A Note From the Director

Welcome to the first issue of our MFA in Creative Writing Newsletter, which we plan to publish annually to report on activities of the MFA program, and as a way to keep in touch with our alums.

The 2008 - 2009 year was a great one for Chatham and for the MFA program. Not only did Chatham receive the wonderful gift of an almost 400 acre farm (Eden Hall), our faculty published seven books this year, many of which won national and international awards. We sponsored two field seminars abroad (to Germany and Ecuador), opened up a low-residency MFA program, hosted a wildly successful international writing festival that was supported in large part with donations from alums, received an endowment to support the Melanie Brown Lecture Series, published another jam-packed issue of The Fourth River, received an endowment to support a full two-year fellowship for an entering student (the Margaret L. Whitford Fellowship), and received funding to offer a Fourth River Fellowship and a teaching Fellowship. We sponsored twelve readings in addition to Bridges to Other Worlds which included writers such as Roddy Doyle, Lori Jakiela, Alicia Ostricker, Joel Tarr and Jenni Ferrari-Adler. In April, we helped to host the visit of Peter Mathiesson.

I hope you’ll enjoy browsing through these highlights of our program and of the faculty, students and alums who make our program so successful. I look forward to hearing from you!

—Sheryl St. Germain

Forthcoming from the Fourth River –Amy Uhrich

The Fourth River, Chatham University’s literary journal, has had a busy year. In November 2008 the journal released its fifth issue, which the editors promoted at Chicago’s AWP bookfair in February. The staff is now in the process of reviewing and compiling submissions for a special International Issue (due for release in fall 2009) and Issue 6 (due spring 2010). Both of these issues received an overwhelming number of submissions, through which the editors are still happily wading. The International Issue will be the journal’s first themed issue, with writing from international authors, authors traveling abroad, and translations of international works (including some pieces by visiting authors who attended Chatham’s Bridges to Other Worlds literary festival in October). In addition, The Fourth River held its first contests (in poetry and creative nonfiction) last fall--the results of which will be announced May 31st. The editors have already begun accepting submissions for the journal’s next contest, and will begin reading for Issue 7 on August 1, 2009.

Though The Fourth River does not accept submissions from Chatham University students, alumni are welcome to submit if they have been graduates of the university for at least two years. In addition, any alumni interested in joining the mailing list for The Fourth River’s bi-annual newsletter are welcome to send a request by e-mailing fourthriver@chatham.edu. More information about the journal (including subscriptions and submission guidelines) can be found on the official website: http://fourthriver.chatham.edu.

* All copy not otherwise attributed written in collaboration between 2008 Rachel Carson Fellow Sara Watson and Program Director Sheryl St. Germain *
Bridges to Other Worlds: International

In early October 2008, Chatham University hosted *Bridges to Other Worlds*, an international literary festival drawing writers from all over the globe. Keynote Speaker and former Poet Laureate Robert Hass led a cast of novelists, poets, and translators, including Naomi Shihab Nye, Claudia Rankine, Peter Cole, Astrid Cabral, Alexis Leviton, Samuel Hazo, Laila Al Atrash, Anahita Firouz and Derek Green. And although he was unable, for health reasons, to accept Chatham’s invitation, attendees of the festival agree that Taha Muhammad Ali was also present through his work, presented by translator Peter Cole.

MFA Program Director Sheryl St.Germain, the imagination behind *Bridges to Other Worlds*, executed the festival with the help of students, who enrolled in a course of the same title. Each *Bridges* student became an intern, with duties including driving authors to and from the airport, conducting interviews, and reading introductions. Many students considered their level of responsibility and involvement an amazing gift, including fiction student Amy Holwerda, who said the following: “The opportunity to sit down with Naomi Shihab Nye for and interview was one that I called my friends back home, my family in Palestine, about, and they all resounded with envy and excitement. Naomi was so gracious and outspoken and eager to answer my questions. And we sat there, sipping coffee, nibbling our lunch, laughing, and I kept thinking to myself, ‘This is not normal. This is not what my friends at other grad schools are doing right now.’”

