



The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers provides support to writers whose work reflects the spirit and passions embodied in Ellen's writing and her commitment to a deep map of place.

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Decade of Growth, cont.

love, nurtured by you, is now enjoyed and valued by others. This is Ellen's legacy and your vision at work."

Rebecca's success is tonic for the Fund. We are thrilled that we have played a part in encouraging and stimulating a host of emerging desert writers — in the vein of Ellen's legacy — to pursue their writing passion and to do so successfully.

Our Accomplishments

Looking back, we are pleased with the success and progress we have achieved these past ten years, and feel secure that the EMF has a solid foundation for the future. Working only with volunteers, the Fund has built and now uses a stable, managed, and invested endowment of over \$115,000. This endowment provides a stipend, which we have recently increased to \$3,000, to our award winners. There are now 17 members of the board — a full slate according to our by-laws. And, the board has begun to attract new, younger members who bring leadership, creativity, ideas, and energy to help guide the EMF into an emerging and challenging literary world ahead.

Our Challenges

At the same time, the Ellen Meloy Fund faces challenges. As an all-volunteer orga-

nization we are constantly seeking expertise to help us in core areas of our work, whether it be maintaining our web presence, keeping our database of supporters updated, or continuing to build our endowment for the future. In today's dollars, \$3,000 doesn't go that far, and we would love to be able to offer a greater stipend to our annual winner.

Also, with the acceleration of desertification due to climate change, it is becoming increasingly important to get the voice of desert writers elevated and into the mainstream public discourse. And, we need to nurture and build the future leaders of the EMF — those who will guide the Fund in the years ahead, most of whom will not share with us our personal relationships with Ellen.

Time to Celebrate

These are among the challenges for the future. But now is a time of celebration. The Fund feels so fortunate to have evolved into a respected voice in literary circles, and an effective one in promoting the work of newly emerging desert writers. We have our supporters to thank for that success and we hope that you will stay with us, and others will join us, as we prepare for the next 10 years of our work.



Ellen Meloy Fund 2014 Award Recipient

In Spring 2014, Adelheid "Heidi" Fischer became the ninth recipient of the EMF Desert Writers' Award.

Fischer has co-written two books, *Valley of Grass: Tallgrass Prairie and Parkland of the Red River Re-*

gion and North Shore: An Ecology of Place, a book on Lake Superior.

Fischer relocated to Phoenix in 1998 where she serves as manager of InnovationSpace at Arizona State University and leads the program's biomimicry initiative. Since moving to Arizona, Fischer has focused her writing on the deserts of the American Southwest. Her EMF stipend will support her current work-in-progress, *The Ecology of Grief*, which she describes as "a creative

Raven's Return: A Literary Tribute to Ellen Meloy by Ryann Sovino

Ellen Meloy was a desert writer of place. One such place was the Green River, a watershed that crosses biomes and state borders, weaving itself through Desolation Canyon and the geologic wonder of Utah.

This year, 2014, marks the 20th anniversary of Ellen's book, *Raven's Exile: A Season on the Green River*. It also marks the ten year anniversary of Ellen's sudden and tragic passing. With that knowledge, Epicenter (a non-profit dedicated to housing and the arts in the town of Green River, Utah) and the John Wesley Powell River History Museum honored Ellen and her legacy along the river about which she wrote.

"Raven's Return: A Literary Tribute to Ellen Meloy" began on the evening of July 25 and continued throughout the following day. Four writers and storytellers, Ellen's friends all, Greer Chesher, Elizabeth Grossman, Joe Pachak, and Ann Walka traveled to the dusty desert town of Green River to share stories and words of Ellen's legacy. Individuals came from as far as Provo, Bluff, and Colorado.

Poet Ann Walka started the event Friday evening with a public reading from *Raven's Exile*. The following morning a participant caravan bumped along Hastings Road toward Lower Gray Canyon and the historic riverside Stone House. Fresh-cut watermelon awaited guests aged one year to 60 plus. Although most were drawn to the water's



Clockwise From Top: Ryann Sovino and Ann Walka with their copies of *Raven's Exile*. Elizabeth Grossman, and Joe Pachak gesturing as he tells a story to those gathered in the historic Stone House on the banks of the Green River.

photos courtesy of Epicenter and Ryann Sovino

edge, a slow gait set our pace. Voices softened, and it felt as though Ellen was sitting right there with us, maybe perched on the wooden roof, smiling her trickster coyote smile.

