A Note from the Director

Welcome to the second MFA newsletter! Here you’ll read about special events, trips, and accomplishments of our current students, faculty and alums for 2010. Much thanks to Rachel Carson Fellow Gina Olszowski for designing, writing and editing this jam-packed edition.

It’s always heartening to me to look over an entire year of MFA activities to see how much we have done, from program-changing gifts from alums and friends of the program to annual trips to exciting corners of the world. I’m especially excited about the Words Without Walls program we initiated this year in collaboration with the Allegheny County Jail. Gina’s written a great piece on it, and for those of you who want to know more, check out this video: http://www.youtube.com/user/CandyStoreProduction

Most of you know I’ll be on sabbatical for Spring 2011, and that Peter Oresick will be holding the reins of the program while I’m gone. I look forward to hearing about the trips to Turkey and England when I return, and to getting to know a new group of students.

I feel blessed to be part of such a dynamic and caring community of writers. Happy holidays.

Warmly,
Sheryl St. Germain

Special Gift from Tom & Margaret L. Whitford

Last year, Tom & Margaret L. Whitford sponsored Chatham’s first full ride fellowship, available to an exemplary leader entering the student body. This year, they have generously expanded that endowment to ensure the Margaret L. Whitford Fellowship will be available for the next twenty years.

Margaret, who graduated from the Chatham MFA program in 2008, explains that the couple’s desire to give was inspired by the students whom Margaret studied alongside. “I benefited from not having to worry about tuition while I was here. I was really moved many times by classmates who were doing such wonderful work while juggling full-time job responsibilities or really demanding...”
Fred was the one to start the collecting,” Melanie says. “He has that gene in him.” Fred and Melanie, western Pennsylvania natives, began their impressive collection of literary fiction twenty-some years ago. It all started with *A Summons to Memphis* by Peter Taylor. “On the paperback, at the top, it said ‘Pulitzer Prize Winner,'” recalls Fred. “As I was reading it, I thought maybe that would be a good thing to do: read all the Pulitzer Prize winners for fiction.”

“We actually started, like so many people, by being accumulators,” Fred continues. “But at a certain point, for space reasons, financial reasons, your own sanity, most of us go from accumulating to actually collecting. And what that means is you focus on something. My interest fell on the award-winners. There’s 52 different awards — 50 are annual, two are bi-annual — and that consumes my energy. Mel’s primary interest is mystery writers.”

To date, Fred and Melanie have collected over 4,000 titles. More than 99% are first editions. Well over half are signed. “They’re signed in our presence,” Melanie says. “We don’t buy signed books.” “And then when they’re done, we touch their signature… exchange DNA with them.”

In February 2010, Fred and Melanie generously donated their collection to Chatham University, and remodeled a room in the Jennie King Mellon Library to house it. “We don’t have children,” Melanie explains. “And we didn’t want these books to be sitting somewhere where they weren’t appreciated. When we saw the writers they were bringing in here, we thought, ‘that’d be good to do.’” Fred adds, “We couldn’t be happier.” The couple is also responsible for the Melanie Brown Lecture Series, which funds one fiction writer each year to speak at Chatham.

**The Melanie and Fred R. Brown Special Collection of Literary Fiction**

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The Chatham MFA Program hosted its third annual “Bridges to Other Worlds” Literary Festival on Saturday, October 23rd. This year’s theme, \textit{Imagining Nature}, gathered award-winning authors and lecturers in the Nature & Environmental Writing genres from across the country.

This powerful day included small group workshops with visiting authors, panel discussions, readings, and author signings. The visiting authors this year were:

\textbf{James Cahalan}, a noted scholar who has written an award-winning biography of Edward Abbey, a writer whose words and actions have had a huge effect on contemporary nature writers. (\textit{Edward Abbey: A Life}) Jim is professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.


\textbf{Todd Davis}, author of three books of poetry and six scholarly books, including \textit{Some Heaven}. Todd brings an intense love for the land to his work.

\textbf{Kate Miles}, a young creative nonfiction writer who has a new book, \textit{Adventures With Ari: A Puppy, A Leash and Our Year Outdoors}. Kate is a new breed of nature writer whose works are both informative and entertaining, serious and funny.

\textbf{BK Loren}, an independent writer who brings the perspective of the West Coast to her nonfiction and fiction writing. Her book, \textit{The Way of the River: Adventures and Meditations of a Woman Martial Artist}, is a memoir presented as a series of essays about her life in the martial arts.

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“Kate Miles permanently impacted me with her statement about ‘Hope’ as passive, and to replace it with ‘Fight,’” says first-year nonfiction writer Marla Druzgal. “I took that discussion to heart and incorporated it the next day in an Environmental Science Writing article for class: ‘Hope’ is a lazy word clinging to ideals someone else should step up to save. I ‘hoped’ all over my aspirations for this article. But I wound up realizing the only way forward was turning back against myself: I am King Coal...Big Oil...Developer...Politician.”

“Admittedly, I was hesitant to give up my Saturday to spend more time at school, but I found the conference incredibly inspirational and productive,” says first-year poetry writer Jess Server. “I truly loved the workshop with Todd Davis. I really resonated with his teaching methods and his personal interests as a writer. He writes a lot of poetry about the environment, and in life he is an environmentally conscious individual that attempts change through his own actions. He was very knowledgeable about poetry that would interest each individual writer, and we did an in class writing assignment that used food as a topic. It is now a topic that I am carrying into my month-long subject-based writing assignment in my Craft of Poetry class. From our very brief time together, I found myself creating some pieces that I truly cared about and that had potential for growth.”

