

LYNNE NUGENT

EDITOR'S NOTE

In this issue, as in every December issue, we present the winners of our annual Iowa Review Awards in fiction, poetry, and nonfiction.

This year marks our tenth contest. We started in 2003, logging each entry by hand into a notebook; several years ago, our resident FileMaker maven, Jenna, introduced us to the magic of databases, and we bade farewell to the writer's cramp of logging by hand; just last year, we started accepting contest submissions online through submittable.com, and online submissions immediately surpassed paper submissions.

Despite all the changes, two things remain the same: the care with which entries are read and the difficulty of choosing just one winner and runner-up in each category. Our staff read every entry at least twice, sending a group of finalists along to the judges, who then have the equally arduous task of making the final selection.

Previous winners speak of the emotional boost that comes from winning. When I e-mailed them all to tell them of the tenth anniversary of the contest, some vivid recollections from the past decade filled my in-box:

- "I try to enter contests and immediately forget about them, so when my husband brought me the phone saying it was someone from *The Iowa Review*, I fell out the chair. Somehow, I'd neglected to list my e-mail, which turned out to be a great move, since I got to have a wonderful, breathless conversation with the editor. The pleasure was compounded a few months later when the judge, whose work I love, came to town for a reading. As I got her to sign my book, I started mumbling, 'I'm not sure if you remember, but you picked my story...' She smiled and launched into a precise description of what she'd enjoyed about it. I was high for days after."
- "On the day in May that I received the required #10 SASE for final word on my entry, I studied the envelope for the longest time, and when I finally opened it and took out the 3 ½" x 8 ½" piece of paper addressed to 'Dear Finalist,' and then spotted [former editor] David Hamilton's signature at the bottom, I felt that this bit of news was plenty, and that if I did not win, I would always have this special announcement from David Hamilton."

- “It was my very first story publication. I’d just flown back to Boston from Oakland and took a bus up the Cape in the middle of winter. Getting to hold that issue was a pretty special thing. Very few acceptances of any of my writing, including book deals, have competed with that initial acceptance at TIR, as it was rejected at almost twenty publications before it won.”

We hope the contest has given this year’s winners and runners-up similar memories that will endure for years to come. We congratulate them, we heartily thank our final judges, and we are grateful beyond words to our readers who do the initial screening, most of whom are volunteers.

Of course, we know all too well from stuffing the envelopes that not everyone comes away from our contest with a winner’s notification. We deeply appreciate everyone who knows the odds and enters anyway. *Poets & Writers* magazine, which takes a look at the state of literary contests every spring, warns aspirants in its May/June 2012 issue that “the odds against winning any individual contest are steep” but likens entering a contest, in this age when indie publishing ventures are not self-supporting, to “paying dues on a community project.” The project, in this case, is in your hands, since contest fees go towards the prizes for the winners, the honoraria for the judges, and the copyediting and graphic design of this issue.

As we enter the second decade of the Iowa Review Awards, TIR will also be hosting two new contests. We launched our Jeff Sharlet Memorial Award for Veterans in 2012, and the first winner, along with a number of finalists, will be published in our Spring 2013 issue. A brand-new Iowa Review Award in Photography will accept entries for the first time in January 2013. As usual, our Iowa Review Awards in fiction, poetry, and nonfiction will continue accepting entries in January and publishing winners in December.

We’re also happy to announce, as we do in each December issue, the winner of a prize that does not result from a contest. The family of Tim McGinnis founded an annual memorial prize for the piece we publish each year that best reflects the quirky spirit of Tim’s story “The Trail,” which describes Kafka at Boy Scout Camp (read it at iowareview.org/mcginnis). This year our worthy winner is Ramon Isao, whose story “Rod Stewart Is Everywhere” manages to be unlike anything we’ve ever read about celebrity culture, corporate culture, or, yes, the spiky-haired “Do Ya Think I’m Sexy” crooner himself.

Despite all the contest and prize talk, I hasten to add that there's also a stellar lineup of work in this issue that came to us the old-fashioned way, through unsolicited submissions—a process with pretty long odds in its own right, and resulting in equally stunning work. Looking for chance correspondences across the issue as we inevitably do, we noted Erina Harris's poems about the monsters in the closet, Molly Patterson's story about a young girl's fears both imagined and realized, Keane Shum's memoir of coming of age in America, Geoffrey Nutter's poetic rapprochement with his parents' younger selves, and Anna Vodicka's essay on growing up in flyover country. Taken together with contest winner Bernadette Esposito's account of the airplane crashes and custody arrangements of her childhood, we discerned a through-line of innocence and its loss. That led us to our cover images by Lauren Haldeman of children playing with masks that are at the same time whimsical and somewhat menacing.

Bringing up the non-contest work that populates most of this issue reminds me of a point that is always worth mentioning. Despite all the contests in the literary world and in our own pages, and despite the fact that online submitting is now ubiquitous, we still invite writers who prefer it, as always, to submit their work each fall semester, for free, typed or printed on actual paper and stuffed into an actual envelope, stamped and sent through an actual post office. We'll never tire of the pleasure of receiving mail, the meditative state induced by opening and sorting it (our former intern Sevy recently stopped by and asked if we had any mail to open, for old times' sake), the anticipation of pulling out a poem, essay, or story and wondering if this will be the one that will change our lives, and the excitement when it is.



*submit in January 2013
for our eleventh
annual contest*

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FICTION, &
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