

Philadelphia Stories

Cultivating a community of writers, artists, and readers across the Delaware Valley

SUMMER-FALL / 2024 / FREE



CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 4** MR. ASHBURY (fiction).....JONATHAN WITTMAYER
12 IF ALL WE DID WAS SWEAT (nonfiction).....BECKY TUCH
18 AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES HOLDEFER.....CURTIS SMITH
24 BOOK REVIEWS
27 CAPSULE REVIEWS

POETRY

- 11** YOU SUCK AT STRIPER FISHING.....JOHN WOJTOWICZ
14 TOMBSTONES IN THE DELAWARE RIVER.....CHRIS BULLARD
15 OXYGEN DESTROYER.....DAN SCHALL
16 CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, OR, MY PARENTS DEBATE RELIGION OVER COFFEE
ANNABELLE SMITH
21 FLYING OVER WESTERN PA.....JESSICA WHIPPLE
22 SÉANCE.....R. G. EVANS
28 GENTRADELPHIA.....SHALEIA ROGERS-LEE
29 STREET IMPRESSIONS.....JOSEPH CHELIUS
30 SOLIDARITY.....JOHN WOJTOWICZ

ART



A Little Bird by Candace Stoudt

Candace Stoudt is a mixed media artist from Chester County. She draws inspiration from nature, architecture, and landscapes. Stoudt has exhibited at galleries and public spaces throughout the region. She is a member of the Guild of Paper Makers, Main Line Art Center, the Delaware Valley Art League, Wayne Art Center and the Montgomery County Guild of Professional Artists. mcgopa.org/candacestoudt/



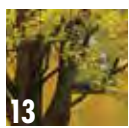
Apparition by Diane Collins

Philadelphia artist Diane Collins inspires reverence for the natural world in her ceramic, bronze, and mixed media animal constructions. She incorporates materials that elevate the figure beyond static replicas. Her subjects live with a voice of their own that we are compelled to consider. The recipient of numerous awards with work in private collections in the US and abroad, Collins has exhibited at The Barnes Foundation, Stanek Gallery, Rosenfeld and more. DianeCollinsStudio.com



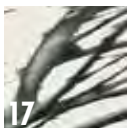
Annie by Annie Thompson

Annie Thompson is a painter originally from Florida who is now based in Philadelphia. She holds an MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where she was awarded the Fine Arts Venture Fund in 2023. Thompson's practice centers on observational oil painting with occasional use of charcoal. Her work has been featured in solo, two-person, and group exhibitions, most recently in "Convergence of Cares" at Side Street Gallery, Philadelphia. anniethompsonfineart.com



Fall Fitter Ginkgo by Rob Lybeck

Rob Lybeck is a photographer from Center City Philadelphia with a large, twenty-plus year collection of work concentrating on the city's built environment, black-and-white street documentary, architectural details, and cityscapes, as well as land and seascapes. Lybeck studied at University of the Arts, is a member of the Da Vinci Art Alliance, and a contributing photographer to Hidden City Philadelphia. DaVinciArtAlliance.org/rob-lybeck



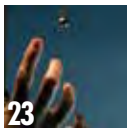
Valley Forge Tree by Kristen Conway

Award-winning photographer Kristen Conway owns a portrait and headshot business in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania. Her passion for portraiture was ignited during an internship with renowned documentary photographer Mary Ellen Mark in NYC. She spent a decade working in photojournalism, capturing the essence of the human condition for various publications. Conway travels with her family capturing images which impart a sense of peace and simplicity. KristenConwayHeadshots.com



Transit by Jay Shifman

Jay Shifman (he, him) is a fiction writer and poet. A 2024 de Groot Courage to Write Award finalist, when he's not creating beauty on the page he's photographing it in the world. He lives in Philadelphia with his primary partner/wife, Lauren, and their dog Nell. JayShifman.com



Sleep Tight, Night Light by Annie Jean Linn

Annie Jean Linn is a musician, visual artist, filmmaker, and painter from Chester County, Pennsylvania. Her style varies from dark surrealism to zany comedy and every creepy crevice in between. She often models and acts in her own works as a means of self-expression and inner exploration, believing there are many versions to one's self if you just take the time and aren't too embarrassed to discover them. AnnieJeanFilm.com



The Happy Elephant by Rachel Coleman

Rachel Coleman is a fluid artist from Chester County, Pennsylvania. After experiencing a trauma, she looked to creative activities for help and healing. She found her passion in fluid art and owns Shy Fox Studio. Her inspirations of color, geology, and elements of nature are reflected in her work. She enjoys sharing her art with others and teaching others the art of acrylic pouring. ShyFoxStudio.com

Co-Founders
Christine Weiser
Carla Spataro

Publisher/Editorial Director
Trish Rodriguez

Publisher/Executive Director
Yalonda Rice

Fiction Editor
Teresa FitzPatrick

Creative Nonfiction Editor
Jenny Burkholder

Poetry Editor
Courtney Bambrick

Art Editor
Pam McLean-Parker

Assistant Art Editor
Victoria Rose

Reviews Editor
Sarah Van Clef

Art Director
Derek Carnegie

Communications Director
Hannah Michael

Social Media Director
Jacqueline Jewell

Poetry Contest Coordinator
Elijah Aharon

Fiction Contest Coordinator
Teresa FitzPatrick

Event Director
Lena Van

Board of Directors
Alex Husted, President
Daniel Johns, Vice President
Gary Zimmaro, Treasurer
Carla Spataro
Angelina Sciolla

Fiction Board
Sharon White
Walt Maguire
EJ Greene
Lena Van
Kate Blakinger
Nathan Long
Jonathan Kemmerer-Scovner
Thomas S. Johnson
Bianca Maebbe

Creative Nonfiction Board
Jenny Burkholder
Christopher Drajem
Debbie Fox
Watsuki Harrington
MaryBeth Madonia
Debby Off
Christine Otis
Seih Torregiani

Poetry Board
David Kozinski
Eileen Moeller
Vernita Hall
Pheobe LaMont
Kathryn Ionata
Peter Baroth
Cecily O'Donnell
Eli Aharon
Pat Green
Liz Dolan
Maria Thaw

Author honoraria made possible by the generous support of the Conrad Weiser Author Fund

Philadelphia Stories, founded in 2004, is a non-profit literary magazine that publishes the finest literary fiction, poetry, and art from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware and distributes free of charge to a wide demographic throughout the region. The mission of Philadelphia Stories is to cultivate a community of writers, artists, and readers in the Greater Philadelphia Area. Philadelphia Stories is a 501 c3. To support Philadelphia Stories and the local arts, please visit www.philadelphiestories.org to become a member today!



SUPPORT PROVIDED IN PART BY THE PHILADELPHIA CULTURAL FUND.



Letter from the Editors

Hello Philadelphia Stories Supporters!

I hope this message finds you well. As the editors of Philadelphia Stories, we are thankful to celebrate 20 years of literary excellence in the greater Philadelphia area. We are even more thankful that you are walking with us in this journey and supporting this magazine and our events and programs.

Our mission is to cultivate a community of writers, artists, and readers in the Greater Philadelphia Area through publications, professional development, and promotion of area writers. Over the past year, we have worked diligently to provide you space to nurture your literary interest: the frequency of our distribution changed from four to two times a year, bringing you larger issues with more editorial content; the two Pitch Fest virtual events proved very successful with sold-out sessions; another engaging Philadelphia Stories Jr. magazine was released, continuing our partnership with student writers through Mighty Writers; our fiction contest has returned and we are accepting submissions until December 1st. To top off this amazing year, we plan to welcome New York Times bestselling author, Laurie Halse Anderson to help us celebrate our 20th anniversary on Saturday, October 26th. These achievements are made possible by the generous contributions from supporters like you.

As we look ahead, we want to continue to bring you more opportunities to partner with us. Your donations continue to directly support our programming. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a significant difference. To donate, please visit philadelphiastories.org/donate or contact us at our email addresses below.

Thank you for your joining us on this amazing journey with Philadelphia Stories. Your support is vital to our ongoing efforts and the positive change we strive to create.

Warm regards,

Yalonda Rice
Executive Director
yalonda@philadelphiastories.org

Trish Rodriguez
Editorial Director
trish@philadelphiastories.org

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



Philadelphia Stories is a free print magazine that publishes fiction, poetry, essays, and artwork from writers and artists from PA, NJ, and DE and makes it available to 5,000 readers twice a year. We'd love to see your work!

Find submission guidelines at www.philadelphiastories.org Free to submit year-round!



Mr. Ashbury

Jonathan Wittmaier

He said he loved his wife. Part of me wanted to believe him—wanted to believe he was telling the truth. Even afterwards, when I learned what had happened, what he had done, I still clung to that lie like it was the last rung on a ladder, dangling—over a great dark pit.

No one told me, of course, that it had happened. I found out the same way everyone else at Alpine State found out anything; I saw it on Facebook. Crammed between baby pictures and cat videos and ads for Diet Coke, there was the headline: “New Jersey Couple Die in Possible Murder-Suicide.”

Possible. Like it was still up for debate.

Maybe it was for *them*: the journalists and the police. Maybe it would take time, months even, until they knew what really happened beyond a reasonable doubt. Maybe they would never know.

But I was certain, I was sure. I knew because he’d sat beside me in the passenger seat of my old Subaru, his big paw on my bare thigh, the other out the window, the fresh summer air on a balmy night in June pouring in all around us.

This was six months before, when I was twenty-two.

It was the kind of night you write songs about. If I were an artist—a painter, a lyricist, one of those mood board bohemians—I would have holed myself up in my room for days, thinking, dreaming about Mr. Ashbury, rendering some sort of artistic expression of the night we spent together driving up and down back roads in suburban South Jersey. Instead, I just replayed it over and over before I fell asleep each night, for a quite some time after actually—remembering the touch of his palm against my skin, imagining what it would have felt like if his hand had slid up inside my tight little shorts.

