

# PEN IN HAND

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MARYLAND WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

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MWA is a non-profit association dedicated to the art, craft and business of writing for professional and aspiring writers.

## The Baltimore Book Festival's Literary New Year

By Paul Lagasse

This year's Baltimore Book Festival, which happened September 26-28 in Mount Vernon Square near the heart of the city, was exciting in many ways. It saw the official launch of the MWA's first anthology, *New Lines from the Old Line State*. MWA members were widely represented in the authors' tents and on the reading stages all weekend long. And for the first time, the Baltimore Chapter had the honor of hosting the MWA's tent, located as always at the figurative crossroads of the festival.

We had a lot of MWA members who volunteered to help set up in the morning, tear down in the evening, and talk to passers-by throughout the day. All weekend long, the MWA tent was a bustling nexus of activity for volunteers and the general public alike. People stopped by to look at the hot-off-the-presses copies of *New Lines*, as well as the many books that members had for sale; many picked up membership pamphlets, signed up for our mailing list, and hung out to talk about the writing experience. Other passers-by we enticed to pick up a marker and add a sentence or two to the collaborative story-in-the-round, which by the end of the weekend filled up



"READ" -- MWA Style! (Standing, L to R: Sally Whitney, Jennie Deitz, Gary Lester, Eric D. Goodman, Lauren Davis, Lalita Noronha. Sitting, L to R: Ally P., Ellen Nibali)

six or seven full flip-chart pages.

All weekend long, MWA members and their friends and families dropped by on their way to or from readings, panel sessions, or the authors' tents, offering a chance to say hi and get caught up.

On Saturday, the operative word was RAIN. We had it in all its forms -- loud, quiet, soaking, misting, gentle, aggressive, the works. At one point, the water was cascading across the floor of the tent like a shallow river, dripping down the center pole onto the table, and spraying

up from the ground in front. As we huddled inside like shipwreck survivors in a storm-tossed lifeboat, we tried to keep the rain from smudging the ink on the storyboard pages, which soon felt like damp paper towels.

Fortunately, the reading for the Write Here, Write Now workshop's first anthology *Freshly Squeezed* happened in the morning, before the rain really kicked in. Many of the authors featured in *Freshly Squeezed* are MWA members, and in fact quite a few of us

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**PEN IN HAND**

## Submission Guidelines

**Topics:** Writing, publishing tips, or experiences that would benefit other members; "how-to" advice for writers; interviews with MWA guest speakers; short-short stories; poetry; articles regarding upcoming events of interest to our members.

**Word limit:** Up to 150 for events; 300-750 for all others.

**Payment:** Your story in print.

**Editing:** PIH reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and spelling as appropriate. Publication depends on timeliness, professionalism and space.

**Submission Requirements:**

You must be an MWA member. Put your unformatted text in the body of an email message. Add a brief bio. Put "PIH" in the subject line and send to: [anngf@hotmail.com](mailto:anngf@hotmail.com)

Submissions and questions are accepted on an ongoing basis.

**Your Feedback Is Welcome**

Speak up. Tell us if *Pen in Hand* articles are helpful to you. Send a letter to the Editor, or write a short article of your own.

Our goal is to match *Pen in Hand* to the needs and interests of our members. If you'd like us to explore a particular theme, let us know.

**Editor: Nancy O. Greene**  
[anngf@hotmail.com](mailto:anngf@hotmail.com)

*P.S. If your e-mail message doesn't say "PIH" or "MWA" in the subject line, it will probably be deleted unread. ;-)*

**Baltimore Book Festival:  
Perspective from a Newbie****By Denise Murphy**

She can't decide if the knot in her stomach is eager anticipation or nervous anxiety. Does she wish yesterday's rained out status would return? Or does she yearn for a speedy arrival of the 11:00 hour, so the program will begin? "Get a hold of yourself," she mumbles as she paces, waiting for a friend to arrive.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Settle.

Why did she invite anyone to come? Sounded like a good idea at the time – moral support. The first time she would read her own written words aloud to a crowd. Not sounding like such a good idea any more. Anonymity feels better.

As the tent flaps are drawn open, signaling the start time is near, she spots an opportunity for distraction. Folding chairs were hurriedly tossed when sudden rains closed the event early the day before. They need straightening. She volunteers.

Occupied time calms her. Other scheduled authors appear. Welcoming banter ensues. People settle. The moderator begins. Her friend arrives, late, and sits across the way. Solitude is better, she decides.

Concentrating on the readers is difficult, as nerves return to distract her. What if people don't follow her text? What if her reference to Jesus Christ offends some? What if she can't adjust the microphone? Her mouth goes dry. Her water bottle is empty.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Focus.