We hope the annual “Bridges to Other Worlds” festivals will continue to thrive, and serve as just another perk of being a student in the Chatham MFA program!
Jimmy Santiago Baca, now an award-winning author with over twenty volumes of poetry, first learned to read and write while in prison. In his essay, “Coming into Language,” he wrote about what the experience meant to him: “But when at last I wrote my first words on the page, I felt an island rising beneath my feet like the back of a whale. As more and more words emerged, I could finally rest: I had a place to stand for the first time in my life. The island grew, with each page, into a continent inhabited by people I knew and mapped with the life I lived.”

Sheryl St. Germain had taught creative writing at a women’s prison in Iowa, and seen first-hand how enriching the opportunity was for inmates. Her son and late brother have both served time in jail, and helped to inspire Sheryl’s interest in working with the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh. Local writer Sandra Gould Ford had been teaching creative writing at the jail for five years, and allowed students from Chatham’s MFA program to shadow her in preparation for taking over the classes.

MFA students Libba Nichols and Sarah Shotland taught their first classes this summer with Sheryl. Later in the fall, the group grew to include Adrienne Block, Matt Bohn, and Ben Gwin. They named the program “Words Without Walls,” and put together a board of distinguished members of Pittsburgh’s literary community to oversee and advise its expansion. Members include Terrance Hayes (Carnegie Mellon University), Toi Derricotte (University of Pittsburgh), Margaret Whitford (Chatham alum), Jan Beatty (Carlow University) and Sandra Gould Ford. Sheryl wrote a grant to the Pittsburgh Foundation to seek additional support for the program, hoping to establish a practice of bringing visiting writers to come and share their words and experience with the inmates.

This October, in partnership with the Drue Heinz Lecture series, the “Words Without Walls” writing classes were treated to a visit from Mary Karr, best-selling author of Lit, Cherry, and The Liars’ Club, who is also a recovered alcoholic and drug addict. “It was truly wonderful to see how well received she was,” says Libba. “The inmates were eager to learn about her writing process and her genuine personality touched a lot of them. Bringing in writers to interact with the inmates about life and writing is an important part of the program, and even more important for motivating the students to see their lives in new and different ways.” Mary Karr was also impressed with the program, calling it one of the best she’d ever seen.

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For the fall term, Adrienne and Sarah taught a weekly men’s class, while Matt and Ben taught the women and Libba served as the program’s coordinator. Each class ran three hours long, and contained about fifteen students. “We generally start with a quick writing prompt,” Sarah says. “We’ll all write for ten, fifteen minutes. Share. Discuss their writing week. They can share something they’ve been working on outside of class, or something they’ve been having trouble with. Then we’ll have a short lecture on craft, or theme… maybe about place, or taking risks with your writing. And then we workshop. Afterwards, the students have an hour of writing time where they get to work on the computers.”

In addition to class time, the students are also given homework: short readings, packets that reiterate concepts introduced during the lecture, and five or six prompts in the hopes that at least one of them will spark some good writing. “We try not to overwhelm them with reading,” Sarah says. “Yesterday, in anticipation for Mary Karr’s visit to the jail, we gave them all copies of her book, Lit. We were like, ‘Don’t worry if you don’t have it all read.’ And they said, ‘You kidding me? You know how many hours a day we’re locked in those cells? We’ll be done! Done by Saturday!’”

I asked her if she’d gotten much feedback from the students, and she nodded with enthusiasm. “What I consider the most genuine feedback is the difference you see in people from the beginning of the course to the end.” Among the women, the most noteworthy change was the sense of community and empowerment that developed out of a group of strangers. Among the men, it was the enthusiasm that bubbled over, betraying their cool-guy façade. “Some of these are tough guys. They don’t want to like it. They’re doing everything they can to not like it. And when you see them unable to stop themselves from liking it, it’s like, ‘We did good!’”

The classes convened on December 3rd to celebrate their achievements through a reading, in which inmates were able to share some of their best writing. Jack Pischke, the Inmate Program Administrator at ACJ writes about the program, “…it has been a great tool; I see men and women gain a feeling and increase in their self-esteem when they see their work published or even on paper for them to read it or send it home. We continue to have more bodies than space allows.”

In addition to supporting inmate writers through classes inside the ACJ, Words Without Walls also aims to create opportunities for writers to publish their work, and continue their practice when outside the jail through weekend community workshops available at Chatham.

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We crossed the 8 mile bridge into Prince Edward Island and stopped at a beach. Now would be a good time to dig for clams, our tour guide Jim told us. Kathy and I scurried around the shore, searching for little bubbles in the sand, a sign that they were buried underneath. Kathy was the first to spot some, and I dug in the wet sand with my hands until I scraped against a razor clam, long and thin. A few minutes later we found a blue starfish. Kathy is my teacher, and was our leader for the trip. On that day she just felt like a friend, and I felt like I was a little kid again, and the world was a magical place (which it is.)

We flew into Halifax, Nova Scotia on July 17th. I hardly knew anyone. We spent the next two weeks driving around in a van together, going on adventures, learning about a thousand different things. There were ten of us, plus Jim. We stayed in hostels mostly, a couple of inns, a dorm room, and a tipi. The tipi was hands down the coolest. A river ran right beside it, into a lake where we could kayak and canoe. We went out twice at night. I have never seen so many stars.

We did so many absurdly fun things in those 14 days. We went whale watching, and saw dozens of small dark pilot whales. We went bike riding on a trail that went through the forest, along the shore and through fields of wheat. We met people from all over the world. We made new friends! We laughed around campfires and roasted marshmallows. We all tried something new, and we all did things that we’ll never forget.
Excerpt from “Leaving My Comfort Zone”

Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia sits on the edge of the ocean. The landscape is primeval. Hard rock is sometimes covered with moss, lichen, low scrubby plants and ferns. The trees are solitary, standing far apart from one another—lonely spare pines. The road to Peggy's cove softly winds through this landscape. Bogs flourish in shallow valleys. The sea flows into coves, backwater fingers branching again and again like fractals.

