

WORD!

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Towson University Professional Writing Newsletter

In This Issue:

A Last *Word!*
from Director
Geoff Becker

Your
*Unfathomable
Wardrobe:*
Professor Harvey
Lillywhite on His
New Poetry
Collection

Catching Up with
PRWR Alumni:
June Locco



A Last *Word!* from your Director

By: Geoff Becker

I've just sharpened five pencils. They are in a coffee cup on my desk, points up, ready to go, their elegant graphite tips sharp as weapons. No memory—flash or otherwise. No USB ports, no batteries. What tool is more basic, yet so full of potential? I remember in grade school, how I would work carefully to get a new pencil to stand up on my desk, its perfectly-shaped rust-red eraser the underburn of a rocket lifting off to space. Ticonderoga may be a fort in New York state, but to me the word was associated only with that satiny yellow stick of wood, its particular scent, the close air of the classroom, the seemingly frozen hands of the clock on the wall that would eventually set us free. I'm writing this on a computer, of course, and I used an electric sharpener to get those pencils so perfect. I'm not a Luddite, nor am I particularly romantic about pencils—I always found them much more interesting as spaceships. But I like to keep some nearby, just in case.

I spent third grade in London, England. This was the 1960s and even after more than twenty years, the country still hadn't fully recovered from the war. The kids were oblivious, but their parents and grandparents hadn't forgotten, and the city itself still bore visible wounds. On my walk to the George Eliot Primary School every morning, I passed the fenced off ruins of a bombed church. In class, if your pencil needed to be sharpened, you raised your hand and said, "Sir!" Sir was Mr. Hammond, a sandy-haired man with blue eyes and a face that had a lot of scarring, presumably from acne when he was younger. He wore a moustache. He would beckon you to come up to the front of the room, where he'd take your pencil and sharpen it for you using a penknife, a few deft strokes over a trash can. Then he'd send you back to your desk.

(Continued on page 2)

Scholarships & Writing Contests

The Zoetrope: All-Story Short Fiction Contest will open July 1st.

More information for the contest's requirements will become available this summer.

First prize is \$1,000, while second and third place winners will receive \$500 and \$250 respectively.

All prize winners and honorable mentions will be considered for publication.

ServiceScope is holding their Short Story Awards for 2019.

One grand prize winner will receive \$1,000 and be featured on Servicescape's blog

Stories must be unpublished and no longer than 5,000 words. Any genre or theme is welcome, and short stories can be fiction or nonfiction.

Applicants may only submit once and must submit their story through the application on the website.

Deadline is November 30th.

(Continued from "A Word!")

The other day, the City of Baltimore's computers were frozen by a malware attack; the virus is called Robbinhood, and the perpetrators want \$75,000. When things like this happen, it's hard not to extrapolate and come up with similar scenarios where comic book villains hold all of society hostage. We understand so little about the things we rely on. Good luck doing your own work on a new car. Know anyone who can build their own cell-phone? Last year on vacation, I couldn't buy tickets for the Boston Tea Party boat at the site's own ticket office. I was standing right there, in view of the boat, with cash in my hand. The poor guy at the counter just kept apologizing. Yes, there was space on the tour—I could see where the already-ticketed customers were gathering for it. No, he couldn't sell me a ticket. I could buy one online through a third-party seller, then show it to him, but I didn't have a phone. This solution was working for the other customers in line, but I was at that time still a holdout against smart phones and didn't own one (maybe I *am* a Luddite). I felt the same way I do walking in to work past all the students gazing down obliviously at their palms, as if the real world was no longer the one that mattered. There was nothing to do but wait and enjoy the bright June morning. After about twenty minutes, someone somewhere fixed the ticket problem and I was able to pay. A man dressed in colonial-era clothing rang a bell and led us into the museum. Time resumed its usual, unremarkable flow.

Professor Michael Downs will be taking over as Program Director starting this summer. My last essay was about typewriters. If I'm writing about pencils, it's almost certainly time.

Good writing to you!

Your Unfathomable Wardrobe: Professor Harvey Lillywhite on his New Collection of Poetry

By: Rebecca Ritter

This spring, Professor Harvey Lillywhite published a new book of poetry entitled *Your Unfathomable Wardrobe*. The book is Lillywhite's first collection of poetry since *Ephemeral Blues* in 1985— since "before human memory," Lillywhite said, laughing.

Dr. Lillywhite teaches classes on Editing and Business Writing for the Professional Writing Program here at Towson, and works as a business writing consultant. But he has also written poetry throughout his career, publishing in national literary journals such as *Antioch Review* and *Kansas Quarterly*.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from “Scholarships & Writing Contests”)

The University of Iowa Press’s Iowa Short Fiction Award & John Simmons Short Fiction Award is open to applicants.

To be considered for the contest, you must submit **an unpublished collection of prose fiction.** Award-winning manuscripts will be published by the Iowa Press.

All manuscripts must be mailed to “Iowa Short Fiction Award” as listed on the organization’s website.

Deadline is September 30th.

The Madison Review will begin accepting submissions for both their Phyllis Smart-Young Prize in poetry and their Chris O'Malley prize in fiction **starting October 1st.**

Winners for both contests will be published in The Madison Review and shall receive \$1,000.

Applicants for the poetry contest must submit **three unpublished poems that are a maximum of 15 pages all together.**

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from “*Your Unfathomable*”)

When asked to describe the difference between writing for the workplace and writing poetry, Lillywhite says it’s less different than people think.

“Writing happens on a spectrum,” Lillywhite says, with the most practical writing—business reports, emails, the scrawlings of daily life—on one end, and writing to entertain on the other. Lillywhite is loath to call that side ‘creative writing.’ “Writing itself,” he says, “is inherently creative.”