A large number of attendees, students, faculty, community members, and even guest writers, remarked that it was a weekend that changed their lives. For additional information on the conference, including author bios, visit our website at: www.chatham.edu/departments/writing/graduate/writing/bridges.cfm. Additionally, Fourth River is planning a special issue dedicated to the conference which will publish samples of visiting authors’ work, as well as interviews and book reviews.

*Bridges to Other Worlds was made possible by the generous support of Laurie & Henry Reich, Margaret & Tom Whitford, and Bill Benter.*
Independent Literary Publishing

Every spring for the past five years Autumn House Press founder and editor-in-chief Michael Simms teaches a single course at Chatham University: Independent Literary Publishing, a Practicum. In this course, students are given the opportunity to learn about the publishing industry, step by step, through the publication of a manuscript of their choosing. In addition, students are encouraged to apply for internships through Autumn House Press in order to gain experience working for a successful nationally known independent literary press.

The premise is simple. Each student chooses a name for her press and selects an author she would like to publish. The student and author negotiate a contract, and the author turns over the manuscript. This is where the real work begins. Each publisher must then edit, design, publish, and promote her chapbook (with the help of the author). In three months!

While the focus of the class is on the business of publishing, past students have also showed interest in the design and book-making aspects of marketing a manuscript. Christine Belt, for example, created “Soledad: If Solitude Inspires; An Anthology,” showcasing the work of fellow students Jen McClung, Marrisa Schwalm, Adam Sukhia, and Meghan Tutulo. Each book is decorated with Belt’s original woodblock prints, and hand-numbered as a limited edition.

High Hopes for Low-Residency Program

2009 marks the beginning of a new MFA Program for Chatham University. Our low-residency program is different from the residency program in a few ways. First, in lieu of writing workshops each term, students take mentorships with a publishing writer such as Marc Neison, Peter Oresick, or Karen Williams. Second, although the literature and content courses students enroll in will be the same as those taught in our residency program, they will be taught in an electronic classroom environment. Third, low-residency students must complete two residencies of ten days each in their first and second summers. Residencies will take place on the Chatham campus in Pittsburgh, and will consist of intensive workshops, craft lectures, panels and readings with well-known creative writers. Finally, low-residency students have the opportunity to take one of our creative writing field seminars along with our residency students in lieu of one of the summer residencies, although the field seminar is not a requirement. Chatham University’s Low-Residency can be completed in two years with two summer residencies. The program is very similar to the residency program, with the same innovative focus on nature, environment and travel writing.
This field seminar explored the diverse ecosystems and culture of Ecuador with an emphasis on environment. This trip focused on the nature and wildlife of Amazonian Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, which sit about 650 miles west of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador is the eighth most biodiverse country on earth, with almost 20,000 species of plants, over 1,500 species of birds, more than 840 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 341 species of mammals. Ecuador also has the distinction of having the highest deforestation rate and one of the worst environmental records in South America. Oil exploration, logging, and road building have had a disastrous impact on Ecuador’s primary rainforests, which now cover less than 15 percent of the country’s land mass.

We spent a few days acclimating in Quito, Ecuador, a beautiful colonial city, and, at elevation 2,800, the second highest capital city in the world. We then traveled to Tiputini Biodiversity station deep in the heart of the Amazon jungle. After about five days in the jungle, where we saw different species of monkeys, hundreds of species of birds, flora, and fauna (including two anacondas), we returned to Quito, and then flew to the Galapagos Islands, where we traveled by boat to visit several of the islands. In the company of a naturalist guide, we saw giant Galapagos tortoises, marine and land iguanas, tiny penguins and large sea lions, blue-footed boobies, flightless cormorants, and more as we traveled the land that led Charles Darwin to write *Origin of the Species*.
Germany (continued)

gathering on our own. I was too timid and language challenged to ask these black leather and spike adorned youngsters what the Goth look might mean in the place that sources its symbols for other nations. At the village though, I spoke to a woman who, off season, fosters historical sheep. “Hitler tried to eliminate this breed,” she said, “because it is backward. He didn’t know that they’re Swedish.” I’m still mulling over the practical implications of that one.