Greer Chesher read first, surprising all by playing a recorded NPR interview with Ellen. Everyone sat, silent against metal-framed chairs and listened as Ellen's voice filled the Stone House. "Turquoise," she said.

When the interview concluded, Greer shared her own story, written about Bluff and Ellen. Next, Elizabeth Grossman, who met Ellen on the river, shared

a piece she wrote after Ellen's passing. Third, Joe Pachak, artist and archaeologist from Bluff, Utah, sat, turned his eyes toward the audience, and began. "I'd like to tell a story, a story I'd like to tell Ellen. That is what we did. We told one another stories..." Ann Walka was last to read that morning, sharing poems, her soft voice filled the room with images of desert rock, Ellen, and coyote clans.

And then there was the river. In true Ellen spirit, about ten boarded duckies, tubes, and paddle boards to float the Green to Swasey's Beach. In *Raven's Exile*, Ellen wrote,

"The canyon is so beautiful it hurts. De solare, to make lonely, yet never do I find loneliness in Desolation."

The capstone of Raven's Return brought us back to the John Wesley Powell River History Museum to share in a panel discussion on the idea of return — returning to Ellen's work and to desert rivers through writing.

Ellen's writing is a gift to place, *Raven's Exile*, a gift to Green River. It was an honor to pay tribute, at such a poignant time, to Ellen and her spirit. Her writing will continue to live along the banks of the Green.

nonfiction book that examines catastrophic loss and change in desert systems." Started after the sudden death of Fischer's husband in 2005, the book will focus largely on Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains and the desert mountain ranges known as the "sky islands."

Fischer hopes to explore two kinds of grieving — grieving for the death of a loved one, and mourning the loss of valued places and ecologies. Don Snow,

who chairs the EMF Awards Committee, says Fischer's work is "conceived to be an excellent natural history book, but also a deeply moving work that will connect the personal with the ecological."

The EMF website (ellenmeloy.com) has more information about Fischer, An Ecology of Grief, and past award recipients under "The Award" section.



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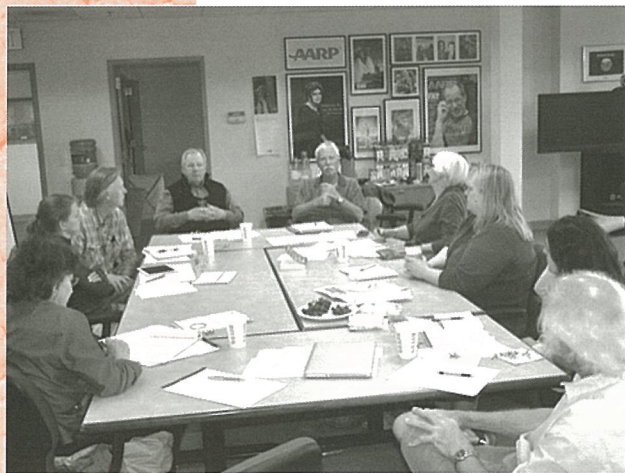
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Supporting the Fund

The Ellen Meloy Fund offers an annual award of \$3,000 to an individual to write about the desert from the desert. Visit www.ellenmeloy.com for the latest information.

You can contribute to the fund in two ways—either visit www.ellenmeloy.com and donate through PayPal or send a check to *The Ellen Meloy Fund c/o D.A. Davidson, P.O. Box 1677, Helena MT 59624*. All contributions are tax deductible.

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In June, EMF board members traveled to Helena for their annual “in-person” meeting. Here the board gathers in the AARP of Montana conference room where co-chairs Tony Jewett and Joan Miles (upper right hand corner) lead the conversation.
Photo by Mark Meloy

Ellen Meloy Fund Board Members

We are happy to announce that new members have joined the Ellen Meloy Fund’s volunteer board of directors: Julianne Ballou and Sarah Stewart Johnson. Below, you can read more about them and their connection to Ellen and her writing. You can find out more about the other board members on the EMF website at www.ellenmeloy.com/fund-board.html

JULIANNE BALLOU was introduced to Ellen Meloy’s writing in college in the Northwest, by her professor Don Snow. After graduating, she lived for a while in New York and then Arkansas before settling in Austin, TX. A lifelong lover of mountains and forests, she thanks Ellen for essentially introducing her to the desert. Now, when she travels through the great Chihuahuan, she thinks about Ellen’s prose, which helped her learn how to respect and love the scruffier side of her state.

