War gold that may be hidden at Colesworth Place. The chaos turns dangerous as Cassie hires a team of archeologists to



excavate beneath the mansion ruins. Because more is buried there than treasure.

A stranger filled with magic arrives at Watson's Landing claiming that the key to the Watson and Beaufort gifts-and the Colesworth curse-also lies beneath the mansion. With a mix of threats and promises, the man convinces Barrie and Cassie to cast

a spell there at midnight. But what he conjures may have deadly consequences. ☐

About Martina Boone

Born in Prague, Martina spoke several languages before she learned English after moving to the United States. She has never fallen out of love with words, fairy tale settings, or characters who have to find themselves. The founder of AdventuresInYAPublishing.com, a [Writers Digest](http://WritersDigest.com) 101 Best Websites for Writers site, Martina also runs the First Five Pages Workshops for writers getting ready to submit their manuscripts to agents. She's also the founding member of YASeriesInsiders.com, a blog dedicated to promoting literacy and love of reading by connecting fans from various fandoms with authors and great new series books.

In addition, Martina has created articles and worksheets that have been quoted in MFA lectures by a *New York Times* bestselling author and used by aspiring writers, schools, school districts, and university extension programs around the world. She has hosted contests and workshops that have helped launch the careers of multiple *NYT* and *USA Today* bestselling authors. Her debut trilogy sold in a six-figure pre-empt.

Praise for the author's first novel, *Compulsion*

"Skillfully blends rich magic and folklore with adventure, sweeping romance, and hidden treasure . . . An impressive start to the Heirs of Watson Island series."

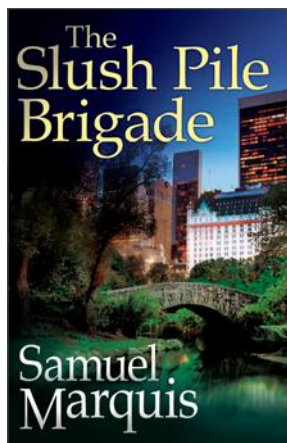
— *Publishers Weekly*

Press Release

The Slush Pile Brigade

On his thirtieth birthday, Nick Lassiter has lost his girlfriend and his job, is wanted by the police, and has discovered that his unpublished thriller, *Blind Thrust*, has been stolen and turned into a blockbuster movie called *Subterranean Storm*. Even worse, the movie is based on a soon-to-be bestselling novel by Australian thriller writer Cameron Beckett, one of the world's biggest brand name authors. Rather than seek revenge through a financial settlement or public humiliation, Lassiter sets out for New York to obtain mea culpas from Beckett and his renowned literary agent, whom he is certain colluded with the Aussie in stealing his debut novel.

Once in New York, Lassiter, and his three quirky fish-out-of-water friends who



insist on accompanying him, instantly run afoul of the law and other powerful forces intent on thwarting them and their mission. As they encounter one thorny obstacle after another, the scope of their inquiries expands and they are soon in way over their heads, battling toe-to-toe not only against the mega-bestselling author and his agent, but a formidable army of antagonists, including the NYPD, Beckett's Big Five publishing house security squad, and the Russian mob. Collectively, these adversaries present Lassiter with the greatest-and deadliest-challenge of his life.

Unexpectedly aided by his CIA father, Director of the Russian Counterintelligence Desk, and his former girlfriend turned CIA-informant, Lassiter and his comrades take to calling themselves the Slush Pile Brigade. Outmatched

and outgunned, they are foiled at virtually every turn but still they are determined to win. But will justice be attained? Can they prove that Beckett and his crooked literary agent have stolen Lassiter's blockbuster novel and are undeservedly reaping the success? And more importantly, will they solve one of the most important counterintelligence cases in CIA history and actually live to tell about it? ☐

About Samuel Marquis

Samuel Marquis works by day as vice-president - hydrogeologist with Cameron-Cole, LLC, an environmental consulting firm in Boulder, Colorado, and by night as a writer of historical and modern suspense novels. He holds a Master of Science degree in geology, is a registered professional geologist in eleven states, and is a recognized expert in groundwater contaminant hydrogeology, having served as a hydrogeologic expert witness in several class action litigation cases. He also has a deep and abiding interest in military history and intelligence, specifically related to the Plains Indian Wars, World War II, and the current War on Terror.

