



AMERICA'S NEXT
GreatAuthor

A reality TV show for writers by writers



Got an idea for a book?

What's up good people? *New York Times* bestselling author **Kwame Alexander** here with the 411 on America's Next Great Author.

I'll be hosting this groundbreaking show. But first, we'll be filming the pilot this fall. Select writers will pitch their book ideas to our panel of renowned judges, a roaring bookish audience, and rolling cameras. Apply to take part in the filming of the pilot.

One winner will receive:

- A **\$2,500** cash prize for the best pitch
- A prominent role in the pilot episode

IN LOCAL NEWS...

We have the largest class in our Low Residency Program completing their MFA by the end of this month! Congratulations! Beginning on the next page, we get close and personal with each Grad student (as much as they allowed anyway), including an excerpt from their work. Thanks to all of you and keep in touch!

It has been almost a year since the launch of our first newsletter, and I wanted to share that it has been and continues to be a rewarding endeavor. I am fortunate to hear from faculty, students, alums, authors and spend time researching all things literary. I encourage anyone to contact me if they want to write an article, share their learning, have an idea for a monthly column. We're constantly evolving and as my studies come to an end, I imagine the search for someone to continue this will soon begin, as my completion of this program is *around the bend*! Thanks again, Keisha, for the clever name!

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Tell me something important for others to know regarding who you are, your desire for this MFA.

First and foremost, I'm old – during my undergraduate studies, I was the oldest full-time student at OSU-Cascades. I'm a retired multi-career guy and, as I mentioned, I returned to school because of my passion for writing. Yes, I was writing about something or nothing every day, even before I went back to school. One important thing for others to appreciate is that I'm doing my MFA because of my urge to share thoughts rather than build a career foundation for financial reasons. It's great to be able to pursue a passion ... just because.

Tell me a little about what you do, day to day, and how that may or may not influence or inspire your writing.

When home, and that's about three-fourths of my time, my day typically starts at my desk with coffee. Nature inspires me, and our property abuts to BLM lands on the north and east. My view from my desk has nothing but Crooked River Grasslands with Ochoco buttes on the horizon. Except for occasional airplanes, I've never seen humankind or its artifacts from our backyard. Ever. When I go to the kitchen for another morning brew, my view to the west has our property sloping downward to the road, about a football field away, and public-park acreage extending beyond with Mt. Bachelor, Broken Top, and the Sisters on the horizon. I see more deer transverse my view than vehicles, more tumbleweeds than people. A setting that stimulates my writing was a prerequisite for purchasing our home. My getaways are Western US deserts, the Oregon coast, and Mexico. These all influence and inspire my writings.

Why did you pursue your MFA?

Three primary reasons. First, I crave scholastics, and my MFA ain't the end. I plan to continue undergraduate Spanish starting the winter term, and I'd like to pursue a doctorate in American Studies or English after that. However, and this is important for classmates with emerging careers, interesting writing projects are popping up frequently and from "out-of-nowhere" because local people and organizations are aware I'm about to be a certified creative writer. Secondly, I have stories to tell, and I needed

academics, literary devices, and processes to narrate prose that grabs my reader's attention enough to keep them turning my pages and enjoying my punchlines or messages. Finally, I experienced events and was involved in politically-decisive and environmentally important activities during my decades that are meaningful to my society – I'd love to share them as a guest speaker or somehow be involved in Central Oregon's teaching environment, and my master's degree is the ticket that at least gets me through some doors.

Where do you envision yourself in five years?

Hopefully, upright. If so, romping in the wilderness or sitting at my desk writing about romping in the wilderness. With Gail, of course.



How has your view of the world changed because of your learning?

Cultures or societies that abuse a "population" and individuals who abuse their partners enjoy mutual mentalities and exhibit shared behaviors. Geronimo coached me about how I articulate this: a quote from my critical intro: [my MFA readings and classes] "... exposed me to the contemporary influences that induce and trap [minority] people in social environment where they have little or no interaction with their culture ... sensitized me to commonalities between cultural and individual predator-victim mindsets ...".

Have you learned anything new about yourself while pursuing this Master's? Please share.

My outlook centers on seizing contentment in the aftermath of difficulties. Until my MFA program, I thought my feelings were a bit on the edge. I mean, being "okay" after a tragic loss of a loved one, being able to sever the relationship and seek happiness in other relationships, didn't seem to be what some of my friends embraced – or expected, nor accepted, me to embrace. I have class readings and instructor dialog that share my sentiments, inspirations I wish to pen for my reader.

How do you want to be remembered?

A humorous, but sincere, trickster who brought delight into your life.

After a film by Kore-eda Hirokazu entitled After Life (1988), with the basics premise: If you could choose only one memory to hold on to for eternity, what would it be?

