

M PEN IN HAND

Maryland Writers' Association

Winter 2011
v24 n1

marylandwriters.org

A Look at the New Bylaws

In response to the growth in membership and geographic reach that the Maryland Writers' Association has experienced in the past few years, the MWA Board decided in late 2009 to take a look at how the organization is structured and governed. At the 2010 Annual Meeting, members voted to enact a new set of bylaws that incorporates the Board's vision of MWA for its second 20 years. *Pen in Hand* editor Paul Lagasse speaks with immediate past president **Sonia Linebaugh** about how the new bylaws were developed, what's new and what's the same, and what the changes mean for the membership and the organization.

Electronic voting, greater Chapter representation, and a much-needed overhaul of the Board's structure are just three of the important changes to the Maryland Writers' Association bylaws that members approved at last June's annual meeting.

The new bylaws incorporate some important revisions to the structure of the MWA's governing Board and the roles of Board members. Perhaps the most significant is that the Board and chapters are now allowed to adopt rules and procedures for online voting to complement traditional in-person voting. Sonia Linebaugh, who as MWA President initiated the revision process, says that this is an imperative given the geographic spread of the membership.

"The bylaws form the structure for MWA to stretch into the foreseeable future," she says.

Under the new bylaws, which are reprinted in a special center spread of this issue, chapter presidents have been accorded the status of voting Board members. In recognition that many of the projects and initiatives launched by the Board cannot be accomplished in a single year, from the 2010 elections onward Board members will serve two-year terms with a limit of two consecutive terms. Future Board elections will be held only in even-numbered years.

Other changes include new membership categories, flexible funding for chapters, and three new Board positions that provide oversight for projects previously

undertaken on by individual members -- the Publications Chair, who supervises publication of *Pen in Hand* as well as MWA books including the anthologies, and the Program Chair, who develops and manages writing contests, awards, critique groups, and other similar programs. Another new Board position, the Development and Long Range Planning Chair, is responsible for fundraising and the recruitment of sponsors.

A special Bylaws Committee chaired by then-Howard County Chapter President (and now MWA President) Nicole Schultheis convened in November 2009 and over the next six months hammered out a draft, inviting comments from past Presidents Scott Morrow and Austin Camacho. The final draft was published to members and opened to comment via the MWA Announcements list in mid-May, and at the Annual Meeting on June 25 the attending members voted to approve the new bylaws.

Linebaugh says that although the new bylaws attempt to address many of the concerns that members have raised over the years, it could take many years for the effects of the changes to play out. Only then will the membership be able to assess the astuteness of the Board's vision. For example, as the relationship of chapters to the organization as a whole will continue to evolve, what will become of the relationship of members who prefer to eschew a chapter affiliation?

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Meetings and Events

MWA Board

Meetings of the MWA Board are announced in advance on the MWA website, www.marylandwriters.org, and on the MWA Announcements and MWA Discussion Yahoo! groups. Contact the MWA Secretary at secretary@marylandwriters.org for more information.

Chapters

The **Annapolis Chapter** meets the second Wednesday of each month at the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, Constitution and Greenfield Streets, Room 205, Annapolis, MD, (410) 263-5544. For more information about upcoming meetings, e-mail mwa@marylandwriters.org.

The **Baltimore Chapter** meets on the fourth Mondays of every month (except December) at 7:00 p.m. at the Towson ARTS Collective, 410/406 York Road, in Towson. For more information about upcoming meetings, e-mail mwab@marylandwriters.org.

The **Frederick Chapter** meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month at locations in and around Frederick, including the C. Burr Artz Public Library and the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. For more information about upcoming meetings, e-mail mwaf@marylandwriters.org.

The **Howard County Chapter** meets on the third Thursday of each month (except November and December) at 7:00pm at Sunrise Senior Living, 6500 Freetown Road, in Columbia. For more information about upcoming meetings, e-mail mwahc@marylandwriters.org.