His strong technical scientific background and deep passion for military history and intelligence has served Samuel Marquis well as a suspense writer. James Patterson has compared his forthcoming novel, *The Coalition*, to *The Day After Tomorrow*, the classic thriller by Allan Folsom which appeared in the number three spot in its first week on the *New York Times* bestseller list for fiction and for which American publishing rights were sold for two million dollars. Donald Maas, author of *Writing 21st Century Fiction* and two novels, has compared *The Coalition* to *The Day of the Jackal*. Other book reviewers have compared Marquis' WWII espionage novel, *Bodyguard of Deception*, to the spy novels of Daniel Silva, Ken Follett, and Alan Furst.

In addition to his novels, Mr. Marquis is widely published in peer-reviewed scientific journals/books and has provided principal expert litigation support and senior technical oversight on a variety of remedial, hydrogeologic, and sustainability projects.



Chef Sean Brock: James Beard Award Winner, Author, Restaurateur, Seed Preservationist

Photo by Terry Price

South Carolina's Anson Mills, the Southern Foodways Alliance, the SoFAB Culinary Library & Archive, Kentucky's bourbon trail, Lodge's cast iron, and Chef Brock: all coming up in our Southern Food issue! ...and book reviews, feature stories, literary festivals, and so much more!

In Depth with Nashville's Chef Sean Brock

Coming in the Fall: Our Southern Food Issue

Perhaps you have known that Chef Brock has been bringing back and growing crops that were on the edge of extinction. And of course, he's been an advocate for seed preservation, growing an assortment of heirloom crops. But did you realize that he studies and collects 19th century Southern cookbooks to educate himself on the South's food history and unearth new ways to revive antebellum cuisine? We'll be exploring all this and more in our next issue!

The Southern Food Issue's Launch Venue Announced!

All of us at *2nd & Church* are thrilled to reveal that we will launch our Southern Food issue at Husk Nashville. The exact date and time will be announced soon via our Web site, so keep checking with us online for all the details. As always, we'll have copies of the issue at the launch for free (while supplies last, as the saying goes!). And while you're there, plan on staying for supper or perhaps a drink at the bar: HUSK Cheeseburger, Carolina Rice Griddle Cakes, HUSK Charcuterie Plate, NC Catfish, Steak Dinner for Two, Crispy Chicken Skins, or A Plate of Southern Vegetables? Who knows? The lunch and dinner menus change and are guaranteed to be fresh, Southern, and local. And don't forget the cornbread! (Oh...and the food and drink are not free, but they are reasonably priced!) And if you can't wait for the launch, try making the cornbread on your own! Thanks to Artisan Books, the publisher of his award-winning book *Heritage*, we are able to share a story from the book and Chef Brock's recipe for Cracklin' Cornbread... *right now.* ☞

From the Desk of Chef Sean Brock:

Cracklin' Cornbread

Makes one 9-inch round loaf

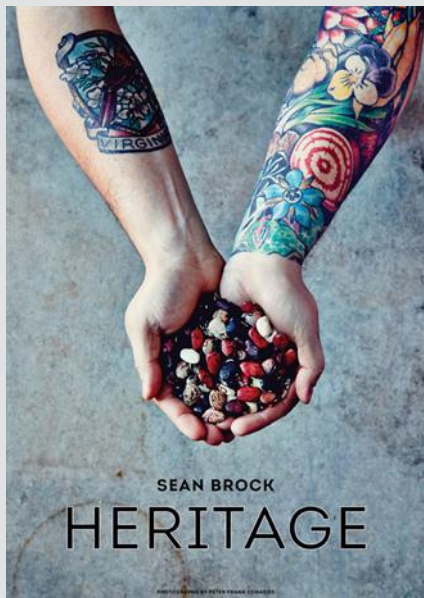
My favorite ball cap, made by Billy Reid, has a patch on the front that reads "Make Cornbread, Not War." I'm drawn to it because cornbread is a sacred thing in the South, almost a way of life. But cornbread, like barbeque, can be the subject of great debate among Southerners. Flour or no flour? Sugar or no sugar? Is there an egg involved? All are legitimate questions.

"When we opened Husk, I knew that we had to serve cornbread. I also knew that there is a lot of bad cornbread out there in the restaurant world, usually cooked before service and reheated, or held in a warming drawer. I won't touch that stuff because, yes, I am a cornbread snob. My cornbread has no flour and no sugar. It has the tang of good buttermilk and a little smoke from Allan Benton's smokehouse bacon. You've got to cook the cornbread just before you want to eat it, in a black skillet, with plenty of smoking-hot grease. That is the secret to a golden, crunchy exterior. Use very high heat, so hot that the batter screeches as it hits the pan. It's a deceptively simple process, but practice makes perfect, which may be why many Southerners make cornbread every single day. ☞



Cracklin' Cornbread: Ingredients:

*4 ounces bacon, preferably Benton's
 2 cups cornmeal, preferably Anson Mills
 Antebellum Coarse Yellow Cornmeal
 1 teaspoon kosher salt
 ½ teaspoon baking soda
 ½ teaspoon baking powder
 1½ cups whole-milk buttermilk
 1 large egg, lightly beaten*



A Winning Tradition...