But not anymore.

These days, I try very hard to not think about him; although, most of the time I fail. Even after all these years, I still can’t seem to get him out of my head. I’ll hear these stories about people with amnesia or old folks with Alzheimer’s and think: *Wouldn’t that be better than thinking about him? Wouldn’t it be better to forget that I fantasized about a man who murdered his wife—the mother of his two children? Wouldn’t it be better than imagining his 11-year-old son coming home from school and finding them?*

In the article, they said he purchased the firearm legally, that he had no prior convictions or history of mental illness. They said

he shot his wife and then turned the gun on himself. They said no one heard or reported gunshots, that construction crews were working on a water main down the street all morning. They said their son called 9-1-1.

The very last time I saw Mr. Ashbury, he was walking up an empty driveway towards a dark house. No one had bothered to leave a light on for him. Not even the rustic metal lanterns mounted over the garage doors were lit. He moved slowly up the wide cobblestone drive, his heels dragging over the pavers, his shoulders slouched. And as he turned and went up the narrow path towards the front door, I just sat there in my old Subaru, my fingers clenched around the steering wheel, watching as he slipped beneath the shadow of the upscale colonial.

My windows were rolled all the way down and I remember hearing the crickets chirping over the low rumble of the idling engine. Or maybe I’m imagining it. It’s hard to say. Sometimes, when I think back to that night, the little details get lost somewhere in between; like which day of the week it was, or what I ate for dinner, or who touched whom first—him or me?

Dad came home early so it must have been Friday; he always got off work early on Fridays, something to do with foreign markets. I never paid any attention when he talked about work and if I’m being honest, I hadn’t paid much attention to anything he’d said since I had come back home after the semester ended.

Both of them, Mom *and* Dad, had been giving me shit ever since I had my stomach pumped in March. I’d been out all night with my suitemates and had one too many shots. This was college. No big deal.

Except, it was a big deal to *them*.

Mom made me surrender the login credentials to my student portal even though it was a major FERPA violation or whatever, but she didn’t give a shit about any of that. She said, “Drunk sluts don’t have rights,” which seemed antithetical to everything I’d come to learn about feminist theory in my gender studies course. Not that she cared of course; she was too pissed to be PC.

So, after dinner, late into the evening (the same evening I’d speak to Mr. Ashbury for the last time), the topic of me, the “drunk slut”, came up again. Dad started, gave some speech about how they loved and supported me, almost seemed sincere until I noticed his words slurring and saw the bottle of Opus One



was almost empty. Then he mentioned my academic probation and I knew the night had taken a turn for the worse.

"No more iPod," he said.

"I don't have an iPod," I replied, bluntly.

"He means your iPhone, sweetie," said Mom.

"You can't be fucking serious?" I said this to him, not her. Never her.

"Don't swear at your fucking father!" yelled Mom.

I turned to her and said, "Well what happens if I get kidnapped? Or murdered?"

To which she replied, "Well then, you won't need your phone anymore, will ya?"

I pushed my chair away from the table, making sure my palms smacked against the polished cherry, and stood up.

"Where do you think you're going?" she asked, exasperated.

I threw my arms back and screamed, "I don't know why everyone's yelling at me!" Even though I was the only one yelling.

And crying...

Quite hysterically.

Then I fled the dining room, grabbed my keys from the ceramic bowl, this little pink pinch pot I made in fifth grade, and rushed outside.

I tore out of our neighborhood and sped down the avenue in my white '03 Forester. Back in high school, my stoner boyfriend called it The Tic Tac. But I'd always preferred Casper and that's what stuck, especially after he got busted for selling Oxy and I dumped his beautiful dumb ass.

I weaved Casper through traffic, not realizing how fast I was going until I zipped past the radar-speed trailer parked in front of Wawa and saw I was pushing seventy. I curled my toes, lifted my bare foot off the accelerator and let Casper coast down to the speed limit. I'd left in such a fury that my flip-flops got left behind. And, of course, my phone.

I didn't care where I was headed, as long as it wasn't home. Traffic died down once I got past the mall and the Regal Cinemas, the one with the brand-new recliner seats. I was still fuming but I wanted to just be over it so I switched on the radio (*because again, no phone*) and that one song by Sia, "Chandelier", was playing on Q102. I turned up the volume and belted the words.

I wish I could say my vocals were up to snuff, but let's be honest, *most white girls ain't got pipes like Sia*—which is something my RA sophomore year used to say. He was this stocky Dominican dude, and I think he wanted to fuck me. He always called me "Becky." And he gave me free condoms this one time for no reason in particular. He just came by my room, said, "Stay safe, Becky," and handed me two LifeStyles. Then he left. And I threw them in the trash.

As I turned past the always packed Chick-fil-A and onto the jughandle, Sia came back around to the chorus and I might have shut my eyes for only a brief moment trying to hit that high note because suddenly, there was someone in the middle of the road, right at the end of the jughandle. I mashed my heel down on the brake and jolted to a stop.

That someone, a very tall man in dirty jeans and a plaid shirt, stood in between my headlights and glared at me. He slammed the bottom of his fist against the hood and flipped me off, all in one fluid motion. Out of pure reflex I laid on the horn. This startled him at first; he winced and stumbled backwards a couple steps. Then, with my headlights burning in his eyes, I saw the

expression on his face turn to one of pure rage and he came around the front of the vehicle and charged towards the door. Panicked, I tapped the lock button repeatedly, sending the power locks into a frenzy—the relentless clicks turning the inside of the SUV into a wild metronome. He tried the handle, but the door didn't give. So instead, he knocked against the window with his bare knuckles.

"Roll down your goddamn window!" he shouted; his voice muffled by the glass.

"Just go away!" I shouted back.

"Pedestrians have the right-of-way. Do you see me standing here? I'm a fucking pedestrian."

"Okay!" I shouted. "I get it! Can you please just go away?"

"Ever heard of *reckless driving*? Girl, I could press charges!"

"Please just stop! I'm sorry, okay? I'm really really sorry." I felt the tears rolling down my cheeks.

"Oh god," he said and sighed loudly. "Don't fucking cry on me."

The traffic signal had turned red up ahead and a few cars on the avenue whooshed through the intersection.

"Jesus fucking Christ," he said, crouching down to my eye level. "I'm not really gonna press charges. Alright?" I rubbed my eyes and let his face come into focus. It was him. I remembered even though it felt as if it had been a lifetime ago.

"Mr. Ashbury?" I murmured.

"Huh?" he groaned. "What'd you say?" I pushed the switch and rolled the window down.

"Mr. Ashbury! That's you, right?"

"Uh, how do you know me?" His brow was furrowed.

"I used to play soccer with Gina," I said. "Ninth grade. I've been to your house a bunch of times."

His face softened. "Holy shit. Kitty, right?"

"Oh my god. No." My face went flush. "It's actually Katrina now. My mom says it's more professional."

"Smart lady."

"What are you uh...doing out here? It's kinda late."

"I could ask you the same thing," he said.

"Do you maybe want a ride home?"

"Oh...I don't know."

"Please," I begged. "I think I kind of owe you."

We drove for a while with only the low hum of the radio to cut through the silence; past the Outback Steakhouse, the P.F. Chang's, past the Baskin-Robbins where I almost lost my virginity to the co-captain of the varsity lacrosse team, past the dingy froyo shop where it finally happened the night before graduation in the front seat of his Civic. He had something of a sweet tooth. I did not.

"You know where you're going right?" asked Mr. Ashbury.

"Yeah," I replied. "Of course." Even though I didn't.

I knew I was headed in the right direction; in fact, I was almost certain. But then we passed the Baskin-Robbins again and he started laughing.

"Hmm," he said, and then cleared his throat. "This looks familiar."

"I'm so sorry." I felt my face turning red again. And then even redder once I realized I'd apologized to this man now twice in one night.

"Don't worry about it. Just take a left at the next light."

I glanced over at him. He wasn't laughing anymore. Instead,

he was gazing out the window; his sharp cheekbone propped against a giant pale fist.

"I don't know why," I said. "But the longer I'm away, the more this place looks like Mars."

"Huh. That's funny." He sat up and took a deep breath. "So, where you at these days?"

"Alpine Mountain State."

"Ahh, North Jersey," he said. "Giants territory."

"My dad says the exact same thing."

"Must be a true Eagles fan."

"I guess so."

I stopped at the next light and waited for the green arrow. There were very few cars on the road by that point, since we were a long ways away from the mall and the "good" restaurants, and I remember this made me feel a little antsy. I didn't have my phone, so no Google Maps. And I was not super familiar with that particular part of town. It gets pretty rural the farther east you drive, and I did not want to end up on some backcountry trail, without a phone or GPS in my little old Subaru, with a much older man I only sort of knew.

"Hey," he said. "Don't take this the wrong way, but are you a hobbit?"

"A what?"

"A hobbit. Those little dudes that run around without shoes."

"Little? I'm five, four!"

"I'm not talking about that. I meant your feet."

"Yeah? What about 'em?"

"It's just...you're not wearing shoes."

"So what? I forgot 'em."

"You been drinking tonight?"

"Oh my god, why does everyone always think... No. I have not been drinking."

"Hey, don't get all mad. My son always has those movies on. I was just trying to make a joke."

"Oh," I said, dryly. The light changed but I didn't move. I was too conscious of my own body: my bare feet, my bare legs. At least I'd worn a loose t-shirt. I tugged at the bottom of my high-waisted denim shorts, hoping they'd stretch even just a little.

"You good? The light's green."

"Sorry," I said, and instantly cringed, realizing I'd apologized yet again. I checked for oncoming traffic and pulled through the intersection.