PEN IN HAND

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Winter 2011

Maryland Writers' Association

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Contributors: Lauren Beth Eisenberg, Kelly A. Harmon, Louise Harris, Paul Lagasse, Gary Lester, Sonia Linebaugh, Nona Naghavi, Leslie Payne, LM Preston, Nicole Schultheis, Mary L. Westcott, Sherri Cook Woosley

MWA Officers

Elected Positions

President: Nicole Schultheis

Vice President: Fernando Quijano III

Secretary: Gail Johnson

Treasurer: Vacant

Program Chair: Sonia Linebaugh

Membership Chair: Eileen Haavik McIntire

Communications Chair: Steve Rossman

Conference Chair: David Placher

Publications Chair: Vacant

Development and Long Range Planning
Chair: Vacant

Members at Large: Lauren Flax, Ally E.
Peltier

Appointed Positions

Editor, *Pen in Hand*: Paul Lagasse

Critique Group Coordinator: Joya Fields

Novel and Short Story Contest Coordinator:
Sonia Linebaugh

Grant Coordinator: Sonia Linebaugh

MWA Books: Ally E. Peltier, Gary Lester

Webmaster: Vacant

Archivist: Eileen Haavik McIntire

Bookkeeper: Edith Goldman

Chapter Presidents

Annapolis: Vicki Duncan

Baltimore: Gary Lester

Frederick: Linda J. Alexander

Howard County: Louise Harris

Submissions

Pen in Hand accepts submissions from MWA members. Feature stories and fiction: 300-400 words. Poetry: up to 100 words.

Authors retain all rights except first publication. Query for guidelines and editorial calendar: Paul Lagasse, peninhand@marylandwriters.org.

Why Use a Beta Reader?

by LM Preston

One of the most important parts of my writing process is to find beta readers. Oh, there's different types of beta readers, all of which I use for different reasons. They are indispensable in the process of getting your writing in shape.

Your Story, and the Reader's

Oh, yeah, there is always more than one side to a story. I'm sure you heard that one before. Well when it comes to writing, there is the story you've written, the one that's in your head, and the story that the reader reads.

The best part of reading a book as opposed to seeing a movie is that no two readers play out the exact same story in their head when they read. Having people test-read your writing shows you the things you forgot to tell them. Lets you know when you tell too much. Picks out the times you forgot to show the story.

As authors, we know the story we want to tell in detail. And also those parts that are our tough spots -- places in the tale where we get too lazy to figure it out. The reader picks up on them with clarity and reminds the author to fix those vague spots.

Why Writers Should Use a Beta Reader

In order to turn your caterpillar of a story into a butterfly, don't skimp on beta readers. I have several sets of beta readers that I use. I break them up into groups and my expectations for them are different. I also find that coming up with questions for that group or a checklist helps them to focus their reading and gives them permission to be nitpicky.

Audience. This is the age and gender group that the book is written for. I usually get a

handful of kids to read my YA books. They usually flush out lags in the story, dialogue issues, believability, and story likability.

Peers. These are fellow writers. This is my secret weapon. Writers are really good at picking apart grammar issues, plot holes, character issues and structure problems. They are golden. Never let anything go out without running your stuff by this group of beta readers at least two times.

Random Readers. This is usually adults I get to read my MG and YA books. They don't usually read YA, but can give me a good indication of hidden audiences and whether the story is strong enough to transcend the intended group and go mainstream.

Authors Should Beta Too

As an author, beta-reading others' work is invaluable. I've become a better writer and editor of my work and others' through beta reading. Also, it is a give-and-take. I love doing beta switches with other authors and critiquing their work at the same time they are critiquing mine. It ensures that they have a vested interest in helping my story succeed as much as I do in theirs.

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LM Preston worked in the IT field as a techie and educator for over sixteen years. She started writing science fiction under the encouragement of her husband who was a sci-fi fan. Her first published novel, Explorer X-Alpha, was the beginning of her obsessive desire to write and create stories of young people who overcome unbelievable odds. For more information, visit www.lmpreston.com.

