
East Tennessee **Writer**

Newsletter of the Knoxville Writers' Guild
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Storyteller Will Perform on Dec. 6



Angelyn DeBord, storyteller, playwright, visual performer and workshop leader, born and raised in an isolated area of the Smoky Mountains, will perform at the annual Christmas meeting of the Knoxville Writers' Guild on Thursday, Dec. 6, at the Laurel Theater beginning at 7 p.m. She will be accompanied by local singer and songwriter, Nancy Brennan Strange.

An Appalshop Roadside Theater founding member, DeBord has performed her one-woman shows at festivals and theaters across the country and in Europe, including the London International Theater Festival, Seattle's International Children's Festival, the Iowa Summer Writing Workshop, and the Lincoln Center in NYC. Her family has provided material and inspiration for her writing and performances over the years, and her critically acclaimed "Praise House" has toured all over the United States, was a featured play at the Spoleto Festival, performed at the Kennedy Center, and produced for CBS. The program is open to the public. A one-dollar donation is requested.

New Board Members Take Office in December

Six new Board Members of the Knoxville Writers' Guild will take office in December. They were elected at the November meeting after submitting resumes and ideas for future Guild projects.

The six are Kay Newton, fiction writer and songwriter; Pamela Schoenwaldt, new Writer in Residence for the UT Library; Robert Boyd, adjunct professor in English at Pellissippi State; Laura Still, poet and technical writer; Robert Lydick, poet and publisher; and Caroline Norris, poet and English instructor at Pellissippi State. Alternates selected are Marlene Taylor, an essayist, and David Joyner, fiction writer.

Members' Book

Sale Dec. 6

Members will have an opportunity to sell their published books at the Dec. 6 meeting of the Guild at the Laurel Theater. This annual Christmas sale gives the authors visibility and allows those attending to buy books for Christmas gifts or just to see what is being produced by members of the KWG.

Authors will be responsible for collecting their own money and keeping track of sales.



The Writing News

November 8, 2001

Publishers and Magazines Avoiding Unsolicited Mail

By CELESTINE BOHLEN

Editor's note: Several people have called my attention to this article, which was printed on the New York Times web site.)

Unpublished authors are used to rejection, but these days they can blame anthrax. Anthrax has not only cost lives and caused panic, but also emerged as one more excuse for all but a handful of publishing houses not to read unsolicited manuscripts. At The New Yorker no regular mail is getting through right now, period. As of this week, there are thousands of short stories, poems, queries and letters in an unidentified mailroom somewhere as editors and publishers ponder what to do next •

In the meantime, literary agents, fiction and poetry magazines and small publishing houses that pride themselves on reading all their mail continue to plow through their slush piles, the trade term for mailings from would-be authors. But they are definitely being more careful. "Last week a package from Pakistan came tied up in twine, and we all went into a panic and placed somewhat hysterical phone calls to 911," said Kathy Pories, an editor at the North Carolina office of Algonquin Books. "Then when we went in the files, we found a letter saying it was coming, and so we went and fished it out of the Dumpster."

There are lessons for new authors in these suspicious times, and the first is to include a return address on any letter or package. Several publishing houses, which habitually return unsolicited manuscripts unread, are now simply junking those that come without any identification.

"We don't accept unsolicited manuscripts for review," said Lisa Herling, director for corporate communications at HarperCollins. "We send a card in response to those that come in with a return address, and those that don't, we discard."

Unsolicited mail from unknown sources "doesn't even make it out of the mailroom," said Adam Rothberg, spokesman for Simon & Schuster. "We have always had a policy that we don't read unsolicited manuscripts," he added. "This has given us an opportunity to reiterate this policy."

Stuart Applebaum, a spokesman for Random House Inc., would not discuss mailroom policies. "We don't make them public because we feel it is a matter that we are handling privately," he said. "Unsolicited manuscripts is not something we have encouraged in the past, and we do not encourage them now."

Indeed, it has been many years since junior editorial assistants at major publishing houses were given the job of reading their way through the slush pile. One editorial assistant with a New York publisher, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said he and his peers still met once a month or so to address the return mail. They can dip into the pile and read anything they want, he said, "but I haven't known anyone who has done that." He added that the backed up manuscripts would probably not be returned, but that the meetings would eventually resume.

Still, the myth of miraculous discoveries — like Alan Paton's "Cry, the Beloved Country," spotted in 1947 by a young editor at Scribners — has lingered. Jason Epstein, former editorial director at Random House, said he remembered when a "permanent atomic cloud" of 8,000 to 10,000 unsolicited manuscripts used to circulate around the publishing houses on an unending circuit. "I swear some of them were floating around for 15 years," he said.