Lillywhite views all writing, whether it’s a memo, a haiku, or the next great American novel, as part of the same process, one that takes time and work to get right.

“People think that writing is something that happens the first time through,” he says. Lillywhite expressed that he thinks of writing as more a process of construction—like building a house, it’s about putting the right pieces together. “And sometimes going to the lumberyard,” he joked.

Much of Lillywhite’s teaching has focused on the importance of editing. “Most people think of editing as something that happens on the backend, like polishing.” But Lillywhite says that perhaps one of the most important pieces of writing advice he has to offer is this: “The editing you do before most words are written is the most powerful editing you will do.”

Lillywhite is referring to the developmental editing and design that goes into the writing process, even before you’ve put pen to paper. But that doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll have a complete idea of what you’re going to write when you begin. *Your Unfathomable Wardrobe* came about during Lillywhite’s recent sabbatical from Towson, when he hadn’t thought he’d be working on a collection of poetry at all.

The collection isn’t written on a particular theme, Lillywhite says, other than “the awe that we have for being alive.” The book, which is made up of a mix of previously published poems and new work, was released this March, and is influenced by many of the great imagist poets, as well as the tradition of Asian and Japanese poetry.

In the book, haikus are used to divide sections, appearing in a different font and written in a vertical style meant to emulate the handwritten quality of the ancient Japanese form. “The haikus are there for the reader to take a breather,” said Lillywhite. The Japanese influence on Lillywhite’s writing can be seen throughout the book and on the cover, which is a reproduction of Yoshida Hiroshi’s 1929 woodblock print “Hirakawa Bridge.”

(Continued on page 4)

Those applying to the short fiction contest should make sure that their submission is **no more than 30 pages and double-spaced.**

All submissions to the contest must be unpublished works.

Deadline is December 1st.

Check out these contests' websites for more information!

Are you halfway through the PRWR program? **It's time to submit your program portfolio.**

Fall portfolio submissions are due **October 31.** You must submit three pieces of writing from different genres. Contact prwr@towson.edu if you have any questions or when you're ready to submit yours!

All **December 2019** graduates need to apply for graduation by **August 15!**

Lillywhite's advice for writers is to strive for quantity over quality, to keep working, and to never take rejections personally. If writing is like building a house, then trying to get published is like fishing: "If you don't keep your hook out in the water," says Lillywhite, "you're never going to catch a fish."

Dr. Harvey Lillywhite is the author of *Ephemeral Blues*, a book of poetry, and multiple editions of his textbook, *Mastering Workplace Writing*. He has served as Editor of *Plum* magazine and *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Prose*, and has been recognized with awards including a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship, the Bennett Cerf Prize, the Pushcart Prize, and The Nation Poetry Award. His book *Your Unfathomable Wardrobe* is available now.

Catching up with PRWR Alumni: June Locco

By: Alyssa Higham

June graduated from the PRWR program in 2018 with a concentration in Teaching Writing. In March she was invited to present at this year's Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Her session, "Performative Voices in First-Year Writing," discusses the study and creation of spoken word poetry as a way of helping students to find their voices. This was her second year presenting at the conference.

June also chaired a session at the conference, "'Get Real': Post Truth Rhetoric and Coded Political Rhetoric in the Composition Classroom."

Can you tell us a little more about your session "Performative Voices in First-Year Writing?" What inspired your subject matter?

I teach English 101 and 102 classes that are contextualized with a creative writing theme. When we begin the poetry unit, there are often audible groans and even looks of fear in students' eyes as they deploy what former Poet Laureate Billy Collins calls "the anti-poetry deflector shields that they develop in high school." In addition to traditional poetry styles, we also study spoken word poetry, which helps students connect with one another and express themselves effectively. They become more confident, and take more risks in their writing. That shows in subsequent essays. My session was an overview of the lessons and ideas on how to

(Continued on page 5)

Let Us Know!

Do you have accomplishments or news that you want to share with others in the Professional Writing program?

Contact us at:
prwr@towson.edu

incorporate spoken word poetry into first-year writing pedagogy in order to help students to find their voices.

How did you find out that you would be chairing a session for the CCCC?

Once my proposal was accepted and I was invited to present at the conference, the conference organizers offered an option to chair a session for another group. I agreed to do so, and was asked to chair a session called “Get Real: Post Truth Rhetoric and Coded Political Rhetoric in the Composition Classroom.”

As session chair, what kinds of duties do you have?

The chair is responsible for introducing the panel members, keeping time during their presentations, facilitating discussion, and may also work the audiovisual equipment if needed.

You mentioned that this was your second time being asked to participate in the CCCC. What would you say is your favorite thing about the conference?

Yes, I presented at the 2017 conference in Portland, Oregon. It’s difficult to choose just one favorite aspect. The 4Cs is an amazing opportunity to meet people from so many places. It is fascinating to learn how, state by state, variations in government guidelines and social norms of the area affect how instructors teach, and students learn. It is also fun to be able to talk constantly about writing in an atmosphere where others aren’t bored by the topic.

How has your time in the Professional Writing program helped your career?

In both my undergraduate English program at Towson, and in the PRWR program, I learned from really amazing professors. I gained confidence in my writing skills, which helps me to connect with my students to help them understand that no matter what career they choose, writing is a vital part of their college years and beyond.

Do you have any advice for current PRWR students—or for fellow graduates of the program?

Remember to make time for your own personal writing. Life can become so busy that we can forget to practice our craft. I work with a writing group, and sometimes that accountability is the only way I know that I will sit at the keyboard to do something other than grading or planning lessons. Try to treat your writing like it is as important as any other job, and set aside time to work.