A Look at the New Bylaws (cont'd)

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"It's an interesting time when an organization goes in a new direction," says Linebaugh. "The future remains malleable." She notes that although the bylaws have put in place a solid governance structure, "it's the individuals who will make it or break it."

"Both those in office and those seeking the benefits of conferences, contests, meetings, and publications -- all of us -- have to value what it means to be in a community of writers," she says. "We have to write well, and we have to reach out not only to publishers, but also to those who will listen to and read our words."

"Your Voice is One that No One Else Could Write:"

an Interview with Justin Kramon

by Sonia Linebaugh

The author of *Finny* (Random House, 2010), a coming of age novel, spoke with MWA about his characters and his attitude towards submitting work and facing rejection.

MWA: Did your book grow out of personal experience? For instance, your characters Finny and Earl meet as teenagers in a field that seems like a setting in Maryland where you grew up.

JK: I grew up in Baltimore County. The things that happen in the book did not happen to me, but all the places are places I've been. It's a process of taking things that happen and changing them. In the novel, things take an unexpected turn, they are a transformation of things that have happened to me. What I'm really writing about are the feelings of what happened to me, not the events themselves.

MWA: What about the time Finny and Earl meet in Paris? What about the chase scene that ends in a brothel?

JK: I made some trips to visit an aunt in Paris. When I travel I walk around and look at things. When I write, I have in my head the way things feel and look and the way I react. I never had this experience that Finny has. It is so specific and strange that the reader might wonder. Paris for Finny was a time of learning about sex and different

relationships. Finny sees the range of behavior. Almost anything could be there when you open a door. I wanted to have that sense of possibility and wonder.

MWA: Let's talk about sending out your work and dealing with rejection. You seem to have a positive attitude.

JK: The thing is not that I have a positive attitude. I get discouraged, disappointed about my work and people's response to it. I think, oh, gosh, my career is over. But I keep going because it's a learning process. You don't always have to compare yourself with others. Your voice is one that no one else could write. Instead of trying to write to impress others, I try to write the books I would want to read, to find ways to say what I really feel, ways I didn't have before.

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Justin Kramon is at work on a new novel about food and childhood mysteries. He visits writers' groups in Maryland to offer tips on experiences related to publishing his first novel with Random House. If you're interested in having Justin visit your writing group, you can contact him by email at justin@justinkramon.com. You can read about his novel Finny at www.justinkramon.com.

Life in Me Like Grass on Fire

The New Anthology from MWA Books

Featuring the poetry of Maryland Writers' Association members, including Tapendu K. Basu, Vonnice Winslow Crist, Eric D. Goodman, Frank S. Joseph, B. Morrison, Liz Moser, Lalita Noronha, Michael Tims, and many more!

Poems on First Love, Lost Love • Love of Art and Work • Friends and Family • Love of Nature • Love Floods the Senses • The Madness of Love Love as We Age

Coming in 2011 from MWA Books!

Your Freelance Career

by Paul Lagasse

Getting Your Words' Worth

What should you charge for your time, skill, and knowledge? You have to find a sustainable rate that makes you competitive without under- or overpricing yourself out of contention. (Yes, it is possible to underprice yourself out of a job -- in big markets, clients are more likely to look at a low rate as a sign of inexperience.)

At a minimum, you'll want to develop basic rates for hourly, per-project, per-page, and per-word work. You can use these in various combinations as baselines when preparing estimates. For example, say someone asks you to edit a 50-page scientific paper. If time's no object, you can propose a per-page rate. If the client needs it turned around within 48 hours, either pitch an hourly rate or a flat project rate derived from a combination of your hourly and per-page rates. Don't be afraid to play around with different combinations, and don't forget to factor in time for the unexpected.

Here are two rate tools that I use frequently:

Writing rates. Lynn Wasnak prepared a guide for Writer's Market (www.writersmarket.com/assets/pdf/How_Much_Should_I_Charge.pdf) that breaks down writing rates by profession and by rate ranges.

Editing rates. The Editorial Freelancers Association website (www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php) features a list of rates for copyediting, substantive and developmental editing, layout, and other functions.