I like being alone on the cliffs—looking out to sea. It’s hard not to resent sharing with tourists. But I can’t forget I am one, too. We’ve all traveled here to see something beautiful. Each person I pass on the path is being fed by this place.

It’s not just the sight of the constantly moving waters, the jostling, fighting waves crashing against the dark, wet rocks that thrills. It’s the sound. Pulsing and regular, like an in utero heartbeat. It’s the smell. Wet and clean, faintly fishy. It’s the feel. The rough rocks beneath your shoes, glinting with quartz and feldspar and biotite mica. It’s the cool and sometimes frigid breeze that both refreshes the body and wears away at the landscape.

Hannah Hoffman

Excerpt from “To Nova Scotia”

Dear Nova Scotia,

I’m sorry. I stole from you. A stone. From Pomquet Beach, perhaps? I can’t remember. All I know is that it’s the size of my big toe. Only prettier. And without hair. Gray with white lines reminiscent of a child trying to draw a family portrait, but unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. And it’s mine. A piece of you, a reminder of the itch. A promise to look ahead to all that is new, undiscovered. A promise to never forget the magic of the unknown. A promise to never stop seeking it and always return back home.

Forever yours,
Me

P.S. Should I declare the stone at Customs? Along with the ten pounds of Cadbury chocolate, and thirty Kinder surprise eggs stuffed among my underwear?

Meghan Mellinger
One morning in May, I woke up early to watch the sunrise over Bayou Teche. I listened to the traffic coming off of Highway 10 and watched water beetles dart across the surface of the bayou. It was surprisingly calm, but my mind was somehow buzzing uncontrollably. I was here in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana with the Chatham Field Seminar, and we had just gotten in from a week in New Orleans. At that moment, waiting for my friends to wake up for a breakfast of boudin sausage and hot coffee, I wasn’t thinking of the time we spent in the French Quarter, the post-Katrina tours, or the several times I sat by the Mississippi River. They all seemed a distant memory once we found the Atchafalaya Basin.

Everything about the Basin was new, and I was doing my best to process recent events. The day before, we launched into the Atchafalaya on several fishing boats and watched cormorants and anhinga fly over our heads. As we motored through a blanket of duckweed and water hyacinth, a female osprey looped in long circles, protecting a nest full of babies from our group. Dragonflies buzzed frantically, tree frogs puzzled at us from the bark of cypress trees, and silver carp jumped a foot out of the water, sometimes landing right in our boats. Not only were these new sights to me, I was learning the names of everything around us. Thanks to our tour guides and to Sheryl St. Germain, a native of Louisiana herself, I was learning to pay attention, and maybe doing so for the first time in my life.

Sitting by Bayou Teche that one morning, I thought of something Sherbin Colette had said, (the mayor of nearby Henderson, Louisiana), something that stuck with me all night: “Water quality is the life of the basin… I’ve been watching the basin die all my life.” Suddenly, this trip wasn’t just about learning local culture; we were witness to what was being lost. We may have just discovered this place, but this was someone’s home, someone’s way of life, and it was continually in danger of being lost. Sitting by the bayou that morning, I knew I was taking home more than memories and souvenirs. I was taking home a new way of living in the world.
Excerpt from “One Must Imagine Us Happy”

Like blood, a spray-painted image on the side of a building in the Lower Ninth Ward stained itself to the walls of my brain. A boy stood with his feet inside a tire swing. His hands gripped the rope holding the tire as he swung. He wore a ball cap.

I became the boy in the tire swing – the sun crisping my skin, and the wind blowing my cap from my shaved scalp. My head tilted back, and my eyes closed. Even though my friends waited their turn, I was the only one there. The closest I’ll come to flying through the clouds. And yet this glory, this horse with two legs to the sky that I rode, was also a painful memory. I couldn’t be sure if the rope broke or I fell, but I dropped to the ground landing on a rock. I wiggled and squirmed like a board, stiff with pain. Dirt stuck to my tears, while my friends helped me limp home to Mom.

In this mural, there stood no trees, no friends. The boy floated alone, and I couldn’t even tell if he was smiling. But I knew that even though he was alone, he would always swing, never gasping for air on the hard ground.

Matt Bohn

Excerpt from “I’m Proud to be a Southerner”

Strolling in the French Market, I couldn’t help thinking the place ought to change its name to Chinese Market, as eight out of ten stalls sold local souvenirs produced in China—Mardi Gras beads and masks, New Orleans magnets, trinkets and key chains, not to mention my new “Made In China” camera purchased on Canal Street. Boy! I felt so much at home. I never noticed as many object names associated with China back home as I do here in the United States.

As a Chinese national in the United States, I have mixed feelings about the Chinese approach to globalization. On one hand, China makes positive contributions to the world economy. On the other hand, the raw materials on these Made-In-China products are from China, which means China now not only sustains 1.3 billion Chinese people but also maintains 300 million lives in the United States and elsewhere in the world by exporting tons of goods abroad. How can the local U.S. economy survive when facing the impact of low cost and cheap labor from the Middle Kingdom? China often says she won’t harm the interest of other countries and wants to develop a just and harmonious economic market. I feel ashamed to see that the China products have stifled the creativity and competition among small local businesses in the world.

Songyi Zhang
Nine graduate students at Chatham University recently had the opportunity to get to know Pittsburgh more intimately. As enrollees in a two-week, intensive field seminar, with syllabus designed by instructor Marc Nieson entitled *On Rivers, Rust, and Renewal*, they learned that ‘the steel city’ is much more than its moniker, appointed nearly a century ago.