It was quiet again for another long stretch. I kept both hands tight around the wheel and refused to let go—not even to scratch my brow, not even to turn up the radio. Because if I did, he might read it as some sign, an acknowledgment of the awkwardness and tension in the air. I didn't even move my hands from ten and two until we drove by the Target, and he told me to make a right.

"Do you mind if I turn on the AC?" he asked, as we turned past the crowded parking lot.

"It's on already," I said. "I think it's just out of fluid or something. I gotta ask my dad to refill it."

Without asking, he pressed the switch beside him and rolled his window down. The wind throbbled loudly through the gaping window; the sharp pulsing sound of air being sucked in rang in my ears. So, to stop it, I rolled the other windows down too and then, surprisingly, the warm breeze and steady thrum of the tires rolling against the blacktop seemed to lighten the mood.

"So," he said, "Alpine State, huh? You know, Gina thought

about going there. We even did the whole campus tour thing. Met the coach. You two coulda been roommates."

"I think the athletes dorm together actually," I said, totally leaving out the fact that Gina and I stopped hanging out after ninth grade. I was never much of an athlete, and we just sort of drifted, went with different crowds as high school kids tend to do.

"Oh right. She's livin' with a couple teammates right now."

"Where does she go again?"

"Marquette," he said, with a proud smile. "She just transferred last year. It's all pretty exciting...oh, hold on."

"What's wrong?" I asked, glancing over. He was looking back over his shoulder.

"You were supposed to turn, back there. Eh, it's fine. You can keep goin' this way. We can just take Lakewood and go by the high school."

He directed me through one of the newer developments: Woodland Creek Condominiums—a posh-ish but affordable housing complex that had sprung up while I was away at school. I remember making some comment about how well he knew his way around the maze of winding roads and that's when he let it slip—he had housing problems.

"We're thinking about moving here," he said.

"Oh, why?" I asked, eagerly. At the time, I was ignorant of the dire straits he was in.

"Uh..." he groaned and paused for a moment. I realize now, he was trying to come up with a good reason, anything besides the truth.

"It's cool," I said. "You don't have to tell me." He exhaled and let himself sink further back into the passenger seat.

After we made our way through the housing complex, we ended up by the high school. Every hallway was lit, the classrooms shrouded in black. School was out now until fall and everyone was away on summer vacation. In a few of the empty classrooms a computer or two had been left on, the bright screens like little blue beacons glowing in the dark. The football field, beside the school, was all lit up by the big floodlights above the bleachers—bleachers where I'd screamed and cheered with friends at pep rallies and playoff games, jealous of all the cheerleaders with their tight uniforms and dumb jock boyfriends.

"What was that nickname the team had for you?" he asked, as we drove by the soccer fields. "Meow something. Meow Mix?"

"No, that's what we called Tiffany. Her last name was actually Miao."

"What's that, like Chinese?"

"Yeah, I think."

"So, what'd they call you?"

"Fucking Kit Kat. I always hated it."

"Oh c'mon, that's better than Meow Mix. Know what they used to call me in high school? Lurch."

"What's a Lurch?" I asked.

"You've never seen *The Addams Family*?"

"I think I saw part of it at my cousin's house. That's the one with the girl from *Casper*, right?"

"No, not the remake," he said. "The original TV show with Thing, Uncle Fester...Lurch. None of this sounds familiar?" I shook my head. "Goddamn, I'm old."

"You're not old," I said, cheerfully. I felt kind of bad. The way

he said it, he sounded beat. "You seem a lot younger to me—
younger than my parents at least. They're old AF."

"That's nice of you to say. But I am old. Might as well admit
it. I sure as shit can't hide from it anymore." He had his arm stuck
out the window—his long, sinewy forearm exposed, his flannel
rolled up and rippling in the wind. It must have felt nice.

"But it's weird though," he continued. "When I was your age
and I was in college, I couldn't even imagine life beyond thirty.
Just couldn't picture it. You know those goals they make you
write down? By the end of the semester, I want to accomplish
this, by graduation I want to do that. In five years, ten years,
twenty years... I couldn't even write something down for the first
goal. I think I just made something up. Get a 4.0 or something
cliché like that. I don't know, maybe I was just stupid. Maybe I
lacked imagination. But then thirty came. And then forty. And
now I'm almost fifty and I still don't know what the fuck I'm doin'."

"If it makes you feel any better, I don't know what I'm doin'
either."

"No, that makes me feel worse actually."

"I know what my mom would say," I said, rolling my eyes.
"Just think about the starving children in Africa."

"Sounds a lot like someone I know," he said.

"Who?"

"My wife."

The road was closed after we passed by the old Sears. Back
in high school we got my new mattress, a Tempur-Pedic, during
their going-out-of-business sale, along with a bunch of random
pieces of furniture we ended up throwing out eventually anyway.
Men in reflective vests waved us down a side street and into
a neighborhood I didn't recognize. I followed the big orange
detours signs through a sleepy suburbia towards an end neither
fixed nor certain.

"I really hate these neighborhoods," I said. "Everything looks
the same and I never know where I'm going."

"Maybe that's the point," he said. "To get lost in it."

"You sound like a fortune cookie."

"I can't help it. I'm a dad."

"What's that like?"

"What's *what* like?"

"Being a parent."

"God, I don't know. I guess it's fine sometimes. Mostly it's
really hard. It's just like anything else I guess."

"Wow," I murmured, sarcastically. "That's like so deep. I think
I'll post that on my Tumblr."

"Oh, shut it. What am I even supposed to say to a question
like that? Hmm? You tell me, Kit Kat."

"But I don't have any kids," I said.

"No, no. what's it like to be you?" he asked. "You're how old,
twenty-one?"

"Twenty-two, actually."

"I see. So, what's it like then to be you, a *hot* twenty-two-
year-old on the cusp of adulthood?"

"Uh, not sure twenty-two really counts as being *on the cusp*."

"You know what I mean."

"Well, if I'm being honest...I don't know. Like I said, I don't
know what I'm doing either. I haven't even declared a major yet."

"You're kidding," he said. "Aren't you like a junior?"

"I took a gap year."

"Oh." He was quiet for a moment. His big hands were on his

knees, and he was rubbing his palms against the denim. "I guess
you answered my question then."

"Don't take this the wrong way," I said, shyly, before making
my move. "But do you really think I'm a hot twenty-two-year-
old?"

"No, I was just saying."

"So, you think I'm ugly then."

"That's not...no. Don't twist my words! It's just...you remind
me of someone."

"Who?"

"You're kind of nosey, aren't you?"

"Hey, you called me a *hot twenty-two-year-old*. Who do I
remind you of?"

"No one. Just some girl at work," he said. "An intern."

"Ooh interesting. Is this a crush, Mr. Ashbury? Kinda sounds
like a crush."

"Please stop."

"It's cool. I'm not gonna tell anyone you've got a big crush on
the hot young intern."

"Seriously, knock it off."

"What's she look like? Lemme guess, is she a blonde? Ugh,
how boring! You seem like the kind of guy who's only into
blondes. Can't you be a little more original? Like, try a new flavor
every once in a while."

"Stop!" He banged his fist against the passenger door,
making me flinch. I peeked over at him, and I saw that look on
his face again, the same one he had standing in front of my
headlights. "Quit asking, alright?"

"Christ, sorry. I was just fuckin' around."

"Goddammit, girl. You're worse than my wife."

Now I don't know why I said this. I don't know if it was the
lateness of the hour, or if it was the way he looked sulking under
the glow of the passing streetlamps, but then I said to him, softly,
"If I were her, Mr. Ashbury, I'd probably have a huge crush on
you also."

He didn't say anything at first. But then he sighed and said,
"If you were her..." his voice trailing off.

"Well, you know," I said, gripping the steering wheel tightly.
"We could pretend. Tell me, if she was here right now, in this seat
instead of me, what would you do about it?"

"Trust me, you don't want to know."

"I can keep a secret," I said. "Try me."

And then he told me everything.

How it started with some casual compliments here and there,
and a few flirtatious emails after work hours. Then, a few turned
into dozens and eventually progressed into explicit texts and
pictures until finally, on a Tuesday, after everyone else left for the
day, they fucked in his office.

"I bet she smelled nice," I remember saying, after he told me
all the things they did in his nice corner office.

"Like Victoria's Secret."

After I'd read about what he had done, I only saw Gina one
more time. It was about a year later and she was looking at
shampoo in the health and beauty aisle at Target. I came around
the corner and froze when I saw her standing there, holding a
bottle of Garnier, reading the back label. I backed around the
corner before she could see me and hurried the hell out of there.

As soon as I was safe in my old Subaru, I broke down. My
hands were shaking, my eyes tearing. I couldn't breathe. I
imagined her saying hello, pretending to be happy to see me



after all those years, and it was all a little too much. She didn't have a clue. And I couldn't stand there and pretend that I didn't spend the better part of a Friday night with her father, driving around town, only six months before he'd kill her mother and take his own life. I have a hard time even saying the words out loud, let alone writing them.

After we made it to the end of the detour, we were still a mile or two away from his neighborhood. That's what he told me at least. I can't remember what time it was by then, but I know it was pretty late. The road was empty for long stretches, only a single car every few minutes. There was a thick line of trees on either side of the road, with a few houses hidden behind them at the end of long driveways, and I remember being afraid a deer or some other large animal was going to run out into the road. I think I was worried that if I got into an accident and the cops showed up, somehow Mrs. Ashbury would find out we'd been driving all night, just the two of us, and she would call my mother or something. I know that sounds childish now but at the time I was kind of childish. I was only twenty-two. But I guess that's not much of an excuse.

"So, what were you doing out here?" I asked. "You lock your keys in your car?"