The gilded Sanssouci, a modest palace for a Kaiser, astonished Americans accustomed to Mt. Vernon standards of luxury. Sachsenhausen, like any concentration camp, left us wordless, as sickly empty as these bleak spaces. Weimar and Wittenburg, less war-torn, let us imagine ourselves in the worlds of Goethe or Luther. They too were full of the unexpected, like a motel, which had a McDonald’s on the facing side and a mixed poultry yard behind (this presence discovered very early in the morning.) Leslie, our guide in Wittenburg, arranged for us to have Goethe’s favorite meal there, pork noodle soup and stewed plums, which reframed Micky D’s. Daytimes everywhere we walked the cobbles until our shoes felt thin. Later, the cheap and convenient U-Bahn made the whole city efficiently accessible and allowed us to break off into special interest groups—some walked even more with a quick stop at an Imbiss and others opted for a leisurely dinner at the favorite trattoria near our hotel. A few of us, hardy, driven or frugal, went to the nearby supermarket and holed up evenings to write. Before going we had heard that everyone who goes to Berlin loves it, and that proved out. As a place negotiating multiple histories at once, it gave each of us much to respond to and generated a surprising project from each traveler.
Sally Alexander’s book, *She Touched the World: Laura Bridgman, Deaf-Blind Pioneer*, published by Clarion Books in 2008, has been selected as a Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People for 2009. The book tells the story of the life of Laura Bridgman who, when she was very young, lost her sight, her hearing, and most of her senses of smell and taste. Laura learned to communicate, read, and write—and eventually even to teach. By the age of 12, she was world famous. Audiences flocked to see her, and she was loved and admired by children everywhere. Sally’s biography shows how Laura Bridgman paved the way for future generations of children with disabilities, making possible important advances in the way they would be educated.

Kathy Ayres’ *Up, Down and Around*, a picture book for young children, published this year by Candlewick Press in 2008, was named by the Pennsylvania One Book, Every Young Child program as its choice for the year. The illustrator is Nadine Bernard Westcott. This past spring and summer Kathy was a scholar in residence at the John Heinz History Center in a series of weekend events that encourage participants to step into historical settings in Pennsylvania. During April and early May, Ayres crisscrossed the state, visiting preschools, kindergartens, Head Starts and libraries. Her mission on these visits was to promote literacy for young children—to connect young children and books and helps to stimulate a lifetime love of reading. Because the book is about vegetables and how they grow, it also supports healthy nutritional choices and good eating habits for young children.

Heather McNaugher’s chapbook of poems, *Panic and Joy*, was published in 2008 by Finishing Line Press. Toi Derricotte wrote, of this book, “Poetry that makes sheer thrilling leaps, like a daredevil rider who lives between panic and joy.”

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I could never have a daughter
What if she loves me
And hates me the way
I love and love my mother
Until it burns to look
or swallow.

What if it’s up to me and she listens
to a word I say?

—from “I Could Never”
Peter Oresick’s book of poetry, *Warhol-O-Rama*, was published in 2008 by Carnegie Mellon Press. Peter’s been on whirlwind tour to promote the book, which sold out its first run within a couple months of printing. Bill O’Driscoll wrote, “*Warhol-O-Rama* is as much performance as poetry collection, and in the best way possible. The poet’s pop-epic suite of 53 verses is a tour-de-force of slyly constructed and fully inhabited postures and poses, assemblages and ephemera, capturing Our Andy with all the revealing superficiality of a faux-candid Polaroid snapped at a Chelsea cocktail party.”

Marc Nieson was awarded first prize in the 2008 Raymond Carver Short Story Contest. His story, “The Last Hours of Pompeii,” was selected from nearly 500 entries in *Carve Magazine*’s annual competition, and has been nominated for the 2009 Million Writers Award.

Additionally, Marc Nieson will be joining us, as of August, as a full-time member of the MFA program. Marc has taught for us for 5 years as an adjunct, and in that time has participated fully in the life of the program: he’s taken students on field seminars, edited *Fourth River*, taught fiction, nonfiction and screenwriting courses, organized international readings as well as student-centered readings, and served as a voice of wisdom on many theses boards as both director and reader.