But even then, when young editors or receptionists were obliged to at least glance through a manuscript's opening pages, the odds of spotting a good book, let alone a best seller, were very long. "It doesn't happen that way in real life," Mr. Epstein said. "In real life a writer will know a real writer who has an agent, and one thing leads to another and the manuscript gets into the hands of the agent and gets to a publisher."

So now, the real frontline for untested authors are literary agents. It was in fact in the slush pile of a British agent that "Harry Potter" was first discovered in 1995 when J. K. Rowling, a single mother on welfare, sent in the first three chapters of what was published in England as "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" over the transom. "It must have been at the top" of the slush pile, her agent, Christopher Little, recounted later. "Because you pick up from the top."

These days most agents say they are bombarded more by letters of inquiry than by boxed manuscripts. "We get 6,000 query letters from writers we don't know, and they all get opened," said Jean V. Naggar, who runs a literary agency in New York. Nothing has changed in the current climate except an added dose of fear, and some precautions. "It has been haunting my nights, I must confess," Ms. Naggar said. "And I have asked my assistant to wear gloves and a mask."

Arthur Klebanoff, chief executive of the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, which charges \$450 to authors who want their manuscripts read, said, "It is very hard to be in this business and then not open and read your mail, even if most of the mail you get is not ultimately of commercial value." Arthur Klebanoff, chief executive of the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, which charges \$450 to authors who want their manuscripts read, said, "It is very hard to be in this business and then not open and read your mail, even if most of the mail you get is not ultimately of commercial value." (Story continued on page 3)

(Unsolicited manuscripts, continued from page 2)

Even before the anthrax scares, agents had in-house rules about mail that was probably not worth reading — or eating. Donald Maass, who has his own literary agency and is the president of the Association of Authors' Representatives, has received fudge and cookies from aspiring authors. Now more than ever, the rule is never to eat the food, he said. "If the package is too crude, too taped together or with squishy stuff inside, then we think twice about opening it," Mr. Maass said. "We try to be on the lookout, but I am not greatly concerned."

At Poetry Magazine, a monthly in Chicago that since 1912 has been printing poetry sent in by readers, the editors cannot afford to ignore unsolicited submissions. "We almost never solicit anything," said Joseph Parisi, an editor. "We absolutely depend on the mail. Every once in a while we get the nut case, but the worst we've had are dead bugs."

Poetry's editors do not even reject letters that come in without return addresses. "The English almost never put a return address on envelopes for some reason," Mr. Parisi said. "So when we see a British stamp, particularly coming from Cambridge or Oxford, we think we are safe." The Poetry editors have taken standard precautions, but rejected certain safety measures. "For two days my assistant had gloves, and then I realized even the gloves would be spreading it around so what was the point?" Mr. Parisi said. At Algonquin Books in North Carolina, the volume of mail has decreased in recent weeks, suggesting that authors are aware that attracting an editor's attention by mail these days is an uncertain business. "We used to get 10 manuscripts a day, and now that number has been cut in half," Ms. Pories said.

At The New Yorker, where mail deliveries were stopped much as they have been at other news publications, editors say they are hoping that a message on the Internet may persuade contributors to hold off. Bill Buford, fiction editor at The New Yorker, said submissions had gone up in recent years and in normal times averaged about 1,000 a week. Only rarely are manuscripts that come in over the transom published in the magazine. One exception was one by Thom Jones, whose first story in The New Yorker helped propel him as a celebrated and published short-story writer. But the magazine's fiction editors, aided by four or five readers, normally look through them all.

The moratorium has been in place about two weeks. When and how it will end and what happens to the backlog is still "an unresolved question," Mr. Buford said. In the meantime, writers have resorted to private messengers, Federal Express and United Parcel Services as well as e-mail. "There is a real sense of loss that we cannot answer our mail," said David Remnick, editor of The New Yorker. "Bad times require certain measures, but we hope it is temporary."



What 's Up with Local Writers

Linda Parsons Marion was awarded first place in the 2001 Tennessee Writers Alliance competition for her poem "Wanderlust." She received the \$500 award and read the winning poem at the Southern Festival of Books in Nashville in October. The judge was Ron Rash.

Fred Brown will receive the History Award Medal from the Tennessee Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution at the group's state conference in Knoxville March 15. Fred was cited for his stories and features on historical events.

Julie Auer and Anwar Accawi will read essays as part of the "Writers in the Library" Series, Monday Dec. 3 in the auditorium of the John C. Hodges Library at 7 p.m.

Jeff Daniel Marion will sign his new poetry collection, "Letters Home," from 2-4 Sat., Dec. 1, at the Laurel Theater and give a brief reading at 3 p.m.