The class kept extensive journals and took photographs, and traveled by university van to neighborhoods such as Braddock, Rankin, Homestead, Springdale, Bloomfield, Garfield, East Liberty, Mount Washington, North Side, and the Hill and Strip districts, where they met and talked with local authors, business people, and residents dedicated to their respective communities.

In addition to these field trips and tours, reading assignments were integral to spurring ideas and discussions throughout the course. Students read poetry, fiction and non-fiction/memoir, such as Andrew Carnegie’s *The Gospel of Wealth Essays and Other Writings*, Thomas Bell’s *Out of this Furnace*, Albert French’s *I Can’t Wait on God*, and other excerpted texts applicable to the landscape. During the seminar itself, they visited the Rachel Carson Homestead, Frick’s Clayton House, the Carrie Furnaces, the Mattress Factory, City of Asylum, and even PNC Park for a Pirate’s game.

“I didn’t come into the class with any expectation, I don’t think, but I certainly didn’t expect to get the chance to visit the Carrie Works or to learn as much as I did about the city’s history,” said student Ben Gwin, of Titusville, New Jersey. “I thought I had a fairly firm grasp on the labor history and the Fricks and Carnevies and Mellons, but I did not. The cracks between the different boroughs and patches of small town character of the city are full of fantastic possibility for fiction and essay, and I hope I can produce work that will do justice to the make-up and texture of Pittsburgh.”

*Rebecca Clever*
I would never run over a dog on purpose. I’m driving my wife Janet’s brand new ’94 Taurus. It’s not a killing machine. The presence of the crippled dog in the back seat and the canine’s two transient owners is the result of the Taurus’ inadequate cup holders—none of which hold a twenty-four ounce iced latte comfortably—thus, forcing me to grip the beverage between my knees while writing down an important address on a napkin as it was dictated over my car phone. A pothole attacked my car and when I looked down at the stain spreading on my lap, I clipped the dog and sent him twirling across Fifth Avenue where he collapsed on the knoll by the University of Pittsburgh.

When I got out of the car to investigate the wounded Labrador a young haggard-looking couple knelt beside me and identified themselves as the dog’s owners. Oddly, they were the only two gutter punks in view. Normally, they roam in expansive, cardboard-colored packs between the coffee shop and the bar that looks like a castle on Fifth. I offered to drive the couple and their dog downtown to the vet-tech school which closes in less than an hour.

The dog shivers and howls in the back seat.

“He’s bleeding,” says the girl. She wears a piercing through the bridge of her nose and matching robin tattoos on her collarbones. The feathers look like dried blood cresting the torn neck of her Duquesne University shirt.

“Did you go to Duquesne?” I ask.

“Once,” she said.

I crack the windows. My jittery passengers and the frustrated traffic converse indirectly.

“You’ve got to save our dog, mister.” The wiry mud-streaked kid in the front with me wears a Barry Foster jersey with the sleeves torn off.

“I’ll try,” I say.

Excerpt from “I Love Dogs”

Inspired by Pittsburgh...

Student Writing

Ben Gwin
The Writing Field Seminar to Spain in May 2010 was an adventure. We stayed on an organic farm near the traditional Spanish village of Sella. We took eight hour hikes, kayaked in the Mediterranean, climbed mountains, picked oranges and lemons from an orchard, baked bread, made our own paper, and communicated with a Spanish family and volunteers from around the world that were living on the farm. We took trips to the cities of Alicante, Valencia, and Granada. We grew as a community of writers and learned things about Spain’s landscape, culture, and traditions. We came home wanting to stay in Spain. We came home with a multitude of experience and inspiration for our writing.

The sun comes out most days, but this is not the sunny Spain you read about, hear about in other people’s stories. The rain in Spain does NOT fall mainly on the plain. It rains in the mountains too, even in May, even with all the citrus trees. Most of the time we are cold, huddling in blankets while we read and journal in corners of the farm house, a skinny girl drinking wine on an outside wooden table, staring at mountains, wrapping her lean frame in a thin scarf that smells of fresh bread and oranges. It is not the kind of cold to complain about though. It is the kind of cold that makes you want to walk on the grass with bare feet, to feel the hard ground underneath you just to remember, suddenly, that you are in Spain relaxing, writing, and the air smells like the leaves of olive trees and the herbs, thyme and rosemary, growing wild outside of your cute terraced bedroom window. Too soon, we will be back in Pittsburgh missing cold ground, cursing humidity, wanting to be outside to smell whatever we can, an old wooden table the neighbor is selling at her garage sale, an open dumpster, the sunflowers accidentally growing underneath a bird feeder. The family we stay with on the organic farm in Sella has their own philosophy: your life is your own responsibility. You are responsible for all of it, each decision, each move, each word. I have woven their philosophy into my freshly tanned skin, my calloused feet, my knotted hair and heart. I will come back here. I will be back, Spain.

Nicolette Telech
Excerpt from “Death Grip”

“I can tell you’re nervous because you’ve got a death grip on the rope.” Of course, that was easy for Johnny to say. He was an experienced rock climber, and I was a climbing virgin. Here’s the difference: I had watched him scale this very rock earlier in the morning barefoot, without a helmet or a harness. And here I was, fully equipped with stylish blue-colored rock climbing shoes, a blue helmet, and two belayers on the ground below me, still terrified.

“Okay,” I said, still shaking. I took a deep breath. “I’m ready.”