A quote from my thesis, "You need to teach me how to swallow again." The moment was near my wife's death when the active part of her brain was still able to express about what her dementia-ridden part of her brain couldn't communicate to her extremities. It wasn't a plea, just an offhand remark, and it symbolizes the optimistic mentality I hope aspires me until I "fall into the far away" (another quote from my thesis.) Yes, I wept.

My thesis' title is *Continuance*, and here's an excerpt from my preface:

This narrative describes meaningful events in the lives of three people as they consider how obstacles were overcome or endured to create positive outlooks. First, Bob and his two life partners, Roberta and then Gail, discuss how they embraced strong beliefs after profound farewells, acknowledging the pain of endeared losses or downplaying the effects of unintended wounds. Later, Bob and Gail examine an "it's okay" mindset in the wake of life's setbacks or the aftermath of personal missteps. They contemplate pursuing the "next" when grasping a final tenderness or winning a decisive struggle. Finally, they consider cultural and social factors that help or

impeded recovery, such as family and friends who support or reject happiness for the one left behind or escaping the shadow of the before.

This story respects will power that battles past tragedies to forge an earthly Eden in the present. It recognizes Native American customs that value natural wonders connecting peaceful coexistence and human presence. It acknowledges the religious merits of Western Civilization as well. Still, it questions its artificial conventions and contemplates whether seeking a paradise-on-earth could be more suited to some people than suffering this world's purgatories and hoping for happiness in some celestial future.

Continuance reveres nature and its capacity for survival despite inherent thrashing and humankind's trashing. It recognizes nature's marvels that permeate and enhance our lives – desert wonders, mountain forests and streams, and the inhabitants of Her Majesties. Continuance embraces those principles of "survivance" that anticipate and welcome comfort in the aftermath of hardships: Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as "... the active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories ..." (Vizenor). To avoid confusion, the narrators are of European descent, and Native American cultural traditions are not inherent to their heritages. Nevertheless, their ties to survivance are accepted and adopted. They adapt those ties to how they express ideas of continuance in their character that portray survivance's components of celebrating life despite life's setbacks. Although Gail and Bob anticipate ongoing difficulties in life, they know each ordeal will end. They keep that perspective when things are tough, knowing contentment is just over the horizon.

A young woman wrapped in a blanket and lying calmly in Rebecca Belmore's painting *Fringe* symbolizes the early attempts by settlers to exterminate native people by bringing them presents laced with smallpox. *Fringe* depicts abuse and dignifies life, demonstrating the stoic fortitude of survivance and serenity of continuance, embodying the core of this tale.

-Bob Steffens

Elizabeth Higgins

Tell me a little about what you do, day to day, and how that may or may not influence or inspire your writing.

More than inspiring or influencing my writing, lately my day to day is providing balance to what has turned out to be a dark thesis project. It can be very refreshing, after staring at a screen thinking about death and insanity, to hang out with a two year old who is always looking forward to garbage day.



Where do you envision yourself in five years?

I'd like to be teaching. Whether that's realistic or not given the adjunct crisis, we'll see.

Have you learned anything new about yourself while pursuing this Master's? Please share.

Much of this process has been having ideas and directions recommended to me, saying I can't possibly do that because of x, y, and z, and then deciding to try it and realizing I was at least partially wrong. I didn't think I could write something that was fictionalized, much less something based on the life of an actual person. I didn't want to read research on post-mortem changes and examine photos documenting the degradation of bullet wounds on dead pigs, but here we are. I chose this very tragic story from an old newspaper and decided to write about it, and accepting where that leads me has been challenging and valuable. There are reasons, of course, that I chose the story I did, and so the process of trying to flesh it out and make it more real has forced me to confront things I'd rather resist. But these kinds of confrontations, really, are why I write in the first place. So, in a very good way, it's been more than I had in mind. I've learned I can write beyond the places I thought my limits were.

How do you want to be remembered?

I'm going to give you an answer that isn't really an answer, because I'm reminded that this was the question I answered in the essay portion of the GED test I took when I was seventeen. All I wrote about was my box of notebooks. I had the idea that perhaps in

death I might like to be understood. In some ways I still think of my words as little breadcrumbs, a way of leaving a trail. I don't have any expectation that any of them will outlive me—I'm not sure that I want them to. But everything we write is a letter to the future, isn't it? It's an understanding that words are capable of a kind of immortality, of allowing us to learn from the dead, or to see ourselves as capable of teaching those who aren't yet alive. Or addressing our future selves (even if it's the future self that's going to be at the grocery store in fifteen minutes and needs to know what to buy). That's enough for me.