Poetry, fiction, mystery, spirituals – the diversity is wide, a pleasant melting pot of talents. She enjoys listening to fellow MWAB members. One runs over on their time. No big deal. Another misplaces a page. She improvises. Some need to adjust the mic. Not a problem.

Before she realizes, her turn arrives. Breathe, she reminds herself as she

crosses the stage. Take your time. Adjust the mic.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Begin.

She knows the work by heart. She must try not to sound rehearsed. People are listening. People are smiling. A passerby pauses, then takes a seat. For a moment, six minutes seems like an eternity. Then, in a flash, it's over. She steps back, thanks the crowd and announces the next reader.

As remaining readers proceed, she's ashamed to realize she's more attentive to them than to those who came before. She was listening, but she did not really hear. She wonders if others have the same experience.

All applaud the moderator as he thanks participants and attendees alike. Milling about and verbal pats on the back among readers close out the experience.

Denise is free. Free to enjoy the festival with her friend. The crisp fall air, the food and the music, rejuvenate her. The first one is behind her. She may still be a freshman, but she is not the newbie anymore!

Breathe in. Breathe out. Aaah, what a beautiful day.



*Denise Murphy has been writing for decades, though rarely for pay. She is an affordable housing consultant*

*by day and a writer by night. One day, she hopes to change that.*

*Denise's first foray into script writing, Faith Lift, is scheduled to be released on DVD by Ascension Lutheran Church in October 2008. Stay tuned for Denise's first non-fiction book, Don't Run With Scissors! – in the workplace, a back-to-basics approach to management.*

*<http://takeitfromdenise.blogspot.com/>  
<http://www.murphyconsultingsvs.com/>*

## The President's Message: Rejecting Rejection

By Scott D. Morrow

In September, MWA released its first anthology of editorially selected short works by our members. *New Lines from the Old Line State: An Anthology of Maryland Writers* is a professionally produced trade paperback available through online booksellers, the MWA website, and a variety of independent bookstores.

We will also soon launch our 2009 writing contests: the Short Works Contest and the Novel Contest.

Winning a writing contest or being accepted for publication in an anthology – or any venue – is highly competitive and subjective: all are dependent on the needs of the publication and the taste of the reviewer. A rejection slip can just as easily mean our piece didn't fit the needs of the publication as that it is not well written. One of the most difficult parts of being a writer is moving on after we've been rejected.

Ironically, the cure to rejection is often the same as the cause. Writing contests can inspire us to dig out an old piece we'd filed away or even write a new piece. And there's nothing like a deadline to compel us to write that ending that's been eluding us for months or years. The important part is to keep writing.

## MWA Volunteers Needed

### Volunteer Needed: Conference Coordinator!

We need a volunteer to serve as Conference Coordinator for MWA's Spring Conference.

This is a Board position.

If you are interested or have more questions, please contact Scott Morrow (ScottDMorrow@hotmail.com)

### Additional Volunteer Positions:

**Grant Committee Volunteers** — work with Grant Coordinator Sonia Linebaugh to identify and apply for possible sources of funding for MWA projects and operations.

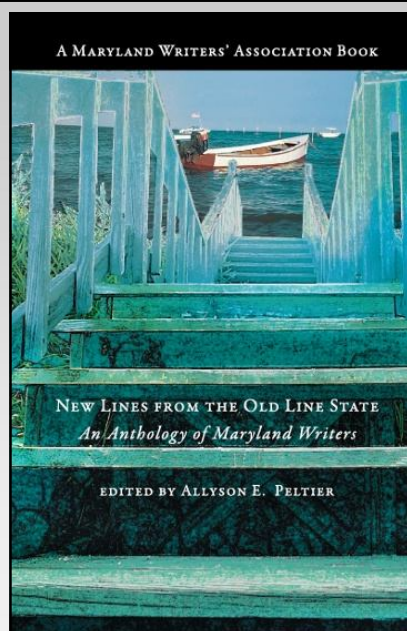
**Historian** — maintains and collects documents for our historical records.

**Contest Volunteers**— The contest coordinators are looking for a volunteer or two to print, address and mail the contest brochure.

Tasks:

- Take pdf contest brochure file to Kinko's, etc., for printing (approximately 400 copies). Save receipt and submit to treasurer for reimbursement.
- Prepare brochures for bulk mailing. Address with MWA member address labels according to zip code list. Hold brochure closed with adhesive label.
- Take contest brochures to Arnold Maryland Post Office for bulk mailing.
- Mail contest flyers to area libraries.

If interested please contact: Mary Beth Creighton at [mbcreighton@clearviewcatv.net](mailto:mbcreighton@clearviewcatv.net).