And so I began my climb. From what I remember, the layout of the mountain could be divided into thirds. The first part of the mountain—which covered the starting position on the ground and reaching to the olive tree—was the easiest, not only because it was close to the ground, but because the footholds were large in size and in quantity. As I passed the olive tree that sprouted out from the surface of the rock, however, the climb became more difficult. I had to abandon my pre-conceived notion of what a foothold should look and feel like and trust that my foot would be secure enough in those barely-jutting ledges to support my entire body weight. I also had to get creative with the angles of my body, at times sprawling out flat on the rock before I found the next foothold, the next hand grip.

And yet, to my surprise, I was doing it. I was like Princess Peach from Mario Brothers, living ledge to ledge, hoisting my dainty self upwards toward some unknown treasure at the top of this mountain. Johnny had told us the mountain was named “The Rhino” for its jutting rock formation that closely resembles the horn of a rhino. And so I focused on climbing the rhino’s gray-brown skin, scanning its smooth surfaces for grooves large enough for my tiptoes, pock marks large enough for my fingers to grip.

Kayla Washko
New MFA Fellows

This year, Chatham University was pleased to select six outstanding fellows for the MFA program: Sarah Leavens, the new Margaret Whitford Fellow; Gina Olszowski, the new Rachel Carson Fellow; Caroline Tanski, the new Fourth River Fellow; and Andy Decker, Katrina Otuonye, and Lo Williams, this year’s new teaching fellows. Robert Isenberg leads the group as Chatham’s second-year Margaret L. Whitford Fellow.

Margaret L. Whitford Fellowship:
Sarah Leavens believes strongly in the indispensable place creativity and the arts hold in daily life. A childhood making honey and cider, transplanting tomatoes, and exploring the woods in rural Indiana taught Sarah to live closely with the land and be self-sufficient, traits that have proven the foundation of her adult philosophy. As the Community Outreach & Education Specialist at the Clark State Performing Arts Center, Sarah coordinated numerous programs that provided positive arts experiences for at-risk youth and their families. Sarah received a BFA in Creative Writing and Studio Art from Wittenberg University. Her current interests are a newfound passion for jogging (first half-marathon in April 2010), book-making, and writing poetry to express the ways a dog can change one’s life.

Rachel Carson Fellowship:
Gina Olszowski graduated from Drake University in 2005, and worked as an Art Director for a Chicago ad agency, designing print ads, TV commercials, and packages for toys. In 2006, she was awarded with a grant from the Wild Gift, which she used to write and self-published a book titled Now Coming to a Town Near You. Her book takes a critical look at urban sprawl and its effect on communities like the one in which she grew up. Gina eventually left her job at the ad agency to work mornings at a coffee shop, where she was given the chance to continue pursuing art, and the freedom to give numerous public talks on her book. Upon discovering that she’d fallen completely in love with the act of channeling her creativity towards pursuits she cared about, she applied to Chatham.

Fourth River Fellowship:
Caroline Tanski grew up in Bar Harbor, Maine. She received her BA in 2006 from Bard College at Simon’s Rock, where she gained her first editing experience working on a magazine assembled with scissors, glue sticks, and a photocopier. Since then, she has been working as a library assistant for the Harvard College Library. Most recently, her passion for grammatical correctness has led her to explore the joys of copy editing, and she has volunteered her services at Slush Pile Magazine and Harvard Review.

Teaching Fellowship:
Lorena Williams hails from the deserts of Oregon and Arizona and is a recent transplant to Pittsburgh’s humid climes. In 2009, after stints as a farmer, fire fighter, business owner, and pastry wrangler, she moved east to reincarnate as a writer and teacher in Chatham’s MFA in Creative Writing program.

Teaching Assistantships:
Andy Decker received his BA in Psychology and Writing from Coe College in his hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He spent the past year teaching English at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Since then, Andy has made arrangements to cut his neighbor’s grass for the summer.

Katrina Otuonye is from Tennessee, by way of Upper Michigan. She says pop and can make her own pasties, all while cheering for the Tennessee Volunteers and drinking sweet tea. She is a graduate of the University of Tennessee and recently taught ESL for a year in Wuhan, China, where she learned how a Batman fan deals with real live bats in her apartment and the best way to fit inside a crowded bus during rush hour.
Derek Green
“I’ve worked in twenty-two different countries, on every continent except Antarctica,” says Derek, the MFA program’s new Travel Writing and Multi-Genre teacher. “I keep thinking I need to go down there and get a passport stamp, but never so serious as to do it,” he says, laughing.

The list of countries is hard to keep straight, and Derek counts on his fingers to remember: Argentina, Bahrain, China, England, Iraq, Mexico, South Africa, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela... I ask which was his favorite. “Oh! The one I forgot: Australia.”

Derek first came to Chatham as one of the visiting authors for our 2008 “Bridges to Other Worlds” Festival. “I thought the program was great. I liked the students, and I liked the travel writing component. The whole theme of the program was interesting to me — especially the way Sheryl runs it. I think she’s got a great vision and direction.” After the festival, he approached Sheryl and said that he’d be interested in teaching if the opportunity ever arose. Later, the opportunity did.

Possibly the most intriguing thing about Derek’s teaching post here at Chatham is his commute — all seven-and-a-half hours of it, from New Haven, Connecticut. “I know it must be crazy because every single person has responded with, ’That’s crazy!’ But to me, it just doesn’t seem that bad,” he says, sipping his coffee. “And I’m not sure why. It might be because I have traveled more gruesome amounts, or, I have two little kids, so seven hours alone in the car sounds really nice. I get to think for a few hours without interruption, and I haven’t done that in four years.”

One might think that a commute of such length might make a person feel drained. But with Derek, this doesn’t seem to be the case. I can say for certain, because I’m in his Travel Writing class. The man has more energy and enthusiasm than most any teacher I’ve ever seen, and we are continually amazed. “I just really wanted to be here,” he says.