The Tennessee Mountain Writers and the Tennessee Writers' Alliance will host writing workshops on fiction and songwriting from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 12, and from 9 a.m. to noon on Sunday at the Best Western Hotel in Sweetwater. Instructors will be Pellissippi State creative writing professor Edward Francisco and songwriter Bobby Taylor. Cost is \$85 for members, \$95 for nonmembers before Dec. 8 and \$10 more afterwards. For reservations, e-mail Sue Richardson Orr at theorrs@usit.net

Deadline for the **Great American Book Awards** for unpublished books is Dec. 31, 2001. Booklength fiction or nonfiction is eligible. For information send an SASE to Caroline Caney, Exec. Dir., GAB Project, NFP, 417 Sangamon St., Chicago, IL 60622.

60th Anniversary of Jewish Book Month

By Sandra Parsons

The Arnstein Jewish Community Center Invites Knoxville to Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of Jewish Book Month.

Jewish Book Month was first celebrated in the United States in 1941 as a counter-measure against the attempt by the Nazis to destroy Jewish culture. It is an annual event to honor Jewish authors and their works, creating awareness among people of all ages to read, write, and to express themselves creatively through their talents. This year, the Knoxville Jewish Book Month, sponsored by Arnstein Jewish Community Center (AJCC), will consist of two exciting events held on December 2 and December 9. The public is invited to both events.

On Sunday, December 2, from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM the whole family is invited to the annual Jewish Book Fair at Barnes & Noble Booksellers. There will be wonderful storytellers and craft tables during the event to entertain kids of all ages. It will be the perfect day to stock up on a variety literature, both for your home and to be given as thoughtful gifts during the upcoming holiday season. For the adults, there will be a book signing for a new work by Michal Strutin. *Discovering Natural Israel* is an eloquent tribute to a land whose geography is inscribed in the bible and upon Michal's heart.

Michal Strutin, a local author, will be at the store discussing her breathtaking new book, *Discovering Natural Israel*. Beautiful photographs from this book will be displayed during this exciting event. In *Discovering Natural Israel*, Strutin takes us on a journey through a land where natural and human history intertwines in often surprising ways. Artfully weaving together ancient history and teachings with tales of modern adventure, Strutin reveals how the land and people of Israel have changed over the millennia. With our spirited guide, we embark on a camel expedition into the heart of the Eilat Mountains, to the ancient copper mines of Timna. We stand enchanted before Ein Gedi's whimpering waterfalls, where King David once wrote psalms.

Ms. Strutin has been involved with nature writing from her time as an editor at *Outside* and *National Parks* magazines. Her books on natural history include two volumes of the Smithsonian Guide to Natural America and the award-winning *Places of Grace: The Natural Landscapes of the American Midwest*, featuring the photographs of Gary Irving. She has worked for *Rolling Stone* magazine, and written for *The New York Times*, *Modern Maturity*, and many other national publications.

On Sunday, December 9, at 1:30, there will be another exciting opportunity to mingle with prominent authors. This program will explore Jewish identity in modern literature, and we are proud to introduce three award-winning authors.

Victorian Sackham is a freelance writer whose fiction and nonfiction have appeared in numerous American and French publications. Her new novel, *The Bone Weaver*, is a richly blended tale of history and fiction created around three generations of women. By taking apart their family tapestry thread by thread, and then studying these women and their daily lives of uncertainty, tragedy, and joy, main character Mimi Zilber learns important lessons about courage and the will to survive. In her discovery of what makes these other women unique, she discovers her own remarkable self.

Also appearing will be Dr. Eugene L. Pogany, who earned his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from UT in 1980, his B.A. in Psychology and Religion from Trinity College in 1973 and spent the following year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has written and lectured over the last decade on subjects relating to Jewish-Christian relations, the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism. Dr. Pogany's latest book, *In My Brother's Image*, recently nominated for a National Jewish Book Award, is primarily an account of the author's Hungarian grandparents between 1910 and 1945 during the Holocaust.

Jean Sasson is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Princess*. In her Princess Trilogy, the author helped create a new genre that stirred widespread interest in the human condition and the plight of women in the Arab world. Jean grew up in Louisville, Alabama, a small southern town with a population of only 800. In 1978, she took a job as administrative coordinator at the King Faisal Hospital and Research Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Although she now makes her home in the southern United States, she is a global traveler. She is an accomplished speaker, enthusiastically addressing any issue regarding human rights, and most specifically, women's rights. Her new novel, *Ester's Child*, was released in September 2001.