"Nope. Got 'em right here," he said, tapping his pocket. They clanked together beneath a thin layer of faded denim.

"So, what then?"

"Has anyone ever told you, you ask too many fuckin' questions?"

"Don't get snarky with me, Mr. Ashbury. I know where you live. I mean...sort of."

"You can call me Damon," he said. "If you want."

"I'd like that," I said, smiling.

"If you must know, I guess it doesn't matter now... I lost my job. Well technically, I was fired, for obvious reasons. And Nora's having a tough time being the breadwinner right now."

"I'm sorry. That must be hard."

"It's alright. It's not *your* fault. Only mine. But goddamn, she sure loves reminding me. Don't get me wrong; I still love her. But the way I see it...yeah, I'm married. But that doesn't mean I'm dead. You can't just like...turn it off. It's not like there's a switch."

"That's interesting," I said, plainly. "So, you walked all the way to Chick-fil-A because...?"

"I needed to get out of the house. Get some fresh air."

"For a second there I thought you were gonna say, *for the waffle fries.*"

"Na," he said, patting his stomach. "Tryin' to watch my figure." Even under the dull yellow glow of the streetlamps and a thin layer of flannel I could tell his midsection was nice and firm.

"I don't think you need to worry about it," I said, glancing back at the road.

As we came over a small hill, the radio crackled with static. I turned the volume up, hoping to get clearer reception. That one song, "Wildest Dreams," was playing on Q102.

"Can you turn it up?" he asked.

"You like Taylor Swift?"

"She's got a nice voice. I like to pretend she's singing to me."

"She is, technically."

"Shh." He held his forefinger up to his lips. "I really like this part. It's like she's letting out a sigh."

"You're so cute," I said, my fingers going numb. I reached

over and cranked the volume, and I don't remember if that's the moment he touched me or if I touched him, but in an instant, his hand was in mine, and I clutched it tight. Then I moved it over and placed it on my bare thigh and kept it there. The tips of his fingers pressed into my flesh and slid down to my knee. I just stared out the windshield and watched the dashed white lines.

I'll never forget what he said to me after we pulled in front of that dark house and stopped at the end of that wide cobblestone drive.

I asked him, "Are you gonna be okay?"

And he replied, "Don't know. I hope so. Really just livin' on a prayer at this point. Thanks though, for asking. You're really sweet."

"Don't call me sweet, please," I said. "I'm not a piece of candy."

Then he smiled at me, and he said, "Whatever you say, Kit Kat."

And then he got out.

Jonathan Wittmaier is a Korean American writer and educator. Born in Seoul—he was raised in southern New Jersey. His writing can be found or is forthcoming in *Water-Stone Review*, *The Museum of Americana*, *WordCity Literary Journal* and *Weave*—a PNW Kundiman zine project. Winner of the 2018 Creative Writing Award for Dramatic Writing (Adelphi University). He currently resides in Seattle, Washington.

workshops currently conducted online via Zoom

Creative Writing Workshops

Express your unique voice. Find joy in writing.

Evening and daytime workshops

Flourtown, PA • Center City, PA • Ardmore, PA

Writers of all levels welcome

Fiction • Non-fiction • Creative non-fiction • Memoir • Poetry

Find out if a workshop is right for you.
Sit in on one workshop meeting as a guest,
by appointment only.

Alison Hicks, MFA, Greater Philadelphia Workshop Studio
www.philaworkshop.com • ah@philaworkshop.com • 610-853-0296
Monday evenings in Ardmore • Tuesday evenings in Center City
Private Consultation for Manuscript Development

Rachel Kobin, Philadelphia Writers Workshop
www.phillywriters.com • Rachel@phillywriters.com • 610-449-3773
Tuesday and Thursday evenings in Flourtown
Coaching for Writers

You Suck at Striper Fishing

Poem by John Wojtowicz

You suck at striper fishing
declares a bumper sticker on a Toyota Tacoma.

I speed up to see the purveyor
of this, in my case,
truthful claim,
expecting a Duck Dynasty
character in camo jacket
and traffic-cone-colored beanie
but, instead,
find a young guy
in a vibrant silk button-up
which I quickly assess
isn't a Reyn Spooner
or Tommy Bahama.
Maybe a Coogi relic from the 90s.

When he notices me,
I smile in a way
that is meant to communicate
but likely does not
that even if this isn't his truck
and he also sucks
at catching striper, he is good
at catching people.

He nods
and releases me back onto the Schuylkill.



John Wojtowicz grew up working on his family's azalea and rhododendron nursery and still lives in the backwoods of what Ginsberg dubbed "nowhere Zen New Jersey." Currently, he teaches social work at Rowan College South Jersey. Recent or forthcoming publications include: *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Sonora Review*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. He is the author of the chapbook, *Roadside Attractions: a Poetic Guide to American Oddities*. Find out more at: www.johnwojtowicz.com



If All We Did Was Sweat

Becky Tuch

The man standing across from me has a long, barbed scar cutting straight down his chest. He's leaning against the wall's wooden slats, sweating heavily and breathing hard.

Beside me, a younger man points to his own chest, his own matching scar. "When did you get yours?" he asks.

They meet each other's eyes, then begin to talk. They compare surgeries, both double-bypass, open-heart. They count blessings and trade tips for the future. "No more ice cream," the older man says, and we all laugh.

It may sound like we're in a medical unit of some sort, a hospital wing or rehab facility. In fact, we're in my favorite spot in Philadelphia: the sauna of my local YMCA.

I started coming here less than a year ago. It's only recently that I've begun to understand how meaningful it is to have this space in my life. This is a space to sweat, obviously, and a visitor won't be in there long before their whole body is drenched. But it's so much more than that.

The main "much more" are the people. I almost wrote "characters." But to call them characters would flatten us all, add a quality of shallowness and goofiness to the enterprise, when in reality it's anything but. Here is a space where people with worlds of differences in everything from age, race, religion, strength, health, agility and body type come together in temperatures soaring past 100 degrees, for as long as we can comfortably stand it. Sometimes we talk; sometimes we sit in amicable silence. If the others are like me, then when they're in the dim wood-paneled room by themselves, they close their eyes and meditate, or pray.

I suppose this is what it means to be part of a religious community—one's local church, temple or mosque. For many who have such a space, perhaps it's not uncommon to find oneself surrounded each week by people from different backgrounds but with one shared goal. In the case of the sauna, that shared goal is good health. Thus, there is little talk of politics or the news. Our job is to help one another stay strong and heal, not tumble into conversational landmines. Our job is to help make each other well.

Growing up, I never had any religious group. My older brother went to Hebrew School in preparation for a Bar Mitzvah. Did he find community there? Was it a kind of second home for him? If so, he never said. When it was my turn to consider doing the same, my mother shook her head. "The only reason you should have a Bat Mitzvah," she told me, "is to get money."

I did want to get money, yet even at age eleven had the good sense to know this was not the way to go about it.

Religious rituals in my world seemed random and muddy. My father's mother lit candles Friday night in her home, but no one told me why. My mother gathered us to light the menorah, sometimes, and we got gifts, I think, though the only one I remember is a plain brown towel that was so rough and hideous I wonder to this day if it was meant to be some kind of joke, the kind without a punchline.

In my twenties, I thought about joining a temple. I wanted community. I wanted to meet people, to feel surrounded by families, food, something bigger than myself. I also, truthfully, thought it could be a good place to pick up clients for my budding freelance copywriting business.

At the Friday night service, I was so thoroughly confused that at one point I turned to the young woman sitting next to me and told her there was a problem with my prayer book. It appeared to have been printed backwards. "The Siddur is read from right to left," she told me. I felt my face turn scarlet and mumbled my way through the rest of the evening. Though she was wonderfully kind, and there was indeed a joyful dinner afterward, the learning curve felt too steep. I never went back.

This past winter, I decided to celebrate Hannukah for the first time in my adult life. I made the decision because my partner's mother had mailed us a plastic Christmas tree. Since we decided to decorate the tree, it seemed only right to also light the menorah.

It embarrasses me to say this, but it is the truth: I had to Google what Hannukah actually is. Either I couldn't remember what I'd learned or I never fully knew. Something about oil, eight days, burning, light. I purchased a menorah at T.J. Maxx. When we lit the candles, I didn't know what to say. I looked at my daughter, bowed my head and told her, "Namaste."

It's a strange position to be in, to understand oneself as Jewish and yet feel no sincere connection to the religion. My father, who passed away this past spring, is part of the last generation to be physically touched by World War Two. He was born in a Jewish ghetto in Japan-occupied Shanghai and later lived in a refugee camp in Cyprus, then in Israel, before coming to the U.S. at age eleven.

He rejected all religious practices, had an uncertain view of God. He called himself a "cultural Jew." Maybe this was true for him, a taxi driver in New York City during the height of Woody

Allen movies and Lenny Bruce comedy. But the phrase holds no meaning for me, a woman whose early cultural life was shaped by hip hop, sitcoms, and John Hughes movies.

"You should write more about being Jewish," my father always told me. "You have such a unique perspective as a third generation of survivors."

"I don't know what it means to be Jewish," I always replied. "I don't relate to being Jewish at all. I never even think about it."

"Exactly," he would say. "That's the perspective."

So, then, where to go?

These days, the sauna is my temple, sweating my personal purification ritual. It is the perfect place for a woman like me. Faithful, without a faith.

And the truth? One thing I love most about this space is its freedom from doctrine, its neutrality, its existence as a place where no conversation drives too vigorously down any particular lane. The woman who sat beside me two weeks ago told me

In this way, we seek to protect one another from certain outside harms—the world's harsh divisions, its spitting animosity. We make space for what is here, a shelter that, though we don't acknowledge it as such, we all surely feel on some level is protected territory. We gather for a sacred bond, however brief, among people who are different from ourselves, yet so alike.