Karen Williams’ book *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (co-authored by Khadra Mohammed) was chosen for the Itabashi Translation Contest Top Five books for teaching economics to children by the Rutgers University Project on Economics and Children. The story of two friends sharing one pair of sandals, the book made the 2008 list of Notable Books for a Global Society, awarded by the Children’s Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association. *Four Feet* also received the Theologos Award for Best Children’s Book, which is presented by the Association of Theological Booksellers.
Students Play Role in Important Anthology

–Carolyne Whelan

This past November, Autumn Hose Press released an astounding and important new poetry anthology of contemporary American women, entitled When She Named Fire. It was edited by Andrea Hollander Budy, an Autumn House poet. To promote the book, we did a series of events around Pittsburgh during the week of February 23-27, 2009, while Andrea is doing a series of book tours whenever she has a free moment. The first event was a book launch generously hosted by Chatham University. From there, there were a few events that I set up and a few that Rick St. John, AHP’s executive director, arranged. On my end, Autumn House took the anthology to POWER Recovery Center’s halfway home, aptly named Power House. Andrea read a number of poignant poems from the anthology and discussed with the women what the poems mean to her and how they can gain some insight from them. Then, the residents shared their own poetry. We also held a reading for three women’s business organizations: PowerLink, Executive Women’s Council, and Women Presidents Organization. These three organizations had never held an event together, and had never had arts as a main focus for their events. It was a profound success, as Autumn House sold a number of books, the poets (Sheryl St. Germain, Andrea, and Patricia Jabbeh Wesley) all had a wonderful time, and members of the audience laughed and cried as the poets shared poems and stories of experience with them. Autumn House also donated 200 copies of the anthology to a number of community organizations (such as the Boys and Girls Club, etc) to help spread the empowerment and feeling of community we feel the anthology hold within its pages. It should be duly noted that fellow Chatham University MFA’ers Bernadette James (fulfillment manager) and Laura Vrcek (intern) also helped launch this anthology and keep track of events and book keeping.

Sheryl St. Germain’s collection of poems, Let it be a Dark Roux: New and Selected Poems, was published by Autumn House Press in December 2007. It has been nominated for the 2009 Poet’s Prize. Ed Hirsch writes of St. Germain’s poetry, “St. Germain’s fiery, sensuous, harrowing poems of longing and grief burn with knowledge of the American night. I admire her relentless determination to witness and understand, her brave willingness to follow the truth wherever it leads, her searing discoveries, and, above all, her emotional courage.”
Laurie Mansell Reich received her MFA with a dual concentration in nonfiction and poetry in 2001. She currently works as an independent contractor, through her own company, “Laurie Mansell Reich Writing & Editing Services.” Among her many and various projects, Reich worked as a copyeditor on Sheryl St.Germain’s, *Let it Be a Dark Roux*, published by Autumn House Press.

Laurie continues to write, and attended the the University of Massachusetts Amherst Juniper Summer Writing Institute, where she studied with well-known poet and essayist Mark Doty. Laurie and her husband (who she says deserves the lion’s share of the credit) were among those generous donors who made last fall’s Bridges to Other Worlds: International Writers Conference possible. In addition, the couple sponsors the Laurie Mansell Reich reading series, which has brought such acclaimed poets as Mark Doty and Claudia Emerson to Chatham for both readings and student conversations. The Reich’s also founded the Laurie Mansell Reich Poetry Prize, an annual contest through the Academy of American Poets.

Margaret Whitford graduated from Chatham University in 2008, with a concentration in creative nonfiction. Strongly influenced and inspired by Chatham’s focus on place, Whitford is currently working on a memoir about living in France. This project began as a section of her graduate thesis, entitled, “Traveling Home.” Whitford participates in an informal writers’ group, and recommends working on a project as a helpful way to keep writing post graduation. “When I am most successful as a writer,” Whitford explains, “it is when I carve out long blocks of time, consistently, to work.”