The afternoon will start with the authors reading excerpts from their most recent novels and talking with us about their work, followed by a question and answer period. The event will conclude with the opportunity to meet the authors while listening to traditional Jewish music and enjoying refreshments. Please join us on these two days of Jewish celebration and help make this year's event a memorable one. The AJCC will receive a portion of all sales that are accompanied by a Book Fair voucher. For the past several years, the Jewish Book Fair at Barnes & Noble Booksellers has been a major fundraiser for the AJCC. Please support us by using one of our vouchers that will be available at the AJCC table at Barnes & Noble on the day of the Jewish Book Fair. Please contact Sandra Parsons at the AJCC (690-6343) with any questions.

Writing Awards Offered by the Knoxville Writers' Guild

Keep this sheet as a reminder of deadlines for our competitions.

More than \$2000 in prizes for poetry, fiction, and essays! The Knoxville Writers' Guild sponsors these annual literary contests. Enter as many of these contests as you like:

[Peter Taylor Prize](#) for the Tennessee Book Award.

[Robert Burns Poetry Award: Terry Semple Memorial Prize](#)

The following contests will share a deadline of **January 31, 2002.**

[Libba Moore Gray Poetry Prize](#)

[Leslie Garrett Fiction Contest](#)

[Young Writers' Prize in Poetry](#)

[Essay Contest](#)

General Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to all KWG contests. See specific guidelines under each contest heading for individual exceptions or additions.

- 1. Contests are open to all residents of Tennessee above the age of 18 with the following exceptions:** Members of the KWG board of directors are excluded from all KWG competitions. Also, see Specific Guidelines under Young Writers Prize for age and locale exceptions that pertain.
2. Contestants may enter more than one contest simultaneously, and may make multiple submissions to the same contest unless stated otherwise (see each contest's Specific Guidelines).
- 3. All deadlines are Jan. 31, except for the Robert Burns Poetry Award** (see Specific Guidelines).
4. Winners and runners-up will be announced at our **Awards Gala** to be held in March in Knoxville. (Details will be announced in January). Include SASE to receive a list of winners.
- 5. Include a cover sheet** with each entry, clearly designating the contest you are entering. Include name, address, phone number and email address (optional) on cover sheets only. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover sheet. **Do not put name or other identifying information on the entries themselves.** (They will be coded, by number, for judging).
- 6. Manuscripts will not be returned;** keep copies.
7. See below for descriptions of individual contests, deadlines, judges and any specific rules peculiar to individual contests.
- 8. Some of these contests charge a \$12 entry fee.** Most provide one free submission per contest to KWG members. Guild membership is \$20 per year; \$15 for students. To join, make any and all checks payable to 'KWG.' **For more information, visit the KWG webpage at www.knoxvillewritersguild.org.**
- 9. Previously published works not accepted.**
10. Send to: **Awards, The Knoxville Writers Guild P.O. Box 10326 Knoxville, TN 37939.**

For guidelines concerning any particular contest, visit the KWG web site at www.knoxvillewritersguild.org

Knoxville Writers' Guild:

Organized in December 1992 in Knoxville, TN, to facilitate a broad, inclusive and egalitarian community among area writers; to provide a forum for information, support and sharing among writers; to help members improve and market their writing skills, and to promote writing and creativity in the wider community through education, publication, and sponsorship of writing-related public events. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at the Laurel Theater. **Officers:** President: John Reaves; Vice President: Julia Auer; Secretary: Kim Trevathan; Treasurer, Lonnie Butler; President Emeritus: Jack Reese; VP Emeritus: Michael Gillespie; Newsletter Editor: Jeanne McDonald; Webmistress: Jo Ann Pantanizopoulos. **Board Members:** Julia Auer, Marybeth Boyanton, Jeannette Brown, Alison Conde-Jaenicke, Brian Griffin, Jacqueline Kittrell, Michael Knight, Judy Loest, Flossie McNabb, Elaine Oswald, Kim Trevathan, Penny Tschantz, Allen Wier, and Don Williams. Dues are \$20, \$15 for students. The KWG does not discriminate against any person because of race, age, gender, handicap or country of national origin. Tel: 531-8855; e-mail messages should be addressed to ed., jmd531k@msn.com or to pres., jareaves@mindspring.com web: www.knoxvillewritersguild.org

New officers will be listed next month.

To join the Knoxville Writers' Guild, complete the form below and mail to P.O. Box 10326, Knoxville, TN 37939, along with annual dues of \$20, \$15 if you are a student. Membership entitles you to participate in study groups, receive Guild discounts on books and merchandise, and monthly issues of the newsletter. For questions about dues or change of address, email jareaves@mindspring.com



Name _____

Address _____

Telephone No. _____

Email Address _____



**P.O. Box 10326
Knoxville, TN 37939**