In addition to writing numerous feature articles many regional and national magazines, Derek has also written a book, New World Order, published by Autumn House Press.

Joy Katz
Joy and I met on a sunny morning at her home. Her front yard looked like an English garden, the wobbly brick path surrounded by flowers and buzzing bees. I found Joy on her porch swing, a dachshund on her lap and her young son happily watching Micky cartoons on an iPhone beside her, his shoes barely reaching the end of the swing.

Joy and her husband, Rob Handell, a playwright, moved to Pittsburgh last year from New York. She was initially drawn to Chatham because of its unique focus on environmental, landscape, and nature writing. Joy received her BS in industrial design from Ohio State University, which she feels influences her interest in place. And while earning her MFA in Creative Writing from Washington University, she took

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New MFA Faculty by Gina Olszowski
This year, the Chatham MFA program is proud to welcome five new teachers into our fold: Derek Green, Joy Katz, Abby Mendelso, Robert Stevens, and Kate Zambreno. It is our pleasure to introduce them to you!

Top Row, From Left: Derek Green, Kate Zambreno, Sandy Sterner, Marc Nieson, Joy Katz, Abby Mendelson, Peter Oresick. Front Row, From Left: Robert Stevens, Sheryl St. Germain, Sherrie Flick, Kathy Ayres.

Joy Katz
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a course on landscape and literature. “Ever since then,” Joy recalled, “I’ve been noticing landscapes — how they’re created and constructed in all kinds of texts from poetry to novels.

After receiving her graduate degree, Joy held a Stegner Fellowship at Stanford and taught poetry workshops at NYU and The New School. “I love to get books in students’ hands and watch them get really excited about poetry. I like to really take apart poems with students and see how they’re put together and how they work. And I love to watch them steal various personal techniques and get really excited about using them in their own poems.”

At Chatham this year, Joy is teaching an advanced undergraduate poetry workshop, and a graduate poetry workshop called Inventing Landscape. “Both classes that I’m teaching feel like warm, tight, supportive groups. And the students remember each others’ work from the past semester.”

Joy Katz has published two books of poetry, Fabulae (finalist for the ForeWord Book of the Year) and The Garden Room (2005 Tupelo Press Snowbound Chapbook Prize) and is currently finishing a new manuscript on a collection of poems in which her son appears. Joy also co-edited the anthology Dark Horses: Poets on Overlooked Poems, and has work in Boulevard, Cincinnati Review, Ploughshares, and Quarterly West, among others.

Abby Mendelson
Abby, in a word, is a gentleman. We met at Café Rachel on a rainy afternoon. He stood when I entered, inquired whether I liked the table he chose, and insisted on treating me to tea, though our meeting was a favor to me.

“I think a great teacher has to be selfless, and there for students — to teach, coach, and encourage,” he explained. “You have to be in it because you love your students. Students can tell early on if a teacher is not on their side.”

Abby was born in New York and moved to Pittsburgh for college. He and his brother were encouraged by their parents to pick “stable” careers, such as a doctor or lawyer — nothing in the arts. “And so I went to law school for one dreadful year,” he says, shuddering at the remembrance. Then he smiles: “But I knew!”

Abby was interested in learning how books worked, so he got his PhD in Literature. Since then, despite his parents’ warning, he says, “I’ve never lacked for work.” I asked him why that is, and he explained, “I can write to length and I can write on time. I make my editors’ lives easy.” Abby has spent time on both sides of the publishing process and understands what editors want and how to work with them.

On his first visit to Chatham, Abby recalls, “It was the kind of place I dreamed about when I was in grad school.” In addition to teaching writing classes at University of Pittsburgh, Point Park, and La Roche, he also taught his first graduate-level nonfiction workshop at Chatham last spring. “My students were talented, hardworking, motivated and eager to help one another. Of all time, they were the best.”

In addition to publishing novels and short stories, Abby is perhaps best known for his writing on Pittsburgh. Among his Pittsburgh titles are The Pittsburgh Steelers: The Official Team History (three editions), and A Place in Time, a history of Pittsburgh’s neighborhoods, as well as numerous others.

Robert Stevens
“I’d actually moved eleven times by the time I turned eighteen,” Robert says. “My father was in the U.S. Navy for 26 years; we lived largely on military bases.” Robert Stevens was born in Seoul, South Korea, and has lived in Japan, Italy, and all across the United States.

He credits his mother as the person who made him want to write. “When we were growing up, she would tell us stories about all the places that we had lived.” One of these places included a sugar cane field in Hawaii, inside of which farmers found cars and bodies after a controlled burn.

Robert always remembered those stories vividly, and with fondness. “And I guess I wanted to have that ability — that sort of magnetic quality that a lot of storytellers have. Some of my friends have it. Sometimes you'll run into someone at a bar, or a bus stop, and you'll start talking. And you'll find yourself sort of leaning in, enthralled with what they’re saying. I guess I wanted to have, to some degree, that ability as well. And, for me, it just manifested itself on the page.”

While getting his graduate degree at the University of Pittsburgh, Robert worked as a teaching assistant for a Composition class. He hadn’t given much thought on becoming a teacher, but was surprised to find how rewarding the experience was. “I had two students; I still remember their names and their papers. When they got to my comp class, they could not write sentences,” he says. “These students weren’t dumb. They’d gone to really horrific schools and had sort of been passed along. Then, because they were athletically gifted,
they got into Pitt, and it was my job to sort of work with them. We worked together a lot throughout the semester, learning how to organize their thoughts in a way that would make sense to an outside reader. And just to help them unlock that ability, and be able to express themselves on the page was something that made me really feel like I was making a difference, and like I was part of something really important. That was my first semester of teaching.”

