

The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

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

Author Kate Harris Named 2012 Desert Writers Award Winner

We are extremely pleased and excited to announce that Kate Harris of Vancouver, BC has been selected by the Ellen Meloy Fund Board as the seventh annual Desert Writers Award winner.

Harris received a grant of \$3,000 to support work on her upcoming book, *Cycling Silk*, the story of her ten-month-long bicycle trip through ten countries that lie along the ancient 'Silk Road' of Marco Polo fame. The book's central theme revolves around borders, "the boundaries that atlases depict and armies enforce," Harris says. In describing her upcoming work, Harris stated: "This book will throw the contours of the Silk Road's desert places into sharp relief, and in the process, inspire people everywhere to think beyond borders."

A Rhodes scholar, Kate earned a master's in the history of science at Oxford University, focusing on exploration and geopolitics in contested mountain borderlands. She also holds a Master's degree in geo-biology from MIT and a degree in biology as a Morehead scholar at UNC-