What I want

(after Kim Addonizio)

I want a deluge. Rain in tons,
salt and pepper television screen
at full volume. Streams
of water holding prisms of light,
dark blue clouds in the distance,
water an inch deep in the street,
car tires misting nimbus clouds,
wetting the troposphere.
I want to be soaked through
subcutaneous fat and fascia,
shirt stuck to my skin, pant legs
heavy and saturated. I want rain
plumping the dirt, mud billowing
into the sidewalks. I want soil
to erode around the roots
of trees, to make them tremble
and crash, quakes rippling
earth like whisks running through
soft peaks. I want history
severed, sediment blown out
like moss power washed
off weathered siding—reckless
and impossible. I want
the sound of it to sweep out
my synapses, blow out the thoughts
that leech onto gray matter
and build castles fortified
with armed guards.
I want what will soothe
a parched mouth on a hot day
in droves.

- Elizabeth Higgins



Laec Christensen

An Excerpt from Chapter 16,

Where do you envision yourself in five years?

In five years, I hope to be published. And my life being a little more stable would be nice too.

How do you want to be remembered?

I would love to be remembered for my stories, however many I can get out before I croak. They aren't just novels, they are mirrors of my experiences, my thoughts, my feelings. If my books are remembered, I'll be satisfied.

After a film by Kore-eda Hirokazu entitled After Life (1988), with the basics premise: If you could choose only one memory to hold on to for eternity, what would it be?

August 2018: Standing at the top of Wizard Isle at the center of Crater Lake. The heat burned me, the water was more blue than my eyes could register, the peak was made of pumice of all colors, and there were chipmunks. That day symbolizes a turning point in my life. I got out of a toxic writing collaboration and started creating my own novels without doubting myself.

To Walk the Spathan Path

Zoé gulped, realizing she'd hardly breathed in the presence of the three most powerful magicians in Spathan Cross. Her throat and stomach twisted into knots. "Ignace," she barely choked out.

"Don't worry. They'll go after me before you and I'm not incapable of defending this place, even from them." He looked back at the three, their discussion getting a little heated. "That is, if they can even agree on anything long enough to team up against me." He nodded toward the sunny part of the courtyard. "That guy could use a refill."

Zoé was happy to go back to the kitchen and out of sight of the three magicians if even for a minute. She came over to the café's only other customer with a full pot and a smile. "More coffee for you?"

"Sure. Thank you." Zoé's smile disappeared when she saw the eyes beneath the hood and the beard peppered with grey. She hadn't seen Inquisitor Saiph in five years. He, like so many from the Church, was a ghost of Zoé's former life. Her bones chilled and her chest tightened up at the thought of her being associated with such a dangerous figure,

here, and within sight of the Archmage, Grandmaster Wizard, and High Sorceress. “Something the matter?”

“Could we... go someplace a little more private?” Zoé asked.

“That would arise too much suspicion from those three. Besides, I’m trying to stay away from that vampire...” He studied her face a little more. “They won’t hear you over their own little debate.”

Zoé allowed herself to breathe a little more. “You wouldn’t remember me. I was just an acolyte in the grand cathedral.”

Saiph’s gaze wandered for a moment. “I do remember your face. We never met properly, of course.”

“You’d better call me Zoé then.”

Saiph nodded approvingly. “Your disguise is excellent. Mind if I ask what brought you here?”

“That’s simple. I had nowhere else to go. I guess I slipped through the fingers of... their purge. Ignace offers a haven to all. He’s been happy with my work so far.”

“Why didn’t you leave when things quieted down?”

Zoé found herself smiling. It was bittersweet to feel her mouth grin. “Because I still don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“Is there anyone else still in town like you? Sister Miriam for instance?”

Miriam. She’d been an ironic figure in the Church. She had been outspoken about the poor treatment of magicians, which was why she was relegated to such a low rank despite her decades of service. Any wish in Zoé’s mind to agree with Miriam had disappeared with the destruction of the Church. “Ignace hasn’t heard anything about her. And if there was anything, Ignace would hear of it.”

Saiph folded his hands and rested them on his chin. “And what about you?”

Zoé’s greatest terror in a normal week was her trips to the central marketplace. Simply existing there and appearing like she wasn’t insane with fright was chore enough. “I’ve kept my head down the last five years. I dare not draw attention to myself inquiring about old Church members.”

Saiph looked lamentful. “Unfortunate.”

The grumbling from the other table erupted into shouts. “That wall goes down the moment YOU can assure me your entire guild won’t set a toe in our

ward!”

“We only started patrolling our borders because of wizard activity on our streets!”

“Both of you have been spying on us! Prying secrets from the League of Sorcerers is punishable by death!”

The three powerful magicians rose from their table at the same time. Bomilcar banished his staff at the other two. Jahanara held her wand within one flick of the wrist away from cursing either Bomilcar or Puabi. Puabi’s arms grew brighter and brighter with fire in one hand and wind in the other.

“ENOUGH!!” Ignace bellowed. He marched out from the shade to the edge of the table. “The three of you will leave immediately!”

Puabi didn’t move an inch toward disarming herself as her eyes sharpened on Ignace. “You can’t tell us to leave.”

