TW Contest Winners for 2013 [1]

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Update from the Editors

Celebrating Language that Stays with You

We're pleased to announce the winners of the 2013 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction and Talking Writing Prize for Creative Nonfiction about Family Life.

Hearty congratulations to Charlotte Porter of Island Grove, Florida, who won the flash fiction prize for "Deaf Uncle," and to Drew Ciccolo of Glen Ridge, New Jersey, who won the creative nonfiction prize for "Paige."

TW contests celebrate the diversity online of original, personally driven writing. The contests were highly competitive this year, garnering submissions from writers representing a wide range of backgrounds and professional achievements. All the stories and essays received were clearly written from the heart.

In the end, our hard-working judges focused on the unique, unforgettable use of language in the winning pieces.

Joanne Avallon, the judge for flash fiction, found it impossible to narrow the field to just one story. She selected the winner, "Deaf Uncle," and two finalists: "Sure" by Kathryn Gahl and "A Small Thing" by Missy-Marie Montgomery. Joanne notes that "all three stories are very successful works of micro fiction. Each tells a complete, substantial story in a compressed space."

Of the prizewinning piece, she says:

> I fell hardest for 'Deaf Uncle' because the language haunted me, both the Uncle's ('virgin cartilage' for 'Virgil's Carthage') and the narrator's ('crafts for girls, sports for boys...same old Scout badges'). The author packs so much intention into every word that each has a long half-life, living on in my mind while I walked the dog, taught a class, or worked on my own writing.

"Deaf Uncle" author Charlotte M. Porter lives in an old citrus hamlet in north central Florida. Look for her recent work in *Burningwood, Baseball Bard,* and the Remaking Moby-Dick project of *Pea River Journal*.

Charlotte shared her thoughts on the role of language, both in creating poetry and prose and as a player in "Deaf Uncle":

> For much of my work, language provides thought, word, and deed. That is, language describes language in a meta function, or app. In this story, language, ancient and modern, provides both portal and partition, brattice, as, one by one, the characters turn a deaf ear.

Lorraine Berry, the judge for creative nonfiction, says "the process for selecting a winner for this year's contest was both the hardest and the easiest thing I've done in a long time. I was really beginning to think I'd have a difficult time sorting out the winner when so many people had written affecting, good work. And then I read 'Paige.'"

Describing the impact of the prizewinning piece, Lorraine says:

> I found that I was holding my breath as I read the story. The writer's style invites you to read it that way. Each sentence is a staccato burst, the flare of panic beneath the skin when something doesn't feel right, but you can't quite figure out what it is. I knew that something terrible was going to happen, but I felt I owed it to the writer to keep reading. Ultimately, I owed it to Paige. That kind of writing—the kind that creates resonance, that low hum beneath my sternum, that's the kind of writing that moves me. And 'Paige' did that for me. It resonates still.

"Paige" author Drew Ciccolo is a second-year fiction student in the Rutgers-Newark MFA in Creative Writing Program.

One of the TW contest goals is to identify new talent. When the names of the 2013 contestants were revealed (all identifying information was withheld by our submissions manager throughout the judging process) and the winners contacted, we were delighted to learn that "Paige" will be Drew's first published work of creative nonfiction.

He described the genesis of his prizewinning essay:

> I went into the MFA program with zero interest in writing nonfiction. The year prior, I'd experienced the deaths of my mother and my younger sister within six months of each other. At Rutgers-Newark, I took a class called 'Writers at Newark' with Alice Elliott Dark. She asked us for a personal essay on regret, and 'Paige' came from that assignment. I never would have written it without Alice's ability to make students feel safe and secure when writing about personal subjects.

Both winners received a prize of $250 and publication in *Talking Writing*. You'll find "Deaf Uncle" and "Paige" in our Winter 2014 issue. The flash fiction finalists, "Sure" and "A Small Thing," will appear in our Spring 2014 issue.

Thanks to all contest entrants for your submissions, which we greatly enjoyed reading. We'll announce the 2014 Talking Writing Prize categories late next spring—so be ready to inspire us then with an unforgettable story only you can write.

—*Elizabeth Langosy and Martha Nichols*

Art Information

- The public-domain image entitled "Writing" is from an 1887 Japanese woodcut by Kamekichi Tsunajima titled "Ry?k? eigo zukushi" or "A Fashionable Melange of English Words." It appears via the *Public Domain Review*.
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