Oh, and save your estimates and proposals for future reference. It will save you a lot of time when you have to do it again two years later and can't remember the formula you used. I speak from experience!

##

Writing skills may open doors for you, but professionalism keeps them from slamming shut in your face. In this column, Paul Lagasse of Active Voice Writing & Editorial Services covers the business basics that he's learned over a decade of making a living writing freelance. Find out more at www.avwrites.com.

President's Message

by Nicole Schultheis, MWA President 2010-2012

Greetings MWA members and other readers!

Since taking office, I've developed new appreciation for outgoing President Sonia Linebaugh's efforts. She did a phenomenal job, shepherding us through much organizational change. She deserves our deep gratitude.

Sonia led us through a significant first effort to obtain funds from the Maryland State Arts Council. Requiring the collection and reporting on a variety of data, the grant process caused us to look anew at issues such as artistic program goals, diversity, and community outreach. We learned much and snared \$1,000, the maximum allotted to new grantees. Building on success, we've applied for a slightly greater sum this year.

In June 2010 we passed new Bylaws. The final version is posted on our website (www.marylandwriters.org/about-2010bylaws.html) as well as published "officially" in this issue of *Pen in Hand*. Under the new Bylaws, our newly expanded board has 16 members, including our four Chapter Presidents, who may vote. Also, Director positions have

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morphed into full standing committee Chairs. We now have a board member dedicated specifically to Development and Long Range Planning, as well as a Publications Chair who oversees *Pen in Hand* as well as our current book project -- a poetry anthology edited by award-winning poet and MWA member Laura Shovan. Finally, board terms are now two years. Starting with yours truly, Presidents may serve no more than two consecutive terms.

This year we're expanding Teen Writers Club. Instituted by Diane Booth, it was so successful last year that it's spreading to additional library locations. And in October, we approved Vice President Fernando Quijano's proposal to commence a new community outreach project, providing free initial year memberships to participants of Writing Outside the Fence (WOTF) and writing workshops at Brock Bridge Correctional Facility. We welcome these new MWA members, who now gain structured, organized support for their writing efforts.

Annapolis Chapter

by Leslie Payne, Chapter Secretary

The Annapolis chapter has returned to Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts where MWA originally began in 1984. With chapter president Vicki Duncan's enthusiasm and stellar speakers lined up by Hank Parker, it is no wonder our group has grown exponentially.

In July we presented the **Writers' Café**. Guests enjoyed wine, cheese and other refreshments in a cozily lit room. After time for networking, some of the best writing instructors in the region spoke on what and where they teach.

Another chapter highlight was **"An Evening with Marlin**

Fitzwater." The only press secretary in history to serve under two administrations, Presidents Reagan and Bush, Sr., Fitzwater has authored two books. He spoke about publishing and shared delightful stories from his political career. We enjoyed abundant laughter that evening.

Our excellent speakers continue: January 12th -- **Iris Krasnow**, former UPI feature writer and NY Times bestselling author of *Surrendering to Marriage* has been interviewed on everything from Fox & Friends to Oprah. February 9th, we present writer and documentary film-maker **Victoria Bruce**. March 9th we have **Sarah McCollum**, publisher and senior editor of Capital City Books (Richmond, VA).

As publicist Joanne Alloway says, "Annapolis may be for crabs, but it is also for writers!"



The 2011 Maryland Writers Conference

It's official!

The 2011 Maryland Writers Conference will be held **Saturday, April 2, 2011** at the **University of Baltimore**.

Watch the website (www.marylandwriters.org) and the Announcements list for more information.

Save the date!

Baltimore Chapter

by Gary Lester, Chapter President

The MWA Baltimore Chapter continues to balance interesting speakers with open mike nights. In September we were represented at the **Towson Arts Collective "Arts in the Park"** event: perfect weather, flowing wine, and dancing belly dancers. Many members read during the lulls in the music, and member book sales were brisk.