Robert has published several poems and short stories, including *The Sacred Heart Auto Club* and *Solitude City.* This fall, he taught the graduate Fiction workshop, in addition to working for the MFA’s low-residency program.

Kate Zambreno

“I think there are so many different ways we realize we’re writers. I think there are mythical stories about that,” says Kate. For herself, her passion for writing grew out of her life as a watcher and an observer. In her undergrad at Northwestern, she studied Journalism and Anthropology, and cultivated her outsider’s perspective at various alt weeklies in Chicago. “I think that’s the writer’s narrative — there isn’t just one,” she says. We are sitting on the lawn under a tree, enjoying a bit of early fall warmth before her next class. “There are certain art forms, like music, where you can say you trained at it all your life. But sometimes, to be a writer, your training is simply living.”

Kate’s interest is in hybrid texts. “For me, hybridity means not only dancing along genres, but involving a sort of criticism in an art form,” she says. “I’m the prose editor at Nightboat Books, which is an independent New York press. And that’s mostly what I publish...weird notebooks and adventurous essays and things like that. The hybrid world — it’s like this outsider world, and I find it quite freeing.”

Kate didn’t always know she wanted to teach. “I think that comes later,” she says. Kate’s interest developed while mentoring young writers as an editor. “I like having students who are very voracious. Students who want to be opened up to new books and new types of writing.” And this proves true. During our brief meeting, she has passed me a copy of *Dictee* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and recommended two books: *The Body* and *The Book of Beginnings and Endings* by Jenny Boully. I’ve never had a big sister, but I wonder if this is what it would feel like to have one.

Kate’s Novel *O Fallen Angel* won Chiasmus Press’ “Undoing the Novel” contest. She also has two forthcoming projects: A novel titled *Green Girl* and a book of essays titled after her blog, *Frances Farmer is My Sister.*
Elizabeth Ashe
PUBLICATIONS: (all poetry)
• *Open Wide Magazine: Anatomy Lesson*, Degas’ Studio, To Paint Sunset
• *No Teeth: Amateurs, Evidence, Keys*
• *The Legendary: Letter to Rose, Your Jacket*
• *Glass: At Uncle Suzzie’s*
• *Battered Suitcase: A Change, Cat’s Cradle, Good Time Charlie*

PRESENTATIONS OR READINGS:
• Poetry performance, Pittsburgh, May 2009
• Alto Lounge, Pittsburgh, Sep 2009

OTHER:
• Accepted into MICA’s Mount Royal MFA Program (in art), to begin fall 2010

Divina Baratta
Works as communications coordinator for The Nature Conservancy.

Judith Ida Blank
Poem “Journey” was published in ucpclass.org.

Rebecca Clever
Launched the online literary journal *Blast Furnace*, which is currently accepting submissions for its inaugural issue, Jan 2011. In 2010, her poems appeared in *Lunarosity, shaking like a mountain* (SLAM), *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *One for the Road*, an anthology by Split Oak Press. Her poetry was also selected for inclusion in Magnapoets’ *Epiphanies* and *Love* anthologies, both to be published in Summer 2011.

Elizabeth DiGiulio
Is an English instructor at Carlow University.

Christy Diulus
Is an instructor of English at CCAC in Pittsburgh.

Jane Fishman
PUBLICATIONS:
*Everyone’s Gotta Be Somewhere* (book), based on her years as a columnist

Kathryn Hawkins
PUBLICATIONS:

OTHER:
• She is a partner in Hawkins Multimedia, LLC, an editorial and web development consulting firm in Portland, Maine, and is owner and editor of the website Gimundo.com.

Johnny Hrebik
Is a PhD student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and recently won “The Exemplary Teaching of Literacy and Language Award” for outstanding teaching service.

Yoli, a.k.a. Yolande Hughes
PUBLICATIONS:
• *Cruisin’ Sarah* (book), an environmental-adventure-mystery, winner of the Mayhaven Award for Children’s Fiction
• *Arlecchino and the Italian Clowns* (play)
• *Five Children and It* (play, adaptation)
• *The Dark Side of Zylo’s Moon* (play)
• *Pittsburgh’s Mr. Aviation* (play)

OTHER:
• Produced Teachers Guide for Point Park University’s Playhouse Jr.

Kevin Kaiser
PUBLICATIONS:
Fiction:
• “Minnelied” *Jabberwocky*, 5
• “Ménage à trois” *PANK Online*, Jun 2010
• “\( \mu \pi \{0\} > \sum \int \sum \) The Collagist*, May 2010
• “Rain, Thunder, Ocean” *decomP*, Mar 2010
• “Golden Leaf” *Frame Lines*, Edition 8, 2009
• “El Sancho” *BULL*, No. 3, Summer 2009
• “Polarity Bears’ Paradigm Shift: New Paradigm, Mar 2009
• “This Is What I Mean By ‘Trying’” *Six Sentences*, Mar 2009

Poetry:
• “when an American Buddhist Monk bites into a cookie” *Falling Star*, Summer/Fall 2009
• “womb” *Sein und Werden*, Summer 2009
• “twitching,” “encampment,” “swinging for the ages” *No Teeth*, July 2009
• “noösther,” “god’s lonely being,” “we, collapsing bridge, waves.” *Filling Station*, Jul 2009

Music:
• “the empty word,” “the thrust and grasp of god” *Sein und Werden*, Summer 2009

JOB:
• Is teaching writing at a community college in Dallas, TX, and is applying to the PhD program at the University of Texas, Dallas.
Robert Isenberg
PUBLICATIONS:
• The Archipelago: A Balkan Passage (book), Autumn House Press, was shortlisted for the Graywolf Nonfiction Prize
• Enough Rope (play), was performed at the “Festival in Black & White,” in Oct 2010
• “Street View” (photojournalism blog), Pittsburgh Magazine
• A poem and essay in Christian Science Monitor
• Regular reportage for Pittsburgh Magazine and Pittsburgh's City Paper, among other publications

PERFORMANCES:
Developed and performed in the latest installment of the Pittsburgh Monologue Project, produced by the Duquesne Red Masquers.