## Reviewers Wanted for MWA Anthology

The MWA's first anthology, *New Lines from the Old Line State*, is available for sale via Amazon.com and BN.com. One of the more important aspects of online book listings is the strength of customer reviews. If you've already picked up a copy of the book, would you help out by writing a brief review and posting it to either or both sites? You've seen these before... it needn't be a page-long review of every piece (though that would be fine!). Even a few lines talking about how much you enjoyed the book and why can be helpful to potential readers considering a purchase would be great.

If you haven't purchased a copy yet, you can still get one at a special members-only discount of 20% if you e-mail [MemberDiscounts@marylandwriters.org](mailto:MemberDiscounts@marylandwriters.org) with your full name and membership ID number. Or get 15% off if you aren't a member here:

<http://www.marylandwriters.org/publications.html#newlines>

Thanks so much for your continued support!

## Five Easy Steps to Internet Marketing for Writers

By Angela Render



The Internet is big. Really big. You wouldn't believe how mind-bogglingly huge ... wait. That's the universe according to the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Still, the Internet is a pretty vast network of resources and a veritable bonanza for a writer to get lost in, especially when trying to come up with a marketing platform.

The big marketing buzz is to get on the web. It's scads of inexpensive advertising that's global and easy for you to do yourself. The Internet is more than just the web and if you're not using all of the resources the Internet has to offer, you're shorting yourself a huge number of marketing opportunities. The Internet includes:

- The Web
- Email
- File Transfer (FTP)
- Online Chat
- Newsgroups
- Massively Multiplayer Online Games and Communities (MMO's)

The buzz is right about one thing. You do need an internet presence to effectively market yourself in this day and age. It's hard to know where to start, though, and even harder to focus where your time is best spent when you'd really rather be writing ... or, for some of us, procrastinating. Here are five easy steps to get you started.

### Select and purchase a domain name and hosting account:

For a beginner, this should probably be your name or your pen name. Purchase and host through NetworkSolutions.com or GoDaddy.com. Both are top tier providers with 800 numbers and friendly, intelligible customer service. You can't get into trouble with them. Later on, you'll probably want more domain names that reflect your various book titles, but a writer should market his or her personality as much as the work, so a biographical site is the best place to start.

### Set up and use an email address using that domain name:

Let's face it, [angela@angelarender.com](mailto:angela@angelarender.com) looks a lot more professional than [bladesong42@yahoo.com](mailto:bladesong42@yahoo.com). The added benefit is that most people are quick enough to figure out

that [angelarender.com](http://angelarender.com) might have a website residing there and type it in to go look if they liked what I said in the email. Every email you send out is a potential advertisement. Take a few minutes to set up an automated signature that will append to your message. Make sure the signature includes your email address and web address.

### Put up a blog or a website on that domain name:

Now that you're sending out all these advertisements, you need to have something for people to see when they visit. A blog is a fast, easy thing to set up. Straight out of the box it will allow you to put up a bio, picture and some information about you and what you're doing. Websites handle brochure-level information better, but they tend to be more difficult to set up and maintain. Many blogging platforms allow static pages as well as news-type pages and can be a good choice when starting out.

### Add content to your blog or website:

Now that you've taken care of the basics, try to regularly add content to your web presence. This is where a blog can stand out since it's easy to update. Content is text, images, audio recordings, links and video. Post old articles of which you've sold all of the reprints you can. Put up experimental poems or back-story. Post press releases letting people know what you're doing. Interview people of interest to your potential readership. Since you're starting on this so late, you're interested in creating a volume of useful information so that you can attract and keep a following.

### Put your domain name on every bit of correspondence you send:

I mentioned email signatures, but don't neglect business cards, letterhead, print advertisements, bylines, bios and press releases. Anything that says something about you or your book should include your domain name and email address. It's as important today as including your phone number was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These are the bare-bones basics. If you already have some of this, you're on your way — just don't neglect any leverage you can get out of it. If you don't, it doesn't take very long to do. You can even use it as an excuse to procrastinate.

*Angela Render is an author who has been editing and developing websites for over a decade. She teaches regular classes on internet marketing. Her internet marketing workbook, Marketing for Writers: A Practical Workbook, is available on her website at [www.AngelaRender.com](http://www.AngelaRender.com).*