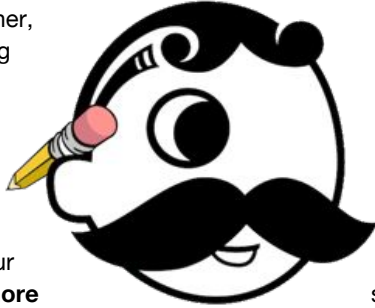
September was also our favorite event, the **Baltimore Book Festival**. Many thanks to Dave Wilson for helping us get off to a clean start. Though the event lacked the traditional heavy rains, we filled the days with readings, writings, and new friends.

October was our **"Five Minute Fright Fest,"** where attendees told short, creepy

stories. Prizes were awarded and embarrassing photos were uploaded. In November, MWAB was represented at the **Baltimore Writer's Conference** at Towson University, where we met lots of up-and-coming writers and grizzled veterans. Our November meeting was a "speed dating" critique session.

Next year we plan all sorts of great speakers -- some new, some old. We will have talks on using Kindle for fun and profit as well as a reading for MWA's upcoming poetry anthology.

Meetings are the fourth meeting of every month, except December. Watch your email and website for upcoming topics and locations.



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Howard County Chapter

by Louise Harris, Chapter President

This year has been one of transitions in Howard County. The chapter formed a little over a year ago with 40 members, elected its officers, and organized programs that were fairly well attended. Under the tireless leadership of Nicole Schultheis, the chapter grew and provided many opportunities for Howard County writers. When Nicole was elected President of MWA, she asked chapter member Louise Harris to take over.

"Despite the challenges, I enjoy my position and believe that we are moving forward and advancing the chapter," Harris says.

The chapter met in a different location each month during its first year. Harris made getting a permanent meeting place her top priority to enable it to become a networking organization for writers throughout the county. The chapter recently reached an agreement with Sunrise Senior Living to use its activities room. In an effort to diversify the chapter's programming and boost attendance, Harris also appointed program and publicity directors.

The chapter is helping spread the word about Howard County writers by attending festivals. Already, Howard County has committed to two holiday festivals and is pursuing two large events: **Women's Expo** and **Wine in the Woods**. Harris says she is looking forward to what 2011 will bring for the Howard County Chapter.



Frederick Chapter

by Kelly A. Harmon,
Chapter Secretary

In October, we held a **round-robin reading and critique** for members, which morphed into a long discussion on memoir writing by memoirist **Ken Shook**. We have invited Ken to speak formally at an upcoming meeting.

Paul Evancoe was our featured speaker in November. Mr. Evancoe is a retired Navy SEAL with significant combat experience. He worked as the Director for Special Operations in the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State after his SEAL retirement. He spoke about his three novels and how to fictionalize personal experiences.

The Frederick MWA Chapter is actively seeking a new permanent home for monthly meetings, since the public library has reduced their available hours. Several possibilities exist, including local restaurants and museums. We hope to finalize details very soon and will make an announcement thereafter.

We've also been in touch with several authors to speak at upcoming meetings and have scheduled **Jeri Smith-Ready** and **Elaine Isaak** to speak in January and April. Jeri Smith Ready (*pictured below*) is the author of nine published urban fantasies. Elaine Isaak is known most for her high fantasy trilogy consisting of *The Singer's Crown*, *The Eunich's Heir* and *The Bastard Queen*.



Urban fantasy writer **Jeri Smith-Ready** is the featured speaker at the January meeting of the Frederick Chapter

Creative Writing

Quitting

by Sherri Cook Woosley

My two-year-old daughter was diagnosed with leukemia on August 7, 2010. I quit writing. We lived on the 8th floor of Hopkins -- pediatric oncology -- for 28 days. There was no way for me to be closer to her. I tasted her medicines, learned a new vocabulary, we slept in the same bed. I was the one who pushed the emergency button when I awoke to blood leaking from her cracked chest-port tube. I was the one who forced her to take the steroids that agitated her stomach, changed her personality, and saved her life.