At this point, many folks are sure to know that Chef Brock won the James Beard Award for “Best Chef Southeast” in 2010, and he was a finalist for “Outstanding Chef” in 2013 and 2014. But did you know that he’s carried on his winning tradition with his *New York Times* bestseller, *Heritage*? A couple months ago, he won the 2015 James Beard Foundation Award, “Best Book of the Year in American Cooking,” for *Heritage*. And earlier in the year, *Heritage* was the 2015 Winner, IACP Julia Child First Book Award. A huge THANK YOU to Artisan Books for allowing us to reprint Chef Brock’s recipe for Cracklin’ Cornbread.

To prepare Chef Brock’s Cracklin’ Cornbread:

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Put a 9-inch cast-iron skillet in the oven to preheat for at least 10 minutes.
2. Run the bacon through a meat grinder or very finely mince it. Put the bacon in a skillet large enough to hold it in one layer and cook over medium-low heat, stirring frequently so that it doesn’t burn, until the fat is rendered and the bits of bacon are crispy, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove the bits of bacon to a paper towel to drain, reserving the fat. You need 5 tablespoons bacon fat for this recipe.
3. Combine the cornmeal, salt, baking soda, baking powder, and bits of bacon in a medium bowl. Reserve 1 tablespoon of the bacon fat and combine the remaining 4 tablespoons fat, the buttermilk, and egg in a small bowl. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients just to combine; do not overmix.
4. Move the skillet from the oven to the stove, placing it over high heat. Add the reserved tablespoon of bacon fat and swirl to coat the skillet. Pour in the batter, distributing it evenly. It should sizzle.
5. Bake the cornbread for about 20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Serve warm from the skillet.



Photo by Andrea Behrends

From husknashville.com: “Husk Nashville, Located in Rutledge Hill—just a few blocks south of Historic Broadway, in the heart of Downtown Nashville—is the newest outpost of the Neighborhood Dining Group and James Beard Award-winning Chef Sean Brock’s renowned restaurant, Husk. Led by Brock, the kitchen reinterprets the bounty of the surrounding area, exploring an ingredient-driven cuisine that begins in the rediscovery of heirloom products and redefines what it means to cook and eat in Nashville.”

Excerpted from *Heritage* by Sean Brock (Artisan Books). Copyright © 2014. Photographs by Peter Frank Edwards.

Meet our Contributors

A look at the writers and poets who contributed to this issue of *2nd & Church*:

Chuck Beard

Chuck Beard is a thinker by trade (will think for food; food for thought if you will), people observer-questioner/mental note-taker by habit (self-taught mind you), and curator of meaningless words searching for a dome near you. He works part-time at Oasis Center, is the editor for *Number.*, contributor for *Nashville Galleries Examiner*, a blogger, freelance writer, published author, and sole proprietor of East Side Story (Nashville's only all-local bookstore).

Ralph Bland

Ralph Bland is a native Nashvillian from the Jurassic Era and a graduate of Belmont University. He is the author of six novels (*Once In Love With Amy*, *Where Or When*, *Past Perfect*, *Ace*, *Long Long Time*, *Bright Red Devil*) and a collection of stories, *Not Dead Again*. He is retired and lives with his wife, a posse of spoiled dogs, and an eccentric MG named Zelda on the outskirts of Music City, USA, disguised as a normal person.

Kate Buckley

Kate Buckley's poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *The Cafe Review*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Slipstream*, and other literary journals. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and is the author of *A Wild Region* (Moon Tide Press, 2008) and *Follow Me Down* (Tebot Bach, 2009). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her awards include a Gabeheart Prize and the *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Prize.