Margaret and her husband, Tom, made a generous contribution to the recent Bridges to Other Worlds: International Writers festival, hosted by Chatham in 2008. Furthermore, the Whitfords endow the Margaret Whitford Fellowship, which allows a chosen student to complete his or her graduate work tuition-free for two years. “We felt privileged,” she says, “to be able to support Chatham… I hope that our gift encourages others to do what they can do.”

The Melanie Brown Lecturer is presented each year through the generosity of The Melanie and Fred R. Brown Endowed Fund. Melanie Brown was inspired by the Chatham MFA program’s emphasis on nurturing creative writers in part through place-based writing. The selection of each year’s Melanie Brown Lecturer is guided by the desire to highlight a fiction writer with a strong sense of place in her or his writing. Students have opportunities to interact with these authors both in and out of the classroom. Ann Pancake and Debra Marquart were previous Melanie Brown Lecturers.

Melanie and her husband Fred are life-long residents of western Pennsylvania. They presently live in Bethel Park, where they keep an extensive book collection.

Book collecting has always been one of the Brown’s primary personal interests. They emphasize modern first editions with the vast majority of the books having been published in the last 50 years. Their collection contains over 3500 books. Over half of these are signed by their authors.
Jolynn Baldwin (2008) just accepted an offer of admission and a fellowship from Ohio University’s English PhD program.

Nimi Finnigan (2007) is a Graduate Part-time Instructor in Intro to Creative Writing, Intro to Fiction, and First-Year Composition at Texas Tech University. She is an Associate Reading Editor of poetry for Iron Horse Literary Magazine, and the recipient of an AT&T Chancellor Fellowship. Nimi can be reached at nimi.finnigan@ttu.edu.

Jane Fishman (2008) was accepted to the Hambidge Residency Program in the north Georgia mountains.


Kathryn Hawkins (2006) is editor and content strategist for Razoo.com, a website dedicated to charitable giving, and also serves as an editorial consultant for Slingshot Labs, a website incubator owned by MySpace. As a freelance journalist, she has recently published work in GOOD Magazine, Wildlife Conservation, Chow.com, and numerous other publications. She lives in Maine with her husband Jeff, two cockatiels, and three dogs, and can be reached at kathy@hawkinsmultimedia.com or found online at kathrynhawks.com.

Jessica Ina (2006) is at AG Properties, a subsidiary of American Greetings Corporation in Cleveland, Ohio where she a writer, editor and creative developer. AGC maintains classic and creates new licensed character properties that are used for consumer products, publishing and entertainment. It’s a lot of fun and she definitely gets to utilize everything she learned at Chatham (especially things she learned in her lit classes). She has also participated in the Ohio Reads program by tutoring 3rd and 4th graders in reading.

Kitty Lagorio (2006) is working very hard on revisions of Gretel, her Young Adult thesis project at Chatham. She contributes to a local paper, The Almanac, and works at Chatham teaching KidLit and helping on thesis committees. Her picture book (developed at Chatham), The Ride, The Legend of Betsy Dowdy, with illustrations by Marjorie Priceman, is coming in 2010 from Atheneum Books. In the summer of 2008, Kitty was a children’s writing instructor for the Appalachian Writer’s Workshop at the Forks of Troublesome Creek in Hindman Kentucky, and sat on a panel for “Beginning with Books,” a children’s literacy nonprofit in Pittsburgh in April, 2009. Kitty served as senior judge for the National History Day Regional competition at Heinz HistoryCenter in March, 2009. Contact her at kitty241@earthlink.net kittygriffin.com.

Courtney Lang (2008) is currently freelancing, mostly printmaking and intellectual property work. She is also still the Programming Director at the Most Wanted Fine Art Gallery on Penn Ave. She just moved out to Washington, PA with her partner-in-crime, Jason, and can be reached at courtney.lora@gmail.com.

Amanda Lescovac (2007) won first prize in the Bellevue Literary Review nonfiction contest. Her winning submission was an excerpt from her thesis manuscript.

Kelly (Grace) Herendeen Markel (2006) is an Editorial Assistant for the American Economic Journals and Freelance Writer for Pittsburgh Magazine and Three Rivers Rowing Association. She is a regular contributor to “My Life as a...” in Pittsburgh Magazine. She got married September 6, 2008, and changed her name to Kelly Markel. She can be contacted at kellygrace@gmail.com or kellygraceherendeen.com.