It wasn't the first time I'd quit writing. I quit after I couldn't get a single agent to read my first collection of short stories. I quit after I re-worked a story so many times I had it memorized, but no paying market wanted to publish it. I quit after I finished a novel and each rejection letter made me so horrible that my family had to tiptoe around, dreading me the way I dreaded the SASE.

But now I quit because there was nothing inside. All I could think about was Cancer. About my two-year-old dying. About whether her twin sister would present with symptoms. I looked at the daily chart and marked off each day. Lumbar puncture. Surgery -- bone marrow biopsy. Today three different types of chemo. Behavior therapist, surgeon, 4am blood draw before the attending does rounds in the morning.

I couldn't talk on the phone. I began by posting terse sentences on Facebook, then sending messages to Groups, but it

was clunky. I switched to CaringBridge, a site to connect people with medical emergencies to friends and family. I began to look forward to the thirty minutes each day when I could write about my daughter, but also just get my own thoughts down. And it worked both ways. I began to receive messages of encouragement from people I didn't even know who had heard our story and begun to follow my daughter's progress. People from all over the country, and then in Germany, Turkey, and Mexico were praying for my daughter. I would read these messages while she slept.

My shiny dream -- famous published author sitting behind the casting table for the resulting movie -- is tarnished. Small. Tacky, even. Authors process life through words, making sense of what they experience. Writing is telling stories that connect. I can't quit cancer. And I can't quit writing.

#

Sherri Cook Woosley has an M. A. in English literature from University of Maryland. She wrote academic articles in the field of comparative mythology before switching to fiction writing. Her stories have been published in ZoneMom, Mount Zion Fiction Review, and New Lines from the Old Line State. She is the editor of The Coffee House Fiction 2009 Anthology and The Fifteenth Dame Lisbet Throckmorton Anthology, 2010. She accepts editing work through www.coffeehousefiction.com.

Would you like to see your poem, short-short story, or essay in *Pen in Hand*?

Our ideal is to match *Pen in Hand* to the needs and interests of MWA members. With your help, each issue approaches that ideal a little more closely!

Submissions should be in unformatted text and included in the body of an e-mail message. Please include a brief bio. If line art or halftones will accompany your submission, please specify that in your e-mail and the editor will provide formatting guidelines. Include "PIH" in the e-mail subject line and send to Paul Lagasse at peninhand@marylandwriters.org.

For All the Days and Nights

by Nona Naghavi

For all the days and all the nights
And all the talks and all the fights
For all the laughs and all the cries
And all the incredible delights
For you and me and us and we
The life we made that's full of glee
To share and care and love and dare
To be and touch and feel and glare
For all the roads and towns we travelled
And all beautiful moments that unravelled
For all the things we acquired
Our little home that we admired
For all the nights we stayed up talking
First on the phone, and then when cuddling
For the dreams that brought us together
And the demons that we feared never
For all the tears we shed in our endeavour
You know they only brought us closer together
For all I learnt while you talked
And all I questioned and doubted and fought
For all your patience and love that wouldn't die
Even though every step of the way I asked "Why?"
For all the effort you put into us
The peace of mind you gave me and thus
I have grown into who I am
Because of you I am where I am

*

For the best friend in you I admire
And your soft gracious heart that I desire
For the best partner one could ask for
And the greatest man anyone would die for
For the love we share that grows day by day
And the things we do that no one would dare
It's for you that I live and breathe
Without you, nothing matters, nothing lives
What a journey I've had with you
What a story I've written with you
A happy pill you've been to me
A dream of a life you've given me
What happiness is awaiting me
You're a "daddy to be" and that's the best gift for me

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Nona Naghavi is an orthodontist by day and poet/ writer by night. She lives in Maryland and Florida. This poem is dedicated to her husband Ali in anticipation for the arrival of their son Zackaria.

Capital Limited Train to Chicago

by Mary L. Westcott

Wiling away hours,
my chamber fortified with books,
prose poems and pieces
of odes that romped and roamed like
rushing rivulets,

I repressed desire
to slumber, rocking to and fro
to the rough rolls of wheels
revolving on red-rust rails
that roared conviction.