Let me not romanticize what the space is. There are phones and gadgets. People staring at screens. Young guys who don't know how to modulate their voices for small, quiet spaces. There is the noisy crinkle of water bottles; the tinny echo of loud music through headphones; someone talking on their cell.

Nonetheless, it is what I have, the only temple I do have. So please, let me find glory here. Let me tell you that sometimes we sit together, and we say nothing at all. We see the scars on one another's bodies. We match them to our own, or else we choose not to ask, decide not to tell. We allow the heat to work on us, allow our pores to open. We come here as strangers, in search



FALL FITLER GINKGO by ROB LYBECK

firmly that she believes in home-schooling, that she's worried about what could happen if the internet shuts down, that "times are changing fast." That was as specific as she got. Times are changing fast. A sentiment few would disagree with.

The two men who sat on the lower bench last week talked about how great the neighborhoods around here used to be, how everyone used to get along. They lamented how the city had changed. They stopped themselves before getting into specifics. They wiped the sweat off their brow with their forearms, nodded, laughed, drank their water.

As I listen to it all, I wonder, is this not unlike religious ceremony? We use careful words. We find common ground in injuries, arthritis. Popping knees and slipped discs. Bee pollen as a cure for asthma. Peppermint oil for cardiovascular health. The "silver sneakers" crew talk about the temperature of the swimming pool, who was late to class, who is *always* late to class, and the small hot room fills with the wild laughter of seventy-year-olds sounding as delighted as naughty children.

of what is higher than ourselves. We seek ways to become more purely ourselves.

It is in this space that we find our way both into our bodies and out of them, a way to live comfortably in our own skins and perhaps touch on something just beyond. We close our eyes. We breathe. And if all we did was sweat, in the end, it would be enough.

Becky Tuch is a fiction and nonfiction writer, based in South Philly. Her stories have won awards and fellowships from *Moment Magazine*, The MacDowell Colony and The Somerville, MA Arts Council. Additional writing has appeared in a variety of venues including *Salon*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Tikkun Magazine*, *Gulf Coast*, *Post Road*, and *Best of the Net*. She is also the Founder of Lit Mag News, a bestselling Substack dedicated to demystifying literary magazines. Learn more at www.BeckyTuch.com.

Tombstones in the Delaware River

Poem by Chris Bullard

Graves warehouse
immortality like a bank
stores bullion. Yet,
if the need arises,
a defunct cemetery
may wish to break
open the marble assets
deposited to its care
by evicting a few
unaccounted bodies
and auctioning off
its surplus headstones,
now repurposed as rip rap
for the Betsy Ross.
At low tide, when
the velvet waters
draw back you
can see the markers
stacked around
the bridge piers like art
displayed in a rich
man's parlor, names
and dates showing
on their banknote
faces. They have ages
left, standing security
for capital improvement
in perpetual care, though
not as was intended.



Chris Bullard is a retired judge who lives in Philadelphia. In 2022, Main Street Rag published his chapbook, *Florida Man*, and Moonstone Press published his chapbook, *The Rainclouds of y*. Finishing Line Press has accepted his chapbook, *Lungs*, for publication in 2024. He was nominated this year for the Pushcart Prize.

Oxygen Destroyer

Poem by Dan Schall

As long as I'm alive, who can say I wouldn't be coerced into using it again? – Dr. Serizawa (Gojira, 1954)

Brackish water detonates, stickleback failing
to squirm from the kingfisher's bill.

Swept into the branches, what remains:
smash the spine, suck bladder from bone.

Pistol-mouthed sun edging the lips
of the river. Last night, I fired

upright in bed, struck by a moonbeam of panic:
Twelve years on, you've somehow escaped,

survived by a stream of electrons,
mourning notes, your candle's animation

frozen on my laptop's open window.
I almost titled this *Open Window*

to bear witness to not just your death
but the power of air, the advantage of height,

the threshold you once threatened
for my murder. Still your tremors

haul me, flailing on my side
in your mouth, from the boiling surface,

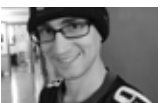
each eye fixed on its own dimension,
talon and water and sky. Here, the air

I can't respire. The delta shrugs, pulls again
its body to its neck, forgets the waves,

the trace scales floating. Sleeps.
Surely you are not the last lizard

to crawl from this ocean.
If we keep testing this weapon,

you may yet rise again. If our atoms touch,
our bodies will explode.



Dan Schall is a poet and teacher based in Pennsylvania. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Willows Wept Review*, *Anthropocene Literary Journal*, *Arboreal Literary Magazine*, *Merion West*, *Cartridge Lit*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *The Shore*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, *Right Hand Pointing* and many other journals.

Contrary to Popular Belief, or, My Parents Debate Religion Over Coffee

Poem by Annabelle Smith

My father doesn't believe in God the way he thinks he should. There will always be barriers between the holy and the tangible, and today, it's Big Bang vs Genesis. I think this world will never have the answers for bare feet on the water's surface. But still, he is suffering, too. My mother believes the moonlit garden where we were born is pure. My father sees the other half. God is not limited to beauty; the world he built is far from perfection. It is blossoming with faith thin as the broken breath between sips of coffee gone cold. Tension tethers to our living room gilded by dawn. My father believes in being good, no matter what follows death. I'm not sure there's a difference.

my mother believes, but when he sees her, stained glass and baptismal waters shifting between what is known and what is felt, he feels obligated to choose. Worries that resurrection, water deepening to wine, and sin cannot be explained. If God is salvation, he is Monet's lily pads, each lotus sunset, and the earth we are buried in. For her, this answers everything, creates all. But divinity encompasses heartbreak, hatred, death, ignorance and childhood leukemia and trigger fingers. My father rests, takes my mother's hands, and silence swaths doubts. Much like God asks, though, he

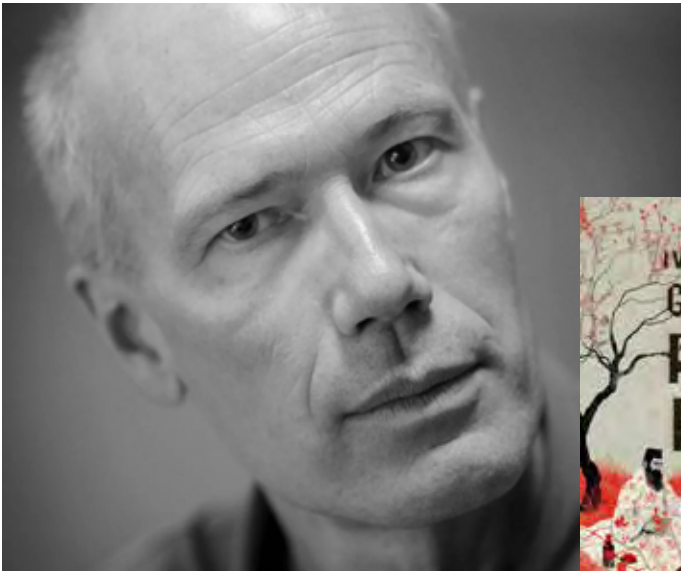


Annabelle Smith is a student at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA. She has received national recognition for her work in poetry from Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. More of her work can be found in *Spotlong Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Black Coffee Review*, and other journals.



Interview with Charles Holdefer

Curtis Smith



Charles Holdefer is a writer based in Brussels, Belgium. His latest collection of short stories, *Ivan the Terrible Goes on a Family Picnic*, has just been released. Holdefer's fiction has won a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The New England Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, and elsewhere. He is also the author of six novels.

Curtis Smith:

Congratulations on your new collection, *Ivan the Terrible Goes on a Family Picnic*. I really enjoyed it. Not to let the proverbial cat out of the bag, but all of these pieces are about baseball, at least on some level. They take us through the years and across the world. My first question would be, how did this overarching structure/theme come to you? Did you have a few baseball stories already published and then realized you were writing more and more? Or was the idea there from the start?

Charles Holdefer:

The structure came to me gradually. In *Ivan the Terrible*, baseball is a common backdrop, but the stories are very different, and you don't actually have to care about the sport to get into them. They're not about "how we won the big game" or some kind of fan fiction. For me, sport is a form of popular theater. Human

qualities and problems are dramatized, and it's the individual character, not the contest, that counts. I tried something similar in my previous book, a novel called *Don't Look at Me*, which referred to women's basketball. It took me some years to pull *Ivan* together but once I started thinking more historically, the pieces fell into place.

CS:

We see different times in history here—(1925 Paris! 1979 Chicago! 1569 Pskov!). Do you use any research/tricks to get your head into those spaces? Perhaps 1979 Chicago was easy, but Bufford County 1899 is a totally different vibe and backdrop—yet you ease your readers into each so deftly.

CH:

It's fun to try on different guises. I'm pretty careful to respect a baseline of accurate information about the twenties or the disco music era or the local team in Hiroshima, but in the end that's only fact-checking. These stories aren't "research" or historical fiction

in the traditional sense. They're speculative, sometimes wild and fanciful. Sometimes all it takes is an image, like a facial resemblance between Babe Ruth and Gertrude Stein, and then it's off to the races.

CS:

Yes, I wanted to ask about Gertrude and the Babe. I really enjoy when you bring in historical figures. You had a previous story collection that took on Dick Cheney and his ilk. And here, we get to see this unlikely duo of 1920s icons. I'm guessing you enjoy bringing these folks into your work. Can you address the rewards—and challenges—of using a historical figure in a piece of fiction?

CH:

Well, the immediate reward is that I get to bring on stage a character with a ready-made backstory. This allows me to plunge straight into the action, no fussing around. The challenge is that this foreknowledge brings obligations. It should add something; it should *matter* somehow. If it's only a cameo by a famous person





TRANSIT by JAY SHIPMAN

without contributing to the meaning, then it's an empty gesture. Here I use Ivan the Terrible to introduce a pastoral idea that gets played out in subsequent stories. This is an opportunistic appropriation that I hope is generative—but it's definitely not "history." *Ivan* is more light-hearted than *Dick Cheney in Shorts*, which was a darker book.