SARAH STEWART JOHNSON is an assistant professor at Georgetown University, where she studies planetary science and is currently writing on a book about Mars. She received the Ellen Meloy Desert Writer’s Award in 2013, a fact she still has trouble believing. She has always been drawn to far-off places, and her field work has taken her to the dusty expanses of the Australian Outback, the polar deserts of Antarctica, and the summits of Hawaiian and Patagonian volcanos.

The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

December 2014

Dedicated to the memory and legacy of writer, artist and naturalist Ellen Meloy (1946-2004)

A Decade of Growth and Accomplishment

The Ellen Meloy Fund 10 Years Later by Tony Jewett

In March, the Ellen Meloy Fund (EMF) Board will meet and select the winner of the EMF’s Desert Writer of the Year Award. It will be a milestone moment for the Fund, signifying the first ten years of progress and growth, along with the establishment of a foundation upon which we can build in the years ahead.

As we reflect on the past and look to the future, it’s a valuable time to consider the impact the EMF has had while also asking ourselves what we can and must do to perpetuate our mission.

The Fund

Ellen Meloy immersed herself into the desert of the Southwest, using a shoestring budget to create deeply insightful, humorous, and ecologically inspiring writings about the magnificent landscape. The Fund, led by its board of directors and hundreds of stalwart supporters, set out ten years ago, on Ellen’s untimely death, to preserve her voice and her messages by throwing a net out across the country and inviting other writers, whose passion was lodged firmly in the arid environs, to submit their work to the Ellen Meloy Fund in an annual competition for recognition.

Where has this road taken us these past ten years?

Measuring Success

Recently the EMF got some inspiring news from our first ever awardee — Rebecca Lawton. Women Writing the West had given her the prestigious WILLA Literary Award for softcover fiction for her novel *Junction, Utah*. When she heard, Rebecca wrote to us to say: “Dear Friends at the Ellen Meloy Fund, I’m very happy to report that my novel, *Junction, Utah*, supported by the Ellen Meloy Fund in 2006...will receive the WILLA literary award...Key ideas in the novel were sparked by my trip to the desert with the support of your fund. I’m thrilled that this labor of

Decade of Growth, cont. on 2



Rebecca Lawton, recipient of the EMF Award in 2006 and the WILLA Literary Award in 2014.



“Key ideas from [my novel, *Junction, Utah*] were sparked by my trip to the desert with the support of your fund. I’m thrilled that this labor of love, nurtured by you, is now enjoyed and valued by others. This is Ellen’s legacy and your vision at work.”

—Rebecca Lawton

Adelheid Fischer at the Bluff Arts Festival by Ann Walka



Adelheid (Heidi) Fischer, the recipient of the 2014 EMF Award for Desert Writers

Adelheid (Heidi) Fischer, the winner of the 2014 Ellen Meloy Fund Award, braved noisy kids and the

October chill of the San Juan River to open Storytelling Night at the Bluff Arts Festival. Circled around a campfire, listeners leaned in to hear Heidi, as we quickly knew her, read “There Are No Strangers in the World.”

She drew us in with a tiny brown bird who called “like a drill sergeant in a Buddhist boot camp. ‘Be here. Be here Now,’” and held us in thrall through the final “solitary bees and solitary writers labor[ing] in sisterhood in the

same generative light of creation.” The essay is a finely crafted meditation on the ecology of grief, the topic she proposed to the Awards Committee in the selection process.

In the following days Heidi dined with us and laughed and told stories, urged us to the magnificent vista over Monument Valley at Muley Point, and led us in an on-you-knees examination of tadpole shrimp in slickrock potholes. The EMF board members and friends who spent the weekend with Heidi — Mark and Margaret, Ann and Joe, Jake and Kathy — look forward to introducing the rest of you to this talented and delightful writer.