“Oh. I beg to differ. This is my place! The three of you have been coming here how many years and you still you don’t know the rules? No fighting in my café!”

Bomilcar chuckled without tearing his gaze away from the other two. “Big talk from somebody who doesn’t know who he’s dealing wi—”

“Adorable. You three children think you can take me on after a mere sixty years of life.” Ignace held out his hand for Bomilcar and the others to see. His fingers had gotten longer and his fingernails were needles. “I would hate to disappoint you. I would even hate how delicious you’d taste.”

Bomilcar’s face contorted with fear, eyes fixed on Ignace’s hands. “We will continue this another time.”

“Elsewhere,” Ignace stated. “Now get out.”

The three fell out slowly, pridefully. Bomilcar was first. Puabi waited until he was almost out of the building before departing. Jahanara lingered for a minute more. “I wonder how much longer you can keep this neutral ground of yours?”

“Long after you die, mortal.” Ignace grinned wolfishly. “Do you want that death of yours sooner or later?”

It was only then that Jahanara departed. Zoé tore away from the scene and found Saiph had long since departed. She took up her pot and his coffee cup. He hadn’t taken a single sip. She returned to the kitchen.

-Laec Christensen

Ari Blatt

Tell me a little about what you do, day to day, and how that may or may not influence or inspire your writing.

I have worked as a seasonal biological technician most of the years since I graduated with my BS in Environmental Science. Mostly this has meant conducting salmon surveys, restoring habitat, and more recently conducting surveys for marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls. I love the rhythm of working in the field, the physicality, the kind of attentiveness it requires, the seasonality. I have a love/hate relationship with the amount of driving it requires. The weather can suck a lot of the time, and a lot of time I worry the data I collect won't lead to the kinds of conservation outcomes I'd like, and I stress a fair amount about what's next as each season nears its end, but...it mostly still beats sitting in a box all day. When I knew I would be going on a different (non-science) track for school, I left my only permanent/year-round position to return to this seasonal work to support my writing in the meantime.

I presume I would not be as creatively 'productive' without the balance I get from field work. Some of the observations I make while in the field directly influences the content of my fiction writing, especially in terms of setting descriptions. My imagination tends to play off what I see driving to and from survey sites, wondering what might be a story of the people that live at the end of the road or how a landform more magically came to be? Also, my educational and field background inform content in terms of exploring various environmental issues such as habitat degradation, the threat of geologic disasters and climate change, the social impacts of natural resource and tourism-based economies, and inequitable access to environmental services. I hope my creative pursuits might interest more people in conservation and environmental justice efforts than me in a box.

Why did you pursue your MFA?

I decided to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing after working part-time for a few years writing for an independent newsweekly, The Corvallis Advocate. This began during on off-season. Then when I began working full-time again, I kept think-



ing each pitch I made would be my last, as balancing this writing work and work-work was tricky. But eventually I realized that writing itself provided me with a sense of balance, and that I wanted to develop my craft more to see where else it could take me. I thought I would stick with Non-fiction when I entered this program, but in the summer leading directly up to it, found myself trying out fiction. That opened a whole world of play and problem-solving that was just too enticing to leave during the two years of the program. I really enjoy the space fiction has allowed me to explore ideas and issues by embodying them in characters and place and language.

How has your view of the world changed because of your learning?

It has become clearer to me during this program that I am inclined towards writing within a worldview in which external forces drive plot rather than any individual characters.

Tell me something about when you were little that might be relevant in discovering something about who you are.

Over spring residency, a writing prompt in Raquel's Advanced Foundations class involved describing a distant memory, which seems close enough to this question that I will paraphrase the pertinent points of my attempt at poetry. When I was 3, my parents moved from suburban LA to suburban Portland, and not long after to college-town Corvallis. Both my dad's parents had passed away recently, my mom was not close to her own, and they were ready to get out of the smog to raise me and my siblings with better access to forest and mountains. On my first birthday in Oregon in November, it snowed. I have this image in my head of looking out at the snow falling from inside the sliding glass doors of the first rental we lived in, which I loved because it was painted yellow. I am a big fan of fall because of anticipation for winter, and for the yellow Big leaf maple leaves, and for so many other reasons, and this memory explains and is dear to me because of all this.

Do you have a writing practice now or is it just a push to get the MFA done?

I haven't seriously pushed much generative work forward lately, though I am writing what I will call snippets for what I hope become future stories/projects. Mostly I'm just letting these things come out when they do to get that energy out, then I find I can focus better on what I'm 'supposed' to be doing. While I have not always felt this way in the moment, working on wrapping up my thesis and all its' components—writing about the work and others' works and connecting them—has been an invaluable practice. I know I would not be as clear as to the what's, and how's, and why's of my writing if I had not gone this path, and I think this clarity will serve me and the snippets as we (eventually) continue down new paths.

How do you want to be remembered?