Jen McClung (2008) is a lecturer at Iowa State University, as well as an instructor at Des Moines Area Community College. Her poems have appeared in Dante’s Heart, Superficial Flesh, and Hayden’s Ferry Review. Her poem, “To Make a Woman Come,” was nominated by Hayden’s Ferry Review for a Pushcart Prize in November. Jen received an honorable mention in the 2008 Laurie Mansell Reich

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Poetry Prize Competition, and was a finalist in WW Norton’s MFA Program-Off. Her email address is jenmclung@yahoo.com.


Amy Sargent (2007) teaches English at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, where she now lives with her husband, four cats, and a dog.

Teresa Schartel (2008) will be teaching a poetry course during the after school program at The Ellis School, located on Fifth Avenue, this winter. Her poems have appeared in Wheelhouse Magazine, Ladyfest zine, and The Monongahela Review.

Jean Wahlborg (2006) is currently working as a preschool teacher in Richboro, PA. As a children’s writer, such employment provides inspiration for her pieces. On October 4th she married Kevin Ladden, who she met through a classmate at Chatham.

Edward Weslowski (2007) completed his teaching certification at Robert Morris University, where he currently teaches part-time.

Stefanie Wielkopolan (2008) is an adjunct lecturer at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, MI and Writer-in-Residence for InsideOut Literary Arts Project in Detroit. Her poems have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from Uphook Press Anthology and Temenos. She gave a reading at Detroit’s Artist Market in February 2009. Stefanie adopted an adorable Boston Terrier named Emerson that was rescued from a puppy mill in Fall 2008. Catch up with her at swielkopolan@gmail.com or check out her blog: http://hickorysmokedturkey.blogspot.com/.

Emily Papale Wilson (2007) teaches English at Pittsburgh Schenley High School and is the Pittsburgh Public Schools/Institute for Learning 9th grade Lead Curriculum Writer (English Language Arts curriculum). Her poem, “Killed in Action,” recently appeared in Black Book Press. Reach her at ewilson1@pghboe.net.

Yoli (2006) is directing her newly adapted children play, “Five Children and IT.” The play for children and families, based on the book by E. Nesbit, will have its World Premier at Point Park Playhouse Jr. on May 8 and run until May 24. See her website at www.yoliworld.net.

Robert Isenberg is a freelance writer, stage performer, and playwright. He is the theatre editor and Scoop writer for Pittsburgh Magazine and has contributed essays, reportage and creative works to City Paper, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, InPittsburgh, Pulp, PopCity, US Airways Magazine, MSN.com., The New Yinzer, McSweeney’s, Yankee Pot Roast, Deek Magazine, Salt Journal, The Three Rivers Review, Pittsburgh Love Stories (anthology), Back Stage, Stage Directions, and others. A co-founder of Ophelia Street, he co-edits the online edition. He is a recipient of a Keystone Award, the McDowell Fellowship for Nonfiction Writing, and a Brackenridge Fellowship. His first nonfiction book, The Iron Mountain, is due out in August, 2009 (SabellaPress).

Isenberg teaches Playwriting at Duquesne University. His many plays have premiered at the Pittsburgh New Works Festival, Future 10, the B.U.S. 24-Hour Play Festival and the Pittsburgh Pride Theatre Festival. Specific companies include the Penn Avenue Theatre, Thank You Felix, and Cup a’ Jo Productions. His Jetlag and 32 ft. per sec. per sec. were cited among the best plays of the year (2002 and 2005) by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and his New Works contributions have garnered several Donna Awards. His latest work, “Carbomb,” receives its world premiere at Duquesne University in April.

As an actor, Isenberg has performed for Bricolage, the No Name Players, Pitt Rep, the Duquesne Red Masquers, the Summer Company, Dog & Pony, New Horizon Theatre, Pittsburgh Playwrights, The Black & White Festival, and others. He is creator and co-author of the Pittsburgh Monologue Project (Monkey Corner, 2006) and co-founder of the Hodgepodge Society comedy lecture series.