## Tips on How and Why Writers Should Submit to Anthologies

By Ally E. Peltier

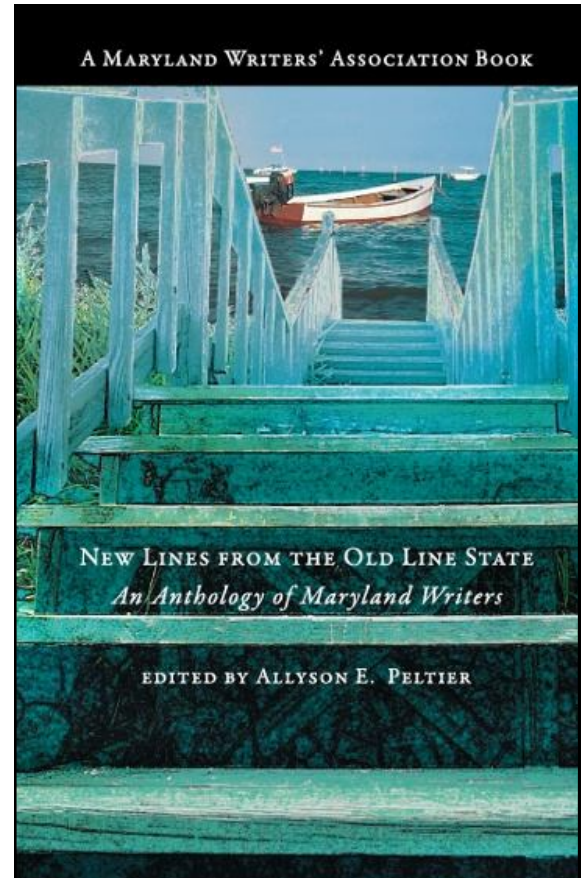
**A**nthologies provide wonderful opportunities for writers in any stage of their careers. Placing a short piece or poem in an anthology can get your work in front of lots of eyes, including eyes belonging to publishing industry insiders. I've known several writers who have received calls from literary agents because of their participation in anthologies. If you're a seasoned writer with previous titles under your belt, anthologies can expose you to new readers who might otherwise never have found you. The networking opportunities are also incredibly valuable — newer writers may find mentors in their more experienced fellows, and all can benefit from the introduction to sometimes dozens of other writers who may become friends, co-authors or connections to agents and publishers.

Anthologies come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from community efforts (like *New Lines from the Old Line State*, the MWA's first anthology, released in September) to more pedigreed series that have featured the biggest names and have been publishing annually for decades. There are anthologies of poems, fiction, essays ... whatever you are working on, there is bound to be a good home for it in a collection.

While many writers publish in anthologies because of an invitation from other writers or from the editor or publisher, you can get your work into such a collection on your own. Seek out announcements of contests or descriptions of ongoing collections by subscribing to writer's publications that list such things (two of my favorite free e-zines include [fundsforwriters.com](http://fundsforwriters.com) and [absolutewrite.com](http://absolutewrite.com)) or even do an Internet search for "anthology submission guidelines" or "submit to anthology." Reference books such as the *Writer's Market* may also have anthology listings, but remember that these books come out annually, so they can only include details on long-running series, such as the "Chicken Soup" books.

### Four Tips for Submitting to Anthologies:

1. Follow submission guidelines to the letter. I was surprised at how many writers did not follow the guidelines when submitting to *New Lines from the Old Line State*. Unfortunately, these submissions were not eligible for publication — as per the contest rules — regardless of who wrote them or how good they were. In professional contests and publications, editors and judges will toss



submissions that do not follow the guidelines without even reading them.

2. Address your submission to the appropriate judge or editor's attention with the requested subject heading. This information (along with the address) should be part of the submission guidelines.
3. Edit carefully for grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. You only have one chance to make a good impression, and you could be up against hundreds or even thousands of other writers. Your work might be stellar, but too many errors — even minor ones — will likely prevent the judge or editor from reading past the first page.
4. Finally, weigh reward against return. You may not get paid for your work but will the anthology be a useful credit or networking tool? Conversely, if the anthology editor received an advance from his or her publisher, you should get a share.

*Ally E. Peltier is an editor, writer, and publishing consultant formerly of Simon & Schuster. She is the Anthology Editor for the MWA, most recently for its first publishing effort, New Lines from the Old Line State. Learn more at [www.ambitiousenterprises.com](http://www.ambitiousenterprises.com).*

# The Flightless Goose: An Interview with Eric and Nataliya Goodman

By Nancy O. Greene

**E**ric and Nataliya Goodman, writer and artist as well as husband and wife, decided to take their love of writing and illustrating to the next level and teamed up to work on their first children's book. I recently had the opportunity to ask them some questions about *The Flightless Goose* and what it was like to work together on this creative project.

**PiH:** Why did you decide to write, and illustrate, a children's book?

**Eric:** It was something I've thought about for years. I think it became more important when our first child was born. Especially when we began revisiting children's books as adults, buying them and reading them to our own kids.

**Nataliya:** I've always been interested in art. When Nicole was born, it rekindled my interest in the books — and illustrations — I grew up with.

**PiH:** Tell me a little bit about *The Flightless Goose*.

**Nataliya:** It's about a goose who can't fly. But really, it's about how people (and geese) are unfair. Before judging someone, you have to get to know them and see their positive sides instead of the differences or ailments.