CS:

You've been publishing a lot recently—novels and story collections. How do you juggle these projects? Do you work on a novel until a certain point—then take a break and write a cycle of stories? If so, do you have any go-to break points (end of first draft perhaps—or some other milestone in your process)? What benefits does taking a break offer when you return to your novel?

CH:

Those are serious questions, but I'm afraid I don't have a neat answer. I do feel happiest when I'm working, when I'm absorbed in something. But it can be hard, and I get stuck, so I bounce to something else. Then I bounce back. Break points like a first draft, or a fifth draft, are psychologically gratifying when I get there—but I don't always get there. Publishing is nice when it happens, and I've been fortunate, but when a book comes out, due to the time lag, my head is usually somewhere else. I'm most at peace when I'm working.

CS:

I liked all the stories here, but my favorites were "Foul" and "Deadball," and while the book may refer to baseball, these two are really love stories. Do you think love—especially love that doesn't quite connect—is one of the prominent themes in your work? Fitzgerald said he could only write about a few things—as you look over all that you've written, can you identify any central themes/ideas that you keep circling back to?

CH:

In earlier drafts, I didn't consciously set out to write them as love stories but for those examples, yes, that is what emerged, what I had to explore. I was drawn there. As for central themes, that's a question I would've found impossible to answer a number of years ago. But with hindsight, I notice a couple of ideas that keep popping up. The first one: we're not as smart as we think we are. The second one: we are more free than we usually allow ourselves to be. That's about all I know.

CS:

So let's talk baseball. What was your favorite season/team? I'm partial to the '93 Phillies, but I have to admit the current Phils are pretty entertaining too. Who's your all-time favorite player?

CH:

When I was a little kid, copying my big brother who admired Mickey Mantle, I was intensely interested in the Yankees, which is a bit weird for a rural Midwesterner. But I had to get a divorce from New York during the Steinbrenner years. It got too obnoxious. Since then, I haven't been particularly loyal to a team, but I still enjoy the show. As for a favorite player: well, it sounds corny, but when we were kids we used to study the backs of baseball cards and take note of the birth dates of players and write them letters with birthday greetings, and some of them responded.

One special day a personal reply from Roberto Clemente landed in our mailbox. He's a player I appreciate even more now, from an adult perspective. He was an impressive person, larger than sport, and I still watch clips of him on YouTube. And the game is not just about its stars; it's about hard-working journeymen who are now forgotten, guys like Don Wert, who also answered us all those years ago. Thanks, Don!

CS:

I really appreciate your tone in the book. There's a real storyteller vibe going on—the book moves through places and time, but wherever we land, we instantly feel an intimacy with the characters. At this point of your career are you aware of tone—or have you been doing it so long that it comes easily? Another thing I enjoyed was the pacing—and in a way, it felt like a baseball game—unrushed yet full and complete—sometimes soaring and sometimes bittersweet. Was this in your head as well—or am I bringing too much of my current ball-watching frame of mind into this?

CH:

Tone is the collision of language and plot, more or less. The shorter flash pieces have less plot and lean more heavily into language. But the longer stories give themselves more time to unfold, the pacing is different, with more events, and yes, perhaps it is baseball-ish. And though there's some truth to the notion that the game is like life itself, I'd also underline how the *limitations* of the game compared to life account for much of its appeal. The space is strictly rule-bound and self-contained, and it provides a way to focus. We hunger for such focus in life. This heightened focus can be reproduced in art, and that's definitely worth trying for.

CS:

Loved the Dylan epigraph. What's your go-to Dylan album?

CH:

Not sure I have one, but *Bringing It All Back Home* has songs like "She Belongs to Me" and some others that have left imprints on my mind like tattoos. They won't go away. Maybe it's because of good songs that I've never bothered to get tattoos.

CS:

What's next?

CH:

I'm immersed in a novel called *Bomp* that's more formally challenging than anything I've tried before. Still trying to figure out its turns but am enjoying the experience.

Curtis Smith has published over 125 stories and essays. His latest novels are The Magpie's Return (named one of Kirkus Review's top indie books of 2020) and The Lost and the Blind (a finalist for Foreword Review's Best Indie Adult Fiction of 2023). His next novel, Deaf Heaven, will be published in May 2025.

Flying Over Western PA

Poem by Jessica Whipple

Allegheny hills flatten on ascent
carlights below I press my nose against
airplane glass as we bank I think the hillsides
rise just a bit just like breath before I left
Dad filled my washer fluid, Armor-alled the dash
I didn't ask for Windex blue he is a man of few words
and many solvents. I packed last items glitter dress
satin heels he cleared snow off my windshield
started the ignition but listen: this is what a father does
he scrapes, wind blows because he hasn't let her go
just yet she will live across the state and trace a path
engine ever humming bootbrush hills winter ever coming
leaving home it's sunny second time this year
but the turnpike route, the windshield--both are clear.



Jessica Whipple writes for adults and children. She had two children's picture books published in 2023: *Enough Is...* (Tilbury House, illus. by Nicole Wong) and *I Think I Think a Lot* (Free Spirit Publishing, illus. by Josée Bisaillon). Her poetry has been published recently in *Funicular*, *ONE ART*, *Pine Hills Review*, and *Identity Theory*. Jessica's poem "Broken Strings" (appearing in *Door Is a Jar*) received a Best of the Net and a Pushcart nomination. You can find her on Twitter/X @JessicaWhipp17.

Séance

Poem by R. G. Evans

The world of direct marketing
is a medium reaching out to you,
dearly departed first wife.
Three decades since our divorce
and as many changes of address,
Progressive still wants you to know
you can save when you bundle your insurance.
No tarot cards, no crystal ball, just an algorithm
that believes we're still together,
that believes you're still alive.
One flier seems to say
*Give us a sign. Show us
you're interested in Viking cruises.*
And now, eight months since you died,
in the inbox of a seldom used email,
they want to know, dear dead one,
who you plan to vote for in the fall.
Of course, you never left me,
haunted me long before you actually died,
but I'm the only one who should know
you're there in the guilty way I go on breathing,
the way I venerate the only photo of you I kept
like an icon of a long lost saint.
Now, Facebook necromantically
conjures your picture, tells me
you're someone I might know.
The veil is thin in cyberspace.
I click on your image, make you my friend.
A friend is better than a ghost.
Isn't it? Give me a sign.



R. G. Evans is a New Jersey-based poet, writer, and songwriter. His books include *Overtipping the Ferryman*, *The Holy Both*, and *Imagine Sisyphus Happy*. His albums of original songs, *Sweet Old Life* and *Kid Yesterday Calling Tomorrow Man*, are available on most streaming sites.



BOOK REVIEWS

More Strange Than True

by C.J Spataro

Review by Jennifer Rivera

C.J. Spataro's *More Strange Than True* is a genre-blending novel of romance and fantasy set in modern-day Philadelphia. Spataro magically weaves together the story of a woman who makes a wish for true love in a moment of grief and transition. Through this wish, she unknowingly invokes the help of the fairies from Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. From that moment, Shakespeare's famous words rang true, "Ay me! For aught that ever I could read, could ever hear by tale or history, the course of true love never did run smooth."



The novel opens on the day of Jewell's father's memorial at a Center City restaurant called *Puck's Place*. While celebrating her father's life with her childhood best friend Melody, and her restaurant owner boyfriend Bobby Fellowes, Jewell receives a text from her boyfriend Simon, in which he breaks up with her. While pondering her terrible taste in men, Jewell declares that men are worse than dogs, especially her dog, Oberon. Bobby sends her home with his newest dish, a magical mushroom pasta that has just been featured in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

After a quick trip to the dog park, she meets a lovely man named Steve. After being kindly rejected by Steve, Jewell and Oberon return to their apartment. She digs into the deliciously magical pasta, sharing bites with the dog as they settle into their nightly routine. Jewell tells Oberon that he would make the perfect man for her. She reasons they share the same likes and dislikes and live together. Later in the evening, after thoroughly enjoying her meal, Jewell unknowingly calls out the faerie queen Titania three times, wishing for a man who will love her just as her dog does before drifting off to sleep.

In the faerie realm, Queen Titania searches for the sounds of the bells and crosses the veil from the faerie realm to Jewell's

apartment with her sisters, Ondine and Lolanthe. Although her sisters are more sympathetic to humankind, Titania reviles them, especially that fool Shakespeare, to whom she regrets showing herself. But since she has come all this way, she decides to answer this human's wish and turn her dog into a man. In a highly comical passage, the three fairies realize that the dog has been neutered and restore him to his original state before turning him into a man.

Jewell wakes up to the shock of her life: a strange nude man in her bed and her dog nowhere to be found. Oberon explains to Jewell that three women came and turned him from dog to man to fulfill her wish for true love. He proves it by recounting their trip to the dog park and meeting Steve. Although they are both still in disbelief, Jewell helps Oberon learn how to live as a human. As time progresses, Jewell and Oberon fall in love. Oberon begins working for Bobby, however, unbeknownst to the lovers, Titania has been watching them from her palace since Oberon's transformation. Weaving the most crucial plot points from Shakespeare's work, Titania seeks out other fae living among humans and attempts to put a spell on Oberon, so he falls in love with her. She believes her spell to have brought forth the prophecy of the Elf King's return. Similarly to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the spells do not go as planned, and the humans become aware of fairies among them.