I was going through some old stuff at my family's house earlier this summer as rooms were being switched around, getting rid of things. In one of my boxes was a q & a worksheet from some exercise I did maybe when I was in AmeriCorps, and it had a very similar question in which I answered, "a thoughtful

badass". I think that still applies.

After a film by Kore-eda Hirokazu entitled After Life (1988), with the basics premise: If you could choose only one memory to hold on to for eternity, what would it be?

I like this question and intend to look up this film shortly. This question combined with the earlier question about childhood has me thinking all about the nature of memory, how concrete and vague memories can seem to be at the same time, how they can be singular instances or collages of moments, how some memories seem to have plots directly in or tied to the frame while others float more freely.

I would like my eternal memory to be: the way early morning light shoots through gaps in PNW forests like beams, or beams of light shooting down from incoming storm clouds over the Pacific near sunset, lit-up yellow Big leaf maples, the oblique light of golden hour in an oak savanna, or again some beams of light shooting down from storm clouds but this time over a sea of sagebrush. Accompanying this would be the scent of saltspray, of thunder-to-come, of crisp, of brittleness, of rain over sage. That tickling feeling on the skin when there is more than just dry and stagnant in the air and you know the difference. If someone were to open me up after I died and found this sort of memory, I think it'd be a worthwhile thing to hold onto.

Excerpt from, *The Hunter*

"You've been hunting a lot lately," Mirna said to me, and I couldn't tell at the time if she was asking a question or stating the obvious, or both. This is how she talks.

"Have to eat," I said to the room as I continued to work with the doe carcass.

"You dropped the we," she said.

I looked up at her leaning on the doorframe on the step between the garage and the mud room, flies buzzing between us, blood in the air. She looked older somehow, standing there. Maybe it was just the fluorescent lighting. The dress she was wearing had gotten thinner, the paisley or floral print faded to the point that I couldn't be sure which one it was originally. It was her favorite dress, not that she has many. It wasn't so charming, the way her bare feet

were clawing at the edge of the step, hands dangling by her sides.

“What? You want to come with me next time?”

She kept clawing. She was looking in my direction, but her gaze remained unfocused.

“I’ve got to head to work,” she said, but didn’t move.

“Nothing keeping you here,” I said, meaning in the garage, meaning more than that.

Her wine-dark eyes sharpened.

“You know that’s not true.” She put her hair up and turned to leave.

I was just getting the deer to hang right that night. I’d butcher it in a couple days. Make some steaks, grind some, make some jerky, shred some. That night, that was all, and I was grateful for it. I was exhausted from the hunt. I finished up, washed my hands, put back on my wedding ring, grabbed some leftovers and beer from the fridge inside and spent the evening alone.

I’d been tracking an elk herd unsuccessfully that season. The Chinook run was dismal, and I had a feeling the commercial crabbing season would again be delayed that winter; I had some extra time on my hands. So much time, yet so little sleep during it. The deer was a consolation prize. More substantial than the little bag of mushrooms I brought back just the outing prior at least.

Mirna used to delight in whatever I brought home, substantial or not. She wanted to know all about the food I found, whether it be ungulate or fish or bivalve, fungi or nettles or berries. How is it exactly—it felt she was asking me—that we are living off this land, that we are doing this, despite everything. I could never hear the despite enough, until I could, loud and clear. The spite scratching at the door, trying to get out.

- Ari Blatt

WRITERS' POND | REJECTION

Anything discovered while pursuing the MFA, being in workshop, or while writing can be shared here in this forum. It will serve others and strengthen craft. Go on then, we're waiting for you.

REFLECTION ON REJECTION

Failure is necessary for learning. That's what I tell my daughter, in some way, almost every other day. I also tell her that ‘not knowing’ is a lovely place to be. If you don't know something, there's always more to discover, to ask or investigate. I'm not sure the 18 year-old is convinced.

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I repeat this daily to train myself in hopes that my brain will seek questions, possibly find answers and bring about relief, perhaps peace, in my body.

It's been a tough summer, the hardest in memory (often unreliable, yes), but August being my birthday month, I habitually depend on joy-filled, sweet-fruit-popsicle days. This year I can't wait for it to be over.

I won't bore you with the drama of a college-bound teen girl, her grumpy and anxious teen brother, unhappy aging parents, navigating marriage while encountering perimenopause and caring for a

tortoise that will thrice outlive me, never mind trying to find time to work and write. I digress. It often happens when I find a few moments of quiet to gather my thoughts and do some work on this newsletter.

What lesson did I want to share? I want to share that I received my first letter of rejection this week. I read it and was thrilled. Of course, there was a milli-second of a wha-wha-whaaa, and immediately, I was elated. I had risked. I had put in the time to put myself out into the world. I had asked someone who didn't know me, or wasn't paid by me, to read my work. She read my work and the work of 800 others, then sent a kind letter in response.