**Eric:** Yes, *Flightless Goose* definitely has lessons to teach about tolerance, dealing with disability, and being different. It encourages children to focus on the positive and on strengths. But what they will see on the surface is a fun story about a goose who has an accident, can no longer fly, and how he is treated by others. But despite it all, he saves the day. It's been compared to *The Ugly Duckling*, and it's also a bit like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

**PiH:** Both of you work in the arts — one writes, one illustrates. How was it working together on this book project?

**Eric:** You could say it was a labor of love. ...

**Nataliya:** It was so easy to work together. First Eric wrote the story, then I began drawing and painting the pictures.

**Eric:** She'd come up with a picture that wasn't in the story, and I would modify the story. So it evolved over time, thanks in part to both of us working together, both of us being interested in the project.

this book?

**Nataliya:** The fact that we decided to do a children's book in the first place was an influence of having children.

**Eric:** Right. I don't think *Flightless Goose* would have been a children's book if we hadn't had children. Maybe a YA novel, or a poem. But having kids and reading to them made us want to create a book for them.

**PiH:** How do you hope this book will inspire and entertain children?

**Nataliya:** I don't expect kids to start drawing geese on sidewalks and walls, but I do hope they relate to the goose and learn to think before they judge, to treat people who are different with respect.

**Eric:** Right; I do hope the lessons of the book seep in, but the main goal of the book is to entertain. I hope *Flightless Goose* is a book children will want to read over and over, that it encourages them to read. And I hope they learn to tolerate differences and treat others with respect and kindness.

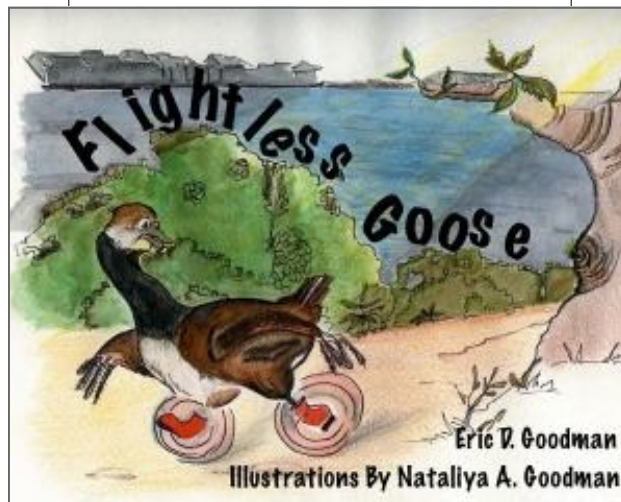
**PiH:** You had a bit of an adventure with the Today Show. What happened?

**Eric:** We knew we weren't going to get a call to appear on the show, so we just showed up.

**Nataliya:** We made a huge poster with "RunGoose.com" on it. The security guard made us take off the ".com," but if you type "RunGoose" in your browser, our site still comes up, so it was fine.

**Eric:** For about 10 seconds, "RunGoose" arched over Matt's head. Then AI came out and we got another 10 seconds on air behind him.

**Nataliya:** After the show, Meredith Vieira saw us with the sign and asked us about it. She asked us for a copy of *Flightless Goose*!



**PiH:** What are some of your influences as a writer/artist?

**Eric:** Most of my writing isn't in the children's category, so my general influences for writing wouldn't apply. But growing up I really enjoyed the Dr. Seuss and Eric Carle books, which I enjoy sharing with our kids. And Maurice Sendak (*Where the Wild Things Are*).

**Nataliya:** I grew up with Russian fairy tales, and the illustrations from Russian storybooks inspired my pictures. In Russian books, drawings often look exactly like the animal, but in clothes. I was always fascinated by the surreal images of animals in human situations.

**PiH:** How have your personal experiences raising children influenced

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## Literary Cubism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Mohamed Mughal

**T**he world moves faster these days. From political campaign snippets, to the latest teen idol (who is it this week?), to the rolling scenes of music videos. Things come, things go, other things take their place and then they too go.

But literature — good literature — is meant for savoring. It lingers. Touches. Whispers. Long after the written words are gone from view, the stories play music in our minds. Herein lies the conundrum. How can 21<sup>st</sup> century literature be fitted to a world that moves faster, to a public that wants and expects an avalanche of enticement?

Literary cubism.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, defines cubism as: "a style of art that stresses abstract structure at the expense of other pictorial elements esp. by displaying several aspects of the same object simultaneously and by fragmenting the form of depicted objects."

The "same object" in that working definition is my story. The "several aspects" and fragmented forms which I display include poems, e-mail messages, personal notes and legal documents, to name a few. And, yes, there's room and necessity for blocks of traditional prose in literary cubism.