JOB:
Works as a standardized patient for the University of Pittsburgh's Medical School.

Kelly Grace Markel
Is the Editorial Assistant for American Economic Association Publications.

Jessica Myers

Teresa Schartel Narey
PUBLICATIONS:
• “Without Direction” (poetry), The Monongahela Review
• “When” (poetry), Blind Faith // Poems by Women in Dayton

JOB:
Freelance proofreader for Ellis Magazine, the alumni magazine of The Ellis School, Pittsburgh.

OTHER:
In the fall of 2009, her online writing gallery, Children Speak: Stories About Their Artwork, was highlighted in the article “It's like magic, that's what writing is-- Gallery of Writing Showcases Writing's Power” by Lorna Collier in The Council Chronicle. The gallery features the artwork and stories of preschool-aged children and was shown on the NCTE’s website as part of the National Day on Writing, October 20, 2009.

Athena Pangikas-Miller
PUBLICATIONS:
• “Bones” (poetry), published in Leveller

JOB:
Full-time academic advisor at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Also adjunct faculty in the English Department at AIP.

Athanasia (Athena) Pappas
PUBLICATIONS: (all poetry)
• Falling Star Magazine: “Long Weekend”
• No Teeth: “Cautions,” “Ice and Snow,” and “First Sand”
• Coal Hill Press: “Rhinestone Cowboy”

PRESENTATIONS OR READINGS:
• Poetry reading at the Bridges to Other Worlds Symposium, 2009
• Poetry reading at the Poetry, Prose, and Picnics series, Jun 2009

OTHER:
• Summer Intern at Autumn House Press
• Co-editor of the Shadyside Review

Angela Parker
Is a PhD student at the University of Texas at Dallas, where she also teaches writing.

Leah Pelleggi
David Phillips
PUBLICATIONS:
• Numerous articles in Racer and AutoSport magazines
• The Indy Car Handbook (book)
• 100 and Counting (book)
JOB:
Editorial Director, iRacing.com
HONORS:
• Silver Medal, Society of International Motorsports Journalists (2000)
• “Mario Andretti One from the Heart Award” (1999)

Amanda Raczkowski
Edits the award-winning journal Caketrain.

Michael Reitema
PUBLICATIONS:
• “A Little Help” (short story), Boston Fiction Annual Review, Vol. 2, Issue 1
• “451 East Brigade Street” (short story), The Dirty Goat, Issue 18
HONORS:
Received a full ride to Texas Tech (PhD) to study English/Creative writing, with stipend, teaching fiction and nonfiction.

Sara Ries
Won the 2009 Stevens Poetry Manuscript Competition for her poetry book Come In, We’re Open. “For Mary, the Past Owner of my Parents’ Diner” and “Fish Fry Daughter” were recently published in the Buffalo News. Graduate rep for the Advisory Board of Communique (student newspaper); she has been invited to write a column for the nationally circulated, monthly, bilingual (Chinese/English) magazine, Crazy English Speaker, from Guangzhou China.

Mary Riley
Poem “Cooking Problems,” was published in Off the Coast.

Kelly Scarff
Poem “Lazarus” was published in A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry, edited by Stacey Brown and Oliver de la Raz.

Marissa Scwalm & Jolynn Baldwin
Are editing a journal entitled The Red Locker. Both Jolynn and Marissa have recently been accepted to PhD programs.

Meghan Tutolo
“Saturday Poem: No One Knows Me At the Salad Bar,” was published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Sarah Shotland
PERFORMANCES / PRESENTATIONS:
• Her play, Other People’s Children, was performed at the Prop Theater in Chicago, Aug 2010. Will be produced and performed with RhinoFest in Chicago, Jan/Feb 2011.
• Presented a pedagogy paper, “Minefield: Creating Obstacle in Plot through Creative Play” at the 2010 AWP Conference in Denver
JOB:
Teaching Fiction and Nonfiction.

Edward Wesolowski
Adjunct faculty member in the English Studies and Communication Skills department of Robert Morris University in Moon Township, PA. He also teaches English full-time at Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School in Midland, PA.

Stefanie Wielkopolan
PUBLICATIONS:
• “Mermaids” (poem), Silk Road Literary Magazine
PRESENTATIONS OR READINGS:
• “Border Theory,” University of Michigan’s Graduate/Post-Graduate Student Liberal Studies Conference, May 2010
OTHER:
Her M.F.A. thesis, Border Theory, was selected for publication by Black Coffee Press. It will be released in Jan 2011.

Michael & Tricia Waguespack
Had a baby!
Liam Andrew, born July 22, 2010

From their blog, Family Wags: “Tricia and I met in the orientation line on the Chatham University campus. Our professor, Kathy Ayres, tells us she saw sparks flying the very first day of class. We think that automatically makes Liam a lifetime fan of Chatham just like his mommy and daddy.”

Sarah Shotland
Her thesis, Traveling Home, received Chatham’s Best Thesis in Creative Nonfiction Award. Her work has appeared in the anthology Good Dogs Doing Good, The Pittsburgh Quarterly, and Mary Magazine. She divides her time between homes she shares with her husband in Pittsburgh and in France. She is currently at work on a memoir exploring the blessings and challenges of living in a small French village, and is co-editing, with Sheryl St. Germain, a collection of essays, Between Song and Story, scheduled for publication in summer 2011 by Autumn House Press.