All this to say that we can only learn by doing and being undone. Isn't it time to answer the call? Any open call you come across? There's some on page eleven!

Have some writing insight or learning to share? Please email Imke at: wernicki@oregonstate.edu

FIVE LITTLE INDIANS

By Michelle Good

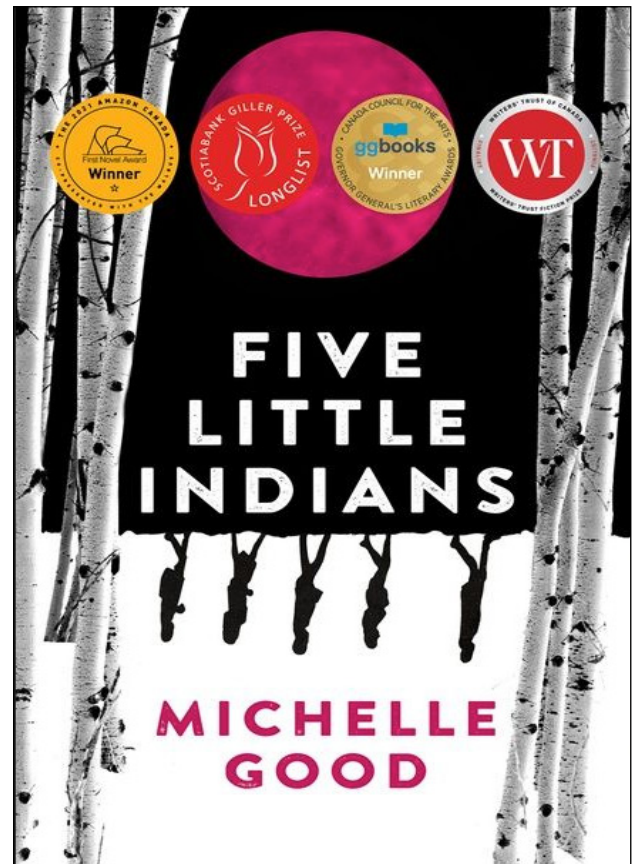
There are many reasons why I want you to read this book. But first, I want to note that I am a white European colonizer and a dual citizen of Canada and the U.S. Both countries are guilty of the genocide of Indigenous peoples. I will never thoroughly feel or understand the horrific experiences of Indigenous North Americans. All this to say, I want you to read this book. It requires witness.

Five Little Indians is a novel written by Michelle Good, a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, a daughter and granddaughter of residential school survivors, and a lawyer advocating for residential school survivors for over fourteen years. *Five Little Indians* tells the story of five children stolen from their families at a young age and put into a remote, church-run, residential school on Vancouver Island. Kenny, Lucy, Clara, Howie and Maisie are barely out of childhood when they are released after years of detention. They separately find their way to the troubling world of Downtown Eastside Vancouver without any support or families, striving to find a place of safety and belonging in a world that does not want them. The paths of the five friends intertwine across decades as they struggle to overcome, or at least forget, the trauma they endured during their years at the school.

*"They call us survivors.
I don't think I survived.
Do you?"*

The author, in my opinion, writes with explicit awareness and honesty that brought deep pause, and raised my awareness of the unrelenting effect of abuse and trauma, (specifically by cultural genocide.)¹ While no one can truly comprehend the experience of another, Michelle Good has written a story that comes as close as breath.

Like many Canadians, I was incognizant of the crimes committed against Indigenous peoples in residential schools, unaware of the past that haunt-



ed or paralyzed generations (a history I'm not sure I could reconcile). Perhaps, this book affected me so profoundly, because the stories of the characters in the book, I imagine, could match the lives of the people I saw, interacted with, or ignored, on my way to work thirty years ago, as they struggled to exist in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

While not easy, rarely worthwhile efforts are, this book strongly reminds us that we must act with grace and empathy, in every moment, because we cannot know the path of each person we encounter. Finally, when you meet someone, who says, "Why can't they just get over it and move on?" please give them this book.

¹-Canada's [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) determined in 2015 that the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and placement in the residential schools to assimilate them constituted a "cultural genocide. The last residential school in Canada closed in 1996.

What do you miss? Who do you long for? What lies buried in the past that you wish you could reclaim?

We're calling this the *Way-back Issue*, a space where past and present collide, a place to rest in restlessness. Give us your take on wayward youth and liminal adolescence. Throw some light time travel our way. Don't be afraid to get a little speculative, a little retro, a little sci-fi. Revise history — new endings most welcome. Tell us about your firsts, your lasts, your just-can't-get-you-out-of-my-heads.

Show us the dark side of nostalgia, all its risks and rewards. There's a danger to romanticizing the past, and we're interested in that too — the ways that wistfulness can poison and uplift in equal measure. Tell us: If you lose yourself to the bygone entirely, can you still find your way back? But also: What don't you want to go back to? What do you wish could be left behind?