Cubist writing is liberating. It adds to a writer's toolbox for telling his or her stories. We've always had description and

dialogue to set scenes, build moods, and create consistent and compelling characters. It feels good to now have the text of an e-mail message to do any or all of those things. We also have poems, personal notes, grocery lists and any other form of written media. They can all be used to great effect to show a lifestyle, define a character's motives and psyche, or to paint a relationship.

As I said before — liberating.

But as much license as literary cubism bestows, there are still some "Do Not Drive" signs on this literary highway. Do not use incorrect grammar, spelling or punctuation (unless you're Cummings "sketching" a poem onto the page). Do not use flat, uninteresting prose. And — whatever you do — do not let your focus stray from telling a good story. The grandest literary artistry is for nothing if you fail to tell a good story.

I find literary cubism to be a sharp, fresh, consistently interesting method for constructing novels. Considering how fast our world moves today, how flashed and multi-variant our entertainment media and tastes are, I'm surprised that more writers don't use cubism. It is an ideal structure for story telling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*An extended version of "Literary Cubism" can be found on Austin Camacho's blog at <http://ascamacho.blogspot.com>.*

*Read Mohamed Mughal's new novel, Resolution 786. Jessica Roberts of BookPleasures.com calls it "Deep, funny, poignant and ultimately satisfying." Available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).*

*(Continued from page 6)*

**PiH:** Describe the road to publishing the book.

**Eric:** As in most arts, it was a long road. I wrote the original draft about 10 years ago. Over the years, I re-wrote parts as Nataliya did the illustrations. We must have submitted to close to a hundred publishers and agents. Most of them wanted story without illustrations, or illustrations without story, and they matched writers with artists. Finally, we found an independent publisher who believed in *Flightless Goose* and was willing to take a risk on it: Writers' Lair Books.

**PiH:** Any advice for people interested in writing/illustrating children's

books, or for artistically inclined couples that want to work together?

**Nataliya:** I'd suggest anyone interested in a publishing career refer to Eric's poem in *Grub Street*.

**Eric:** The one about the burnt out writer?

**Nataliya:** Yes. It's a hard road. Everyone starts out so optimistic, but it's not easy to get published. It takes more than talent. It takes time and hard work.

**Eric:** But if you love writing and artwork, and you're aware that you can't expect to roll into a big publishing deal right away, I'd encourage people to go for it. There's an audience for your work ...

sometimes you just have to work awhile before finding it. And if you love what you're doing and you can do it together, you already have a built-in audience to make it all worthwhile.

*If you would like to find out how to schedule the author and illustrator for a visit to your school, library, festival or event, email Eric & Nataliya Goodman at [RunGoose@gmail.com](mailto:RunGoose@gmail.com). Every book sold will help the Pajama Program charity deliver warm sleepwear and nurturing books to children in need. The Pajama Program appeared on Oprah in 2007 and has been praised by NYC Mayor Bloomberg, Parenting Magazine and many others. [www.FlightlessGoose.blogspot.com](http://www.FlightlessGoose.blogspot.com). [www.rungoose.com](http://www.rungoose.com).*

## Creative Non-Fiction: Literary Cross-Dressing at SCBWI

By Laura Shovan

In the back of my mini-van, where my kids usually sit, were Linda Pratt of the Sheldon Fogelman Agency, Martha Mihalick of Greenwillow Books and Aimee Friedman — Scholastic editor and YA author. Riding shotgun? None other than Newbery Honor winner Cynthia Lord.

They were in Maryland for our regional SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators) summer conference. I had volunteered to play faculty chauffeur for the event.

This is why writers attend conferences. Of course, we hope that connecting with an editor or agent will lead to a book contract. But most of the time, what we go home with is the memory of a great conversation about writing. Often, it's with someone who is as passionate about literature as we are.

A fascinating topic came up as I drove the SCBWI faculty to catch their planes and trains. Let's call it *literary cross-dressing*.

The conversation began with Kevin Henkes. The picture book author is also an award-winning children's novelist. His Newbery Honor winning novel, *Olive's Ocean*, is told in third person, but the limited omniscient narrator sticks closely to adolescent Martha Boyle. The voice is so true to girlhood that Aimee Friedman said her reaction to the book was, "How did Kevin Henkes get inside my head?"

I wish I had written down the list of male authors who the experts in my car said write great female protagonists. However, when I asked about women who write well in a male voice — silence.

"J.K. Rowling," someone finally offered. Lots of agreement. Then ... not much else. "That's it?" I asked, realizing that the novel and two picture books I've been shopping around feature boys.