I rested
with unknown writers
of memoir, fiction,
while the train rumbled past
sprawling rivers and crawling creeks.

The wheels turned,
clanking over tracks,
burning through desire
with winding winds forcing
gusts to Chicago.

In my compartment,
I ached for rhapsody,
prosody, trembled
with the train's friction,
sparking eruptions of flame.

My mind's wheels flashed
brilliant, turned out laments,
oracles, odes and sonnets
and breathed life into aged poems,
wandered again.

I clunked through Ohio
and Indiana towns.
Stark landscapes hinted at
spring. I lurched and swerved from found
words that caught fire, expired.

Sadness seemed
beside the point now.
Depression and winter blues
disbanded to Canada,
left warm words melting.

I Am Salt

by Mary L. Westcott

The men of Sodom gather outside
like storm clouds rumbling.
I run out of my home, leaving
my gold rings and tapestry,
the aromas of garlic
and roasted lamb on the fire.
I flee in the desert, fear
for my husband and daughters
running ahead. Sand sticks
to my feet through my sandals,
and sweat trickles down my brow.
I long for my couches and carpets,
the sweet aromas of cinnamon
and myrrh. Tears sting my face.
I can hear my anklets chinking,
already grieve my silver and purple
garments, pine for sweet figs,
the taste of ripe olives and goat
cheese, a swallow of honeyed wine.
God says, Look ahead,
do not return. I say salt,
and begin to feel bereft.
I taste salt on my lips.
An inner voice says stop
and the angels touch my shoulder.
I am curious and stubborn,
and I turn my head:
my sweat dries to salt.

The Fiddler Crabs

by Mary L. Westcott

The sun's rays light upon marsh
hawks first, while the male fiddler rises
on a spring morning to stand watch
outside a creek tunnel,
his dominant claw a gaping
dinosaur mouth. He stretches
to the height of moon snails,
attempts to lure the next female
into his lair and failing, moves sideways
searching for another mate
through Spartina grass tall as trees.

A female fiddler sets out to entice
with her slender arms.

The male swings his appendage,
beckoning, bending at the knees
like a body builder. After they mate,
he moves onto his next
conquest, barely resting his giant
claw, fighting off other males
along the way.

She lays her eggs, attaches
them to her belly, then scurries
to the water's edge to wash them.
Most of her offspring will be eaten
by sparrows or redfish. She traipses over
salt meadow grasses, a golden plover
hovering overhead. Her task complete,
she examines decayed humus and leaf litter
in the gray dusk.

*Mary L. Westcott is retired and completing
an MA in Writing at Johns Hopkins this
year. She has been published in more than
40 literary journals and is long time
Maryland resident. She lives in Silver Spring
with her perfect white cat.*

Creative Writing

The Damned Diamond

by Lauren Beth Eisenberg

The diamond was perhaps the most beautiful thing I'd ever owned, pear-shaped, just shy of a carat, nestled in a pedestrian band that swallowed it. Eventually, I cannibalized the original setting, remounting the stone and its two small companions in an avant-garde ring that he hated. His reaction to the redesign almost justified the diamond's place on my finger once I'd disposed of him, but not quite. For all my mother-in-law's complaining, during the waning years of my marriage, that the new modern setting hardly made it look like I had a husband now that I no longer did, people rushed up to me everywhere, eyes glistening, congratulating me on my engagement.

I loved that diamond in its clever new ring not really new anymore but it had become the wrong kind of statement, and I resented him for it, of course. Sure, I could reset it once again into one of those divorce necklaces, but well, it's still his damned diamond.

Darkness envelops the black velvet box now, buried deep in the night table. Maybe one day I will put it in a necklace and drape it around the neck of my little granddaughter.

Or maybe it just needs to remain at the back of the night table, discarded.

Like him.

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Lauren Beth Eisenberg is a computer scientist, musician, artist and writer, and she was the producer of the play Through the Looking Glass at the Capital Fringe Festival. Her works have appeared in literary, technical, academic, and journalism publications.



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