Lay down your burdens, your unwrittens, your words waiting patiently with their hands raised high, willing themselves to be called on. For the next issue of Longleaf, we'll read it all.

[Submissions open August 1 – 31.](#)



ALSO, START NOW ON OCTOBER'S CALL! [13 NIGHTS OF HORROR](#)



FACULTY | ELLEN WATERSTON

For our Summer issue, we roped Ellen Waterston in. She's sharp, and I dare say, feisty!

Something about myself? Okay. Yes. I play Wordle.

Three words to describe me? Curiouser and curiouser.

Pursuing writing life? I grew up in a house in New England in which books literally served as insulation. My father was a semanticist, a wordsmith. As a child, books, my imagination, the woods surrounding our house were my favorite companions. But a single event? The high school teacher who saw my skill in and love of writing and encouraged me to take it seriously. The result? I am lucky to have made a living as a writer and, more generally, in the literary arts.

Author? Ursula LeGuin's wit, scholarship, courage, activism, mastery of language and exquisite imagination will always inspire me.

Current favorite book to gift? Just out: *Exotic English* by S. E. Thompson. A rollicking history of the words from other languages that found their way into English.

Kids book? Per "curiouser and curiouser" Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Advice to MFA-ers: Go easy on the "how to" books. Instead, learn how it's done by reading great writing and after that—trust your creative instincts.

A week of travel? Hiking in the North Cascades.
A month? Madagascar.

Most treasured possession? In the end, we don't "possess" anything. All in life is on loan...

First book? Every poem, essay, novella, tome is a "first book". Bring first-book-energy to every page.

Writing practice: In a perfect world, I write every morning for three hours. But BTW the world is not perfect and so I admit I am regularly irregular in my practice. Deadlines are my friend.

Music? More no than yes, but when I do put on classical, folk or rock, I wonder why I don't more often.

Your book to Movie? Lucky to have had soprano Emily Pulley sing the lead in my verse novel-turned-libretto. **Prose?** Sam Elliott, Laura Dern.

As for teaching, what I like best about it sounds trite but is truly true... I learn so much in the process of developing curricula and from all the wonderful students.

Favorite thing about publishing is getting published. Least favorite is not.

Quote: One of my favorite ranchi-smes (I come by them honestly having ranched for roughly three decades): Never say whoa in a horse race.



Photo by Shelly Hummel

Curious about the photograph? In July of this year, Ellen did a poetry reading in conjunction with classical pianist Hunter Noack, the visionary behind, [In a Landscape](#) concert series, held on the summit of Mr. Bachelor.

Now that you're even more curious, here's the low-down on Ellen, who is moving full force through the second half of her life. What are her mantras for her seventh decade? "Show up!" and "Don't let the old woman in." The latter, she explains with a chuckle, she adapted from Toby Keith's country and western song "Don't Let the Old Man In". Realistic about the fact that she has more yesterdays than tomorrows, her goal is to make each moment count and, through her writing and work as a literary arts advocate, to inspire conversation regarding key environmental and social issues, conversation to open minds and hearts.

Her most recent book, *Walking the High Desert: Encounters with Rural America* along the Oregon Desert Trail, is a blend of travelogue, memoir, meditation, history, current events, philosophy, science, and

commonplace book. “Something for everyone,” she jokes. Ellen has published four books of poetry and three nonfiction titles.

In *Walking the High Desert*, Waterston, a former high desert rancher, follows the path of the 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail, and writes of people and places across this wild, essentially roadless, and starkly beautiful part of Oregon’s Outback. A creative and inquisitive literary exploration, *Walking the High Desert* grapples with many of the issues at the forefront of national, if not global, concern: public land use, protection of sacred Indigenous ground, water rights, gun rights, protection of habitat for endangered species, grazing rights for livestock, and recreational and economic demands. Waterston profiles desert residents who care deeply about the land juxtaposed with regional conflicts such as the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation in January 2016. The book invites readers—wherever they may

commitment to care for it. I hope this book inspires people to engage in important conversations about the high desert as well as the broader and seemingly unresolvable issues it represents. As I encountered them, I confess I didn’t see any chance for resolution but by the end of the book... well,” she laughs, “I won’t be a spoiler.”

Waterston comes by her understanding of ranching and the high desert honestly. She came to the ranching West when she was a young woman, in love and full of dreams seasoned with the lore of old and new stories of settlers finding a new life beyond the borders of their towns in the east. She had worked in New York as a photojournalist before packing her bags and becoming the wife of a fellow New Englander who longed to live the life of a cattle rancher and buckaroo. Waterston jokes she soon learned that meant, “Jeans, jeans, jeans, and three times in a family way!”

“The written word has been my life’s common denominator”
she explains, “the glue and the propulsion.”- *Ellen Waterston*

be— to consider their own beliefs, identities, and surroundings through the high-resolution optic of the high desert of southeastern Oregon.