Maybe you're like me and grew up with opposite sex siblings. Until I was an adult and an author, I didn't realize how fascinated I'd been with my brothers,

how deeply I remember their quirks and mishaps. They were so strangely *different* from me. Is fascination or familiarity what makes an author want to tackle an opposite-sex voice?

To help with your literary cross-dressing adventures, try "Gender Genie" online (<http://bookblog.net/gender/genie.html>). Submit a chunk of your short story, novel or poem. The website will predict if the author is male or female. So ... are you fooling anyone?

You can find a longer version of this article — including a writing exercise and recommended reading — at Laura's blog: [www.authoramok.com](http://www.authoramok.com).

Laura Shovan is an Artist-in-Education (poetry) for the Maryland State Arts Council. Her work for children has appeared in Highlights magazine. She is on the conference planning committee for SCBWI of MD/DE/WV. You can find her online at [www.laurashovan.com](http://www.laurashovan.com).

## Fiction: A Simple Act of Valor

By Lynn Mann

Not every act of valor happens on the battlefield or in a burning building. Ordinary people perform great acts of courage, often unremarked.

I was living with my boyfriend and between us we had four cats; two tabbies, a Siamese, and a black cat. Our black cat especially enjoyed sitting in the bay window at night, and after a few weeks we discovered why: a stray cat lived under the house and would come onto the porch at night.

The stray, also pure black, would sit on the window ledge looking in. While he eventually stopped running away when we approached the window, he never accepted anything from us. He refused the food I put out for him and ignored the box with the comfy blanket, even on the coldest nights.

It tore my heart to see him in the window, looking in at our four warm,

well-fed cats, but he was completely feral. Perhaps with time I could have won him over.

One clear, cold night we heard a knock at the door.

"Are you expecting anyone?" my boyfriend asked.

"No." I answered.

He opened the door. A middle-aged man, coatless in the cold night air, stood on the porch, visibly upset.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said, "but I just ran over your cat. I'm terribly sorry. He dashed out from under the house and I didn't see him until it was too late."

My heart stopped. Two of our cats were with us in the living room but the other two, including the black cat, weren't. I checked the kitchen, then ran upstairs.

They lay curled up on our bed, waiting for us to come upstairs.

I realized with a stab of pain who'd been killed.

I assured the man all our cats were safe, and thanked him for telling us.

I cuddled the cats extra close that night.

Whenever I read of great acts of bravery, people hiding Jews from Nazis or civil rights marchers braving snarling dogs and screaming mobs, I wonder whether I would have that courage. I fear I would fall short. Would I have knocked on a stranger's door and confessed to running over his cat? That man's simple act of valor will stay with me forever.

Originally published at [www.500wordstories.com](http://www.500wordstories.com).

Aside from writing, Lynn Mann works full time, sails, raises orchids and gardens. She is currently finishing her NaNoWriMo novel. [www.lynnmanauthor.com](http://www.lynnmanauthor.com).

# Heart Kitchen

By Kathy Spath

Cut them,  
those black-fringed cabbage leaves;  
neglect appearances.

Cut them,  
those saturated stalks  
down to the center;  
eliminate both ends.

Tear them,  
those lettuce lures;  
use for exterior  
decoration.

Pare them,  
those eyeball craters;  
blind sight of a paper bag.

Trim off the excess  
of that bottom round;  
Inspect carefully.

"Heart Kitchen" was published by Tropos Press in 1986 in The Pearl Number 5/6. Kathy Spath has been writing much of her adult life. She enjoys writing poetry and recently had several non-fiction pieces published in the Write Here, Write Now Anthology, Freshly Squeezed.

## Coffeehouse Fiction Contest

From Sherri Woosley: We are now accepting entries for our annual fiction contest. Stories should be original, unpublished works of 3,500 words or less. There are cash prizes of \$500, \$150, \$75, and \$50 and the winners are published on site. Deadline is January 31, 2009. The entry fee is \$17 and there is an option for a critique for an additional \$25. Also seeking an Editor and a Guest Judge. The Editor position pays \$22 per critique and the Guest Judge will be compensated in marketing. Past winners can be seen at [www.coffeehousefiction.com](http://www.coffeehousefiction.com). Contact [info@coffeehousefiction.com](mailto:info@coffeehousefiction.com) or [swoosley@clearviewcatv.net](mailto:swoosley@clearviewcatv.net) with any questions.

# Recent Achievements of MWA Members

## The Flightless Goose Receives Top Story and Illustration

On November 26, 2008, *The Flightless Goose* by Eric D. Goodman and Nataliya Goodman got top billing in the *Baltimore Messenger* (circulation 50,000) and a front page blurb/inside page feature in the *Towson Times* (circulation 35,000). Eric Goodman and the book were also mentioned in an article in the *LA Times*.