Drema Drudge

Drema Drudge is a recent graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing program. She has been published in *The Louisville Review*, *Penumbra*, and in Manchester University's *Spectrum*. She and her husband Barry lived in Nashville for five years nearly a decade ago, and they remember it fondly. In addition, she is a freelance writer and has published regularly with the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

Gayle Edlin

Gayle Edlin excelled in undergraduate mathematics and chemistry but floundered in graduate studies in physics. Through an unlikely sequence of employment events, Gayle made her way into technical writing where she flourished...at least on the surface. Technically satiated but creatively starving, Gayle stumbled across a writing group and seized the chance to join it. Sparks flew and before she knew it (i.e., five years later), Gayle finished her first novel, *Here & Now*, which she published in December 2014. Gayle also enjoys photography and takes frequent walks to indulge both this interest and her love of nature. She is seldom at a loss for words in the written form, but frequently stumbles over them in speech.

Kate Gale

Kate Gale is Managing Editor of Red Hen Press. She lives and writes in Los Angeles and wherever she can afford to travel.

Richard Goodman

Richard Goodman is the author of *French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France*. *The San Francisco Chronicle* said *French Dirt* is "one of the most charming, perceptive and subtle books ever written about the French by an American." He is also the author of *The Soul of Creative Writing*, *A New York Memoir*, and *The Bicycle Diaries: One New Yorker's Journey Through 9/11*.

He has published articles and essays in *The New York Times*, *Harvard Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *River Teeth*, *Chautauqua*, *Commonweal*, *Vanity Fair*, *Grand Tour*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Saveur*, *Louisville Review*, *Ascent*, *French Review*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*. He is Assistant Professor of Creative Nonfiction Writing at the University of New Orleans.

Janelle Hederman

Janelle Hederman has been published in *AOPA Flight Training magazine*, *poetryrepairs*, *Ellipsis*, *The Trunk*, and several other publications. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and a BA in Communications and Journalism from Clemson University. She is a writing consultant and freelance writer in Middle Tennessee.

Alvin Knox

Alvin Knox received his MFA in Creative Writing-Poetry from Vermont College in 1999. Currently an Instructor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, he is one of the founding mentors of MTSU's Writer's Loft program. His poems have appeared in various publications, including the *Southern Indiana Review*, *Algonquin*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Tar Wolf Review*.

Susan Martinello

Susan Martinello lives in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Her poems have appeared in *Grandmother Earth*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *POEM*, the medical journal *CHEST*, Connotation Press, as well as *Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry*.

Molly McCaffrey

Molly McCaffrey is the author of the short story collection *How to Survive Graduate School & Other Disasters*, the co-editor of *Commutability: Stories about the Journey from Here to There*, and the founder of I Will Not Diet, a blog devoted to healthy living and body acceptance. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati and has worked on films with Academy Award winner Barbara Kopple and *World War Z* author, Max Brooks. Nominated for three Pushcart Prizes, an AWP Intro Journals Award, and Scribner's *Best of the Fiction Workshops*, she currently works for Steel Toe Books in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Kevin McLellan

Kevin McLellan is the author of the chapbooks *Shoes on a wire* (Split Oak, forthcoming) runner-up for the 2012 Stephen Dunn Prize in Poetry and *Round Trip* (Seven Kitchens, 2010), a collaborative series of poems with numerous women poets. His recent poems have appeared in journals including *American Letters & Commentary*, *Barrow Street*, *Colorado Review*, *Ke-nyon Review Online*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Witness*, and numerous others. Kevin lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and sometimes teaches poetry workshops at URI.

Diana McQuady

Diana McQuady is a writer who divides her time between Nashville, Tennessee, and Bowling Green, Kentucky. Her writing has won awards and has also appeared in anthologies and various publications. She was the 2007-2008 Western Kentucky University Libraries' Writer-in-Residence. Diana completed her studies at Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program, graduating in May 2014.

Cynthia A. Minor

Cynthia A. Minor is a Nashville entertainment attorney and author. Her novel *Tricked* has received national acclaim and her short story "Extradition" was published in the *Southern Anthology of Humor and Fiction* and later made into a motion picture short that premiered in 2014. Minor still writes books and screenplays.

Michael Morris

Michael Morris is the author of the award winning novel, *A Place Called Wiregrass*, and *Slow Way Home*, which was named one of the best novels of the year by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. His latest novel, *Man in the Blue Moon*, was named a best book of 2012 by *Publishers Weekly* and was awarded the Best Book of Fiction by the Alabama Library Association. A finalist for the Southern Book Critics Circle Award, Morris lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

Michelle Palmer

Michelle Palmer is a writer and dance instructor. Her book reviews have appeared in *The Tennessean*, the *Daily News Journal*, the *Murfreesboro Pulse*, and other publications. An enthusiast for both literacy and literature, she serves on the One Book committee of Rutherford County's nonprofit organization Read To Succeed and has been a giver on World Book Night since its U.S. launch in 2011. Michelle, who graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in English, moved to middle Tennessee with her family 20 years ago. She can most often be found with a cup of strong coffee in one hand and a book in the other.