“My original concept for the manuscript was to bring attention to the Oregon Natural Desert Association’s Oregon Desert Trail especially as it underscored public and private land use issues. But then the Bundy occupation took place and completely changed the scope of the book. The University of Washington Press graciously extended the deadline and I was off to the races.” Each chapter of the final version, she explains, seeks to address a section of the trail and an environmental or social challenge specific to that section, but also aims to illustrate how those same issues and challenges are playing out nationally if not globally. “It was a wild ride and I enjoyed every minute of it,” she states.

The process of researching and writing the book only served to deepen her relationship with the high desert, from volcanic soil to sagebrush to open skies of Oregon’s desert landscapes. “Writing this book has led me to love the desert even more and to deeply apprehend how fragile it is socially and environmentally. There are so many new people moving into this high and dry region, just as we did before them—there needs to be a commensurate

The young couple ranched in Montana before moving to Oregon where they purchased a cow/calf operation north of Brothers. “When I look back, I wonder how in the world I did it, living forty miles of dirt and two hours from the nearest grocery store. But I will always be thankful we found this magnificent desert and got to experience the ranching way of life. The high desert landscape spoke to me like nothing else.” In some ways the book is the culmination of, first, her years as a rancher, wife, parent, and arts advocate; then, after moving off the desert and into Bend, as founder and executive director of the literary arts non-profit The Nature of Words in Bend which featured an annual literary arts festival and year round creative writing classes in schools and social welfare programs; and now, as founder and president of the [Waterston Desert Writing Prize](#) which annually recognizes nonfiction book proposals about deserts anywhere in the world.

With two other writers, in 2000 she co-founded the [Writing Ranch](#), now celebrating its twentieth year, which offers retreats and workshops for established and emerging writers. Throughout all her personal and professional incarnations, starting with an early love of poetry to writing for the Harvard Crimson as an undergraduate there, the constant has

been her love of the written word. This includes both her own practice of the craft coupled with her desire to spotlight great writers. “The written word has been my life’s common denominator” she explains, “the glue and the propulsion.”

The process of writing *Walking the High Desert* galvanized Waterston’s commitment to showing up. Despite the fact that she was child of the 60’s and 70’s, decades noted for protests and demonstrations, it took until a January 2020 Fire Drill Friday rally in Washington, D.C., calling for climate protection legislation, for her to be handcuffed, arrested and detained for civil disobedience. “In the last presidential she organized friends to volunteer in the swing states. There’s so much at stake. Whatever side you’re on, we can’t be Archie Bunkers anymore. It’s time to show up in ways big or small.”

As to “don’t let the old woman in”, Waterston hopes to challenge the cultural perception and, she feels, the discounting of “women of a certain age” both as a way to keep herself on her toes and to encourage other older women to make their voices heard, informed and propelled by the richness of their lives and experiences. Waterston cites Pauline Caine Shelk, who at 104 recently passed, a close friend and mentor. “When I was living in Crook County, she and I got into all sorts of creative trouble in Prineville.” Waterston recalls the two joined forces in the 70’s and 80’s to, among other adventures, start the artists in school program that then spread statewide, install the city’s first piece of public art, and bring in a troupe from the Ashland Shake-

sporean Festival to perform in, of all places, a bar. Waterston credits Shelk for inspiring her to “just do it”—write the Upper Country News column for the Central Oregonian newspaper and start a radio program on KRCO. “Pauline saw it as something of an obligation to act on opportunities for good, which she saw everywhere. She was ageless. Her example, into her 90’s, as a quiet but persistent force for creativity and positive change will always inspire me. I hope I can pay her example forward.”

So much to do! For Waterston now, it’s re-firement not retirement. “The question I am asking myself is how can I show up in body, mind and spirit for causes that are important to me, my family, my community? And then there’s the reality check, ‘How much time do I have?’” She says she is brought up short by the realization that not only time, but energy, is finite. “It becomes very important to use both in a focused way.”

This is the story of a woman who came from the East to the West and was captivated by the high desert. She felt immediately at home in the expansive landscape. It opened her up and, as she absorbed its gifts, she allowed it to fuel her writing as well as her instincts for giving back. “As a writer,” she says, “I am in service to the telling but also in service to the place and people where I am.”

-Ellen Waterston is a contributor

calling all writers

This newsletter is for you, the grad student, alumni, and readers of the writing program. We're changing things up! No more themes, just open call! Please send something to be published in the newsletter. You'll be glad you did.

GUIDELINES: Student, faculty, and alumni original works are welcome.

Please share your thoughts, work, unfinished or not.

Prose: 500 words max (excerpts from larger works welcome)

Poetry: No more than two poems.

PLEASE Share your offering by **Sept 15th, 2022**, by emailing it to: wernicki@oregonstate.edu