## Michael M. Hughes Published in the Baltimore City Paper

Fiction writer, journalist, and Johns Hopkins staff employee Michael M. Hughes had two articles published in the *Baltimore City Paper* in October and November of 2008. His most recent article, "Epic Cop Fail: Or How Obama Won The Election, and I Spent The Night in Central Booking," has received widespread attention.

## Shirley Brewer Publishes First Poetry Collection

Passager Books, dedicated to promoting new older writers, announces the release of its new book of poems, *A Little Breast Music*, by Shirley J. Brewer.

"*A Little Breast Music* is Brewer's book of delights and laments, evidence of a resilient and complicated heart," says Pulitzer Prize winning poet Stephen Dunn.



# The Baltimore Book Festival's Literary New Year

(Continued from page 1)

first met through Christine Stewart's wonderful writing classes before joining MWA.

As the day progressed, people picked up on Mother Nature's pattern and got into the watery rhythm: first would come a thundering deluge, during which everyone would run for cover, followed by a lull where people would run from tent to tent and quickly ask questions, sign up, pick up a flyer, and buy a book -- and then disappear before the next deluge started. At least that way, all the volunteers had a chance to have a breather in between crowds!

No such breaks for us on Sunday, though, which was bright, clear, and wonderfully dry. The day was nonstop motion from just about the moment the tent flap opened to the end of the Anthology reading. Within the first couple of hours we were almost out of membership flyers -- an emergency call home brought a relief delivery of another hundred (THANKS, Mary Jo!!), which arrived literally just after the last one was handed out. It was that kind of a day!

Sunday also featured lots of MWA personalities on the CityLit Stage, thanks to CityLit Project President Gregg Wilhelm. In the morning, members of the Baltimore



Ally P., Lauren Davis, and Eric D. Goodman discuss *New Lines* while Ellen Nibali, Trudy Sauri, and Barbara Morrison hang out.

Chapter read from their recent work and in the evening featured authors from *New Lines from the Old Line State* read from their anthology pieces to acclaim. The *New Lines* reading was a terrific and highly appropriate way to crown the weekend!

On behalf of MWA, I want to take the opportunity to thank each of our volunteers who gave so generously of their time and energy to staff the tent over the weekend: Charles Colley, Rick Connor, Lauren Davis, Jennie Deitz, Jill Earl, Eric D. Goodman, Ian Hochberg, Frank S. Joseph, Gary Lester, Rebecca Lightbourn, Barbara Morrison, Ellen Nibali, Lalita Noronha, Ally Peltier, Angela Render, Trudy Sauri, Ami Spencer, Howard Stiefel, Harry Turner, Sally Whitney, and Sherri Woosley.

I call the Baltimore Book Fest my Literary New Year, because afterwards I always feel re-energized and ready to face the long cold writing season ahead. So to writers one and all, Happy Literary New Year! This year, I made a resolution to write more; how about you?

*Paul Lagasse writes freelance from his home in Baltimore. He is also President of MWA's Baltimore Chapter.*

Discussing MWA and *New Lines from the Old Line State*.



# MWA/MWAB at the Baltimore Book Festival



←  
Gary Lester and Jennie Deitz get caught up on the latest news.



↑  
A typical scene on Saturday!



Rick Connor and Jill Earl kick things off on Friday evening.





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*MWA is a non-profit association dedicated to the art, craft and business of writing. Both professionals and aspiring writers are welcome. Annual dues are \$35; student \$25. Published items remain property of the author. MWA also publishes e-Newswire, a compilation of opportunities and achievements of interest to writers.*

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### **Sunday, January 11, 2009, 3:00pm**

MWA Board Meeting at Panera Bread Company. Location: Route 2, Glen Burnie, MD.

### **Wednesday, January 14, 2009, 7:30-9:30**

MWA presents: Christopher Reed, Assistant Professor of Film, Video and Theatre at Stevenson University, discusses scriptwriting. Location: Chesapeake Arts Center.

### **Monday, January 26, 2009, 7:00-9:00**

The Baltimore Chapter will hold its annual recap meeting. Come out and share your views and ideas for the future of MWAB. Location: TBA.

### **Wednesday, February 11, 2009, 7:30-9:30**

MWA Presents: Dr. Ned Sparrow, Adjunct Faculty at the Maryland Institute College of Art, discusses the elements of fiction. Location: Chesapeake Arts Center, Brooklyn Park, MD.

## **MWA Meetings and Events**

We've changed our mailing address...

The Maryland Writers' Association has moved its P.O. box to Baltimore!

Our new mailing address is

Maryland Writers' Association

P. O. Box 41671

Baltimore, MD 21203

Please note: we will *not* be holding our monthly meetings at that address!