More Strange Than True masterfully intertwines Shakespeare's magical world with the real world of a Philadelphia-based environment. The novel explores similar themes of the intricacies of relationships, mental and physical transformation, and the havoc that magic can create no matter who you are. Jewell and Oberon are forced to make heartbreaking choices, and it is in these choices that these characters discover who they truly are, and that love is rarely unconditional.

Reviewer bio:

Jen Rivera is a Latina writer and certified dog trainer. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Monmouth University in May 2024. Her prose and poetry have been featured in *The Monmouth Review*.



The Reviews section of Philadelphia Stories is a place where readers can celebrate writers! Our diverse, talented, and intelligent reviewers range from academics to professional writers. Philadelphia Stories prides on publishing positive reviews only, motivating and encouraging future readers and writers. If you are interested in becoming a reviewer please email Sarah Van Clef at sarahviveca@gmail.com

Doctor Spight

by L.M. Asta

Review by Mary Evangelisto Miller

Dr. Drew Spight, an obstetrics and gynecology attending at St. Thomas Medical Center in Philadelphia, wanted to escape. He had had enough of St. Thomas; the OB ("Old Bastard," aka Dr. Owen Bates), his supervisor; being his mother's caregiver as her multiple sclerosis progressed; and, most of all, "the aura of failure that clung to him like tobacco smoke." His traditional method of escape was something else he desperately



2,700 miles between his old life and a new one the answer? Would he be satisfied with performing G-spot enhancement and mommy makeover procedures instead of complex, lifesaving obstetric and gynecologic surgery? Adding to the complexity of the situation, revelations about institutional and political irregularities at both Drew's previous and new environments begin to emerge, leading to further entanglements. Drew's reunion with his friend Dr. Lakshmi Rangwala at a convention in Los Angeles, as well as his new involvement with Edie Mitchell, a patient-cum-investigational journalist, lead to more questions—ones that only Drew and his coterie can unravel.

The story of Dr. Spight and his progression from resident to seasoned physician, and his struggles with substance abuse, institutional politics, and colleagues, make for a fascinating look behind the curtain in two settings: an urban hospital and a plastic surgery clinic, varying widely in the procedures they perform and the clientele they serve. Dr. Spight is a complex character with motivations and challenges to which we all can relate, leading him through physical and inner evolution and, ultimately, a satisfying resolution. Dr. Spight's cross-country experiences, as well as an eclectic cast of characters and unexpected narrative twists, make for an exciting, interesting read.

wanted to leave behind, after it led to a severe traffic accident, substantial injuries, a hospital stay that revealed his ongoing problem through toxicology reports, and forced membership in the "Physician Wellness Committee," along with mandated drug testing.

Repeated calls from a former colleague to join him out west provided just that means of escape. Trading one coast for another, moving from a busy inner-city hospital to a private surgicenter providing cosmetic procedures to women in Los Angeles, seemed to be just what the doctor ordered. As Dr. Eric Xavier told Drew: "You tighten this, you tighten that, and the best thing of all, it's all self-pay." Repeated reprimands of Dr. Xavier over the years for infractions ranging from negligence to incompetence to inappropriate behavior with female patients and staff, with resultant probation and threats of license revocation, gave Drew pause, but as the pressures in Philly mounted, the call of the west became insurmountable. Even the OB's last-minute attempt to entice Drew to remain in Philly with the promise of promoting him to chair of the department could not keep Drew at St. Thomas.

Drew wanted to leave many aspects of his old life behind, particularly his long history of substance abuse. Was placing



Reviewer bio:

Mary Evangelisto Miller is a freelance writer and editor based in Bucks County. She has been self-employed as a medical editor for 22 years. Mary holds a bachelor's degree in Mass Communications and English from Temple University and a master's degree in English and Publishing from Rosemont College.

Rainbow Tales

by Kathleen Murphey

Review by Rosalind Kaplan

This time there really *is* something new under the summer sun. *Rainbow Tales* by Kathleen Murphey is a collection of stories based on traditional fairy tales and folklore, but each with a refreshing and surprising twist. Rather than suffer derision and isolation for their diversity, gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation, characters of old folk tales are flipped on their heads and rewarded for authenticity, happiness, community, and family.



The book begins with a story entitled 'Beau and the Beast'. A prince, very handsome but lacking kindness and humility, is transformed into a hideous beast by a fairy queen. He is saved by the compassion of an old woman. In his beastly form, he can experience her inner beauty, and it assuages his loneliness. He then befriends the hag's (the old woman's) grandson, Beau, and the friendship deepens into romantic love and sexual attraction as the grandson, in turn, is able to see the beast's inner beauty. Beau's love restores the prince to his human form but with new compassion. The couple is accepted by the older woman, the king, and the 'queen' and live happily ever after.

Throughout this, and other stories in *Rainbow Tales*, we encounter well-rendered, complex characters, including a transgender prince in love with a frog, a non-binary P. Pan, whose quest is to help marginalized, neglected, and abused children, and a Snow White who falls in love with Sleeping Beauty when the latter's family offers her shelter as she flees execution by a jealous queen.

The overall effect of the collection of stories is refreshing and hopeful, as the stories upend not only the obvious sexist, racist, and homophobic tropes of standard fairy tales but also call

attention to the more subtle disparities these old tales espouse. In Murphey's long-ago-far-away world, stepmothers are often kind. A prince or princess might choose to assist the servants in the kitchen. Magic mirrors are used to help those in need, fairies have private lives, and royalty has a broad range of skin tones.

These newly crafted fairy and folk tales open up the genre at a crucial time in history, a time when we can no longer overlook the harmful stereotypes and biases of many classic tales. These revised versions bring new relevance to old lore while continuing to capture the charm and magic of the fairy world.

Rainbow Tales is not a collection aimed at children, however. Known as a sex-positive author, Murphey includes descriptions of sexual encounters and sex acts in her narratives, rendering *Rainbow Tales* a book for mature audiences. While the explicit nature of these passages is not necessary to the storylines themselves, the depiction of inclusive, physical intimacy may be psychologically helpful and even life-saving for some readers. The transformation of classic fairy tales and folklore to reflect modern values is not a new concept in itself. In fact, many stories have evolved throughout the centuries; intercultural elements have been added, and feminist perspectives have emerged (think of the powerful female protagonist Elsa in *Frozen*). With thousands of traditional international folk tales out there, this collection is a welcome addition, set apart by the breadth of diversity depicted as well as its sex-positivity.

Reviewer bio:



Rosalind Kaplan has been published in several literary and medical journals, including *Across the Margin*, *Brandeis Magazine*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, *El Portal*, *Galway Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Signal Mountain Review*, *The Smart Set*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Sweet Tree*, and *Vagabond*

City. Her memoir *Still Healing: A Doctor's Notes on the Magic and Misery of a Life in Medicine* was selected as the winner of the Minerva Rising 2022 memoir contest and is forthcoming in the fall of 2024.

CAPSULE REVIEWS

THE REVIEWS SECTION OF PHILADELPHIA STORIES IS A PLACE WHERE READERS CAN CELEBRATE WRITERS! OUR DIVERSE, TALENTED, AND INTELLIGENT REVIEWERS RANGE FROM ACADEMICS TO PROFESSIONAL WRITERS. PHILADELPHIA STORIES PRIDES ON PUBLISHING POSITIVE REVIEWS ONLY, MOTIVATING AND ENCOURAGING FUTURE READERS AND WRITERS. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A REVIEWER PLEASE EMAIL SARAH VAN CLEF AT SARAHVIVECA@GMAIL.COM



Dwell Here and Prosper

by Chris Eagle

Review by Samantha Neugebaur

An assisted living facility is a specific kind of purgatory; by definition, it's a place for people who require full-time help but not enough to be in a nursing home. In his novel, *Dwell Here and Prosper*, author Chris Eagle is both honoring his father's memory and throwing light on the state of these facilities, which share characteristics with our psychiatric hospitals, but are not exactly the same.

Read more of this review at www.philadelphiastories.org



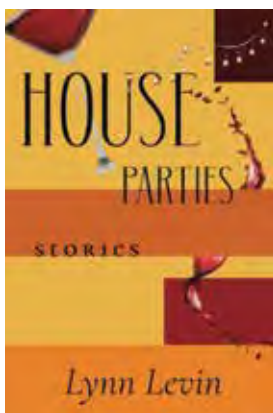
One Day I Am A Field

by Amy Small-McKinney

Review by Margaret Saraco

One Day I Am A Field is a book where heart and poetry meet with profound insight into what is it like to be a caregiver to someone you love and lose at the same time. The honest, unconditional, love she expresses makes the going so much harder, but the reader feeling richer from having shared this experience with her.

Read more of this review at www.philadelphiastories.org



House Parties

by Lynn Levin

Review by Regina Guarino

Using her poetic use of language and tender execution of character, Levin shines a light on her appreciation of our common humanity in her short story collection: *House Parties*. The characters in each story make decisions they know to be not quite right, yet they are compelled to do so anyway, only illustrating the true understanding of the human condition.

Read more of this review at www.philadelphiastories.org

Gentradelphia

Poem by Shaleia Rogers-Lee

I see whiteness, lightness; is it righteousness?
I feel invisible, a little miserable.
Few Black women, more Black men.
White women and men and dogs galore.
I abhor the fact, the lack of colorful faces
in places where there used to be more.
The city is nicer on the surface,
but to what purpose? Who for?
The scene is pretty but lacks an underscore.
Sore, sore, sore of a space. Sore of a place.
Bandaged to heal, but when you peel—rip—it off
a scar covers up what was unsure.
And you can't always remember the original lore.



Shaleia Rogers-Lee is an emerging poet. She grew up in Delaware County and currently lives in Philadelphia. She writes about Philadelphia, women's experiences, being Black in America, fairy tales, and anything she wants to explore. Shaleia has an MA in Writing Studies and a BA in English.