Linda Busby Parker

Linda Busby Parker has taught on the faculties of Eastern Michigan University, Iowa State University, and the University of South Alabama. She is the author of two college-level textbooks. Her novel, *Seven Laurels*, won the James Jones First Novel Award and the Langum Prize for Historical Fiction. She has published short pieces in *Writer's Digest*, *Big Muddy*, and *Confluence*. Linda has served as editor and publisher of *Mobile Bay Monthly* and as publisher of Excalibur Press. She has reviewed books for *The Mobile Press Register*, the Alabama Writers Forum, and the *San Diego Union Tribune*. She has been a fellow in fiction at Bread Loaf and a Tennessee Williams Scholar in fiction at the Sewanee Writers Conference.

Mary Popham

Mary Popham's fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, and book reviews have appeared in *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, *The Louisville Review*, *ForeWord Reviews*, *New Southerner*, *2nd & Church*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. She has produced short plays and published short stories in anthologies, holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University, and is an active member in two writers groups. In November 2013, her essay "The Kindnesses We Give Each Other" was published in *This I Believe: Kentucky*, and in October 2013, her novel *Back Home in Landing Run* was published by MotesBooks. She is currently writing a collection of short fiction.

Flora K. Schildknecht

Flora K. Schildknecht is a writer and visual artist living in Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband and son. She is a recent graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing program.

Tamara Scott

Tamara Scott is a writer and editor, a founding member of the Skirts Up Writers Group (skirtsupwriters.com) and blogger at smallandcentered.com. By day she works for an Internet marketing software firm so she can save the world through words at night. After graduating with a teaching degree from Vanderbilt University in 2004, she taught in Metro Nashville Public Schools and devoted herself to a Belmont Master's Program and a thesis on Zora Neale Hurston. She has since left academics, but enjoys teaching and learning every day. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee with her talented

and handsome husband.

Luke Seward

Luke Seward is a Louisville based photographer currently completing a BFA in photography at the Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville. Seward is managing documentation of all public art works within the Louisville Metro Government through the Commission on Public Art. His work is presently on display at Spot5 Art Center in the Clifton area of Louisville, Kentucky. "Finding myself in the midst of a constant concrete jungle drove me to seek refuge behind a lens. While lurking through the streamlines of urban environments I found myself stepping outside its systemic nature to observe. I find an appreciation for my surroundings by taking time to slow down, compose, and capture. Pumping the breaks in a fast paced world allows me to soak up the little details we are surrounded by, permitting me to find truth and authenticity within scenes carefully composed."

Kathleen Thompson

Kathleen Thompson holds an MFA in Writing from Spalding University. Most recently a poem was published in the 2015 *poemmemoirstory*. Her poetry chapbook *The Nights, The Days* won the 2008 Negative Capability Press Chapbook Award. *The Shortest Distance, 2009*, was nominated for the National Book Award. Kathleen has two novels and a collection of stories in manuscript. "Nesting," is currently published in www.waypointsmag.com. "Finding the Lord," was nominated for a 2009 Pushcart Prize. She published at least seven essays (and many blogs) in WELD magazine in 2011/12. Her current writing projects include a series of linked stories whose protagonist is a crack addict, and a memoir in essay format.

Candace L. White

Candace L. White is a mountain girl born at the foot of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina. She grew up near a cotton mill town on her Granny's farm where stories and the tellin' of them were Saturday night entertainment in the front yard as the sun set and the cool air, soft with the scent of flowers, crept from the pine woods. A chorus of tree frogs from down at the creek provided a background cadence to the spoken words of relatives and friends who had just stopped by for cake, coffee, and visitin'. In this place of mountain laurel and bubbling creeks that sprang from artesian wells, a mountain child with bare dirty feet learned to live in the world. Candace tells this story in her creative nonfiction novel that is nearly complete and refers to it often on her blog and in her cookbook that shares the food and wisdom that she inherited from the women who raised her up.

Deidre Woollard

Deidre Woollard is a writer and social marketing strategist living in Los Angeles. She writes about real estate, luxury, and new media for a variety of websites. A graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program, she also teaches as part of UC Irvine Extension's Digital Journalism program.

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