Street Impressions

Chester Avenue, Southwest Philadelphia, early 1960s

Poem by Joseph Chelius

As on a children's show,
the green-and-cream trolley
with wide windows for eyes,
an emblem above the headlight
like a little mustache,
would come into view—
its doors hissing open, then closed
before it went hiccupping
over the cobblestone tracks.

And down the back alley
past Rusty the Boxer
and Bunky the Beagle,
stirred up along the hairpin fences,
the songs of hucksters
carrying splintered baskets
of freestone peaches
and Jersey tomatoes;
the neighborly chatter
of clothes on the lines.

And the characters we'd meet
along the avenue:
Alex the shoe shiner
and John the milkman;
palsied Mr. Packer
with his handcart of Schmidt's.
The older boys, who with sycamore pods
they gathered from the curbs
to chalk their lessons—
scrawled in cursive
on the slates of our necks.



Joseph Chelius is the author of two collections of poems with WordTech Communications: *The Art of Acquiescence* and *Crossing State Lines*. His work has appeared in *Commonweal*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Rattle*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and other journals. He lives in Bucks County and grew up in Southwest Philadelphia and the Delaware County suburbs.

Solidarity

Poem by John Wojtowicz

When protesters lie on the ground
it is called a die-in
and this is the tactic used
by my blue blotch pansies
when I've absentmindedly deprived them
of water. Before misting,
I try to pick out the ones
just taking a knee. I know
there must be at least one
who has gotten plenty of water,
in fact, is drunk on it:
thick roots, muscular petals;
the water having pooled
in his little side of the pot. He,
who is not even thirsty,
but lies down anyway
because his neighbors' suffering is his own.



John Wojtowicz grew up working on his family's azalea and rhododendron nursery and still lives in the backwoods of what Ginsberg dubbed "nowhere Zen New Jersey." Currently, he teaches social work at Rowan College South Jersey. Recent or forthcoming publications include: *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Sonora Review*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. He is the author of the chapbook, *Roadside Attractions: a Poetic Guide to American Oddities*. Find out more at: www.johnwojtowicz.com



LitLife FESTIVAL



Celebrating 20 Years of Philadelphia Stories with Laurie Halse Anderson
In partnership with Holy Family University's MFA Program in Creative Writing

SATURDAY OCTOBER 26, 2024

10am-11:30am

Includes keynote address, book signing, and reception.

Cost is \$20 (book not included)

MasterClass, 1-4pm

\$95, Seniors/Students \$65 (limited availability)

Holy Family University
Education and Technology Center
9801 Frankford Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19114

PhiladelphiaStories



FOR TICKET INFORMATION, SCAN QR CODE.

Celebrating 85 Years of Harmony

The Philadelphia Youth Orchestra Music Institute offers exceptional technical, musical, and performance education to students across the tri-state area through its eleven program divisions:



Philadelphia Youth Orchestra

Ages 15-21

Philadelphia Young Artists Orchestra

Ages 13-19

Young Musicians Debut Orchestra

Ages 11-17

Philadelphia Youth Jazz Orchestra

Ages 15-21

Bravo Brass

Ages 12-21

Prysm Strings - New Jersey

Ages 8-17

Prysm Strings - Main Line

Ages 5-17

Philadelphia Youth Concert Band

Ages 10-16

Philadelphia Youth Symphonic Band

Ages 13-18

Pizzicato Players

Ages 6-18

Tune Up Philly - Orchestral Pathways Program

An after-school engagement program for 1st-8th grade students



@PYOMusic



@PYOMusicInstitute



pyomusic.org

Now accepting rolling auditions

PHILADELPHIA STORIES MEMBERS AS OF OCTOBER 4, 2024

Michener Level

(\$30 - \$49)

Annalie Hudson Minter
 Carolyn Guss
 Cathleen Cohen
 Douglas & Peggy Gordon
 Gail Priest
 Harvey & Marcia Steinberg
 Jessica Herring
 Kate Blakinger
 Lorna Brown-Gordon
 Lynn Kirchhoff
 Mary Erpel
 Maryann Macartney
 Pam Mclean-Parker
 Richard Mahr
 Sean Hanrahan
 Susan Tomita O'Connor

Buck Level

(\$50 - \$99)

Aaron Bauman
 Charles Carr
 Charles Holdefer
 Christopher Beardsley
 Daniel A. &
 Roberta K. Zehner
 Dennis Lawson
 Elizabeth Abrams-Morley
 Janine Pratt
 John Alexanderson
 Josephine A. Graham
 June Flavin
 Kathryn Taylor
 Katy J. Schroeder
 Kay & Roy Peters

Laurie Wagman
 Lois Schlachter
 Marie Ann Nowak
 Paul Dobias
 Paula Cahill
 Sharon Wensel
 Stephen J. Campellone
 Suzanne Commer
 William & Elizabeth Kirk
 William Hemmig
 Yalonda Rice

Whitman Level

(\$100 - \$499)

Adrienne Gau
 Angelina Sciolla
 Barry Dinerman &
 Monroe Buckner
 Catherine Johns
 Cheryl Mercier
 David Sanders &
 Nancy Brokaw
 Eileen Cunniffe, With much
 gratitude to Christine
 and Carla
 Elisa & Victor Sheronas
 Elizabeth Larsson
 Eugene Matthew Martin
 George Rodriguez, In
 Honor of Trish L
 Rodriguez, | MFA and
 George L Rodriguez, MD
 James Knipp
 Jeffrey McLaughlin
 Joel Edelstein &
 Betsy McKinstry

John Fisher
 Linda Dubin Garfield
 Martha Bottomley
 Nathan Long
 Paul C. Smith
 Robert McCrillis
 Thomas Baroth

Potok Level

(\$500- \$999)

Gary Zimmaro

W.C. Williams Level

(\$1000+)

Daniel V. & Michelle Johns
 Heather McGlenn Hansma
 & Scott Hansma
 Joseph A. Sullivan
 Thomas McGlenn

Sustainer Members

Alex Husted (Potok)
 Carla Spataro (Whitman)
 Carlo Spataro (Buck)
 Carol Clark (Buck)
 Carol Weiser
 (W.C. Williams)
 Christine Barnes (Buck)
 Christine Weiser
 (W.C. Williams)
 Courtney Bambrick &
 Peter Baroth (Whitman)
 Dana & Chris Scott
 (Whitman)
 Donald Kates &
 Mo Ganey (Potok)

James Zervanos (Buck)
 Julie Odell (Whitman)
 Katherine Santoro (Buck)
 Mark & Amy Punt
 Weiser (Whitman)
 Maureen Fielding (Buck)
 Mitchell Sommers (Potok)
 Nancy Jackson (Whitman)
 Susan Karol Martel (Buck)
 Trish Rodriguez (Whitman)
 Will Woldenberg (Buck)

Corporate & Foundations

OGS Recycling (Potok)

Matching Gift Partners

Charities Aid Foundation
 America (Potok)
 Cozen O'Conner
 Foundation (Williams)
 Schwab Charitable
 (Whitman)

Author honoraria made possible by the generous support of the Conrad Weiser Author Fund.

You can help keep Philadelphia Stories in print
 and free by becoming a member today at
www.philadelphiastories.org/donate/

A MAGAZINE THAT CREATES COMMUNITY

THANKS TO MEMBER SUPPORT, *PHILADELPHIA STORIES* HAS BEEN SERVING THE WRITING COMMUNITY OF THE GREATER DELAWARE VALLEY SINCE 2004 IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- Connecting local writers to readers through 5,000 print copies of a free biannual literary magazine, distributed at more than 200 locations, including all branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia and The Delaware and Montgomery County Public Libraries.
- Supporting a community of young Philadelphia-area writers through *Philadelphia Stories, Jr. & Teen*, print and online magazines by young writers.
- Offering affordable conferences and workshops for writers.
- Hosting readings and other social events for writers.
- Publishing books through our boutique imprint, *PS Books*.
- Hosting two national contests, one for fiction and one for poetry.

YOU can help keep *Philadelphia Stories*—a non-profit 501c3—in print and free by making a donation today! For as little as \$30 a year, you can get home delivery and know that your gift directly supports the local arts community.

I would like to support local art & literature by making a contribution today.

MONTHLY PLEDGE:

- \$5/Month \$10/Month \$20/Month Other _____

ONE-TIME MEMBER PLEDGE:

- Michener (\$30-\$49) Potok (\$500-\$999) Buck (\$50-\$99)
 W. C. Williams (\$1,000+) Whitman (\$100-\$499) Other _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

CARD NUMBER (MC, V, DISCOVER) _____ SECURITY CODE _____ EXPIRATION _____

Thank you for your generous support of Philadelphia Stories

To donate online please visit www.philadelphiastories.org/donate/,
or mail to: Philadelphia Stories, 1167 West Baltimore Pike, #267, Media, PA 19063

PhiladelphiaStories

FICTION CONTEST

SUBMISSIONS OPEN
SEPT 1 – DEC 1, 2024

FIRST PLACE:
\$1000 and published in the
Winter/Spring 2025 issue

THREE RUNNERS-UP:
\$250 and published in the
Winter/Spring 2025 issue

PHILADELPHIASTORIES.ORG/
FICTION-CONTEST/



Judge: Stephanie Feldman

Stephanie Feldman is the author of the novels *Saturnalia*, a Locus Award Finalist, and *The Angel of Losses*, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, winner of the Crawford Fantasy Award, and finalist for the Mythopoeic Award. She is co-editor of the multi-genre anthology *Who Will Speak for America?* and her stories and essays have appeared in or are forthcoming from *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Catapult Magazine*, *Electric Literature*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *The Rumpus*, *Uncharted Magazine, Vol. 1 Brooklyn*, *Weird Horror*, and more. She teaches creative writing at Arcadia University and the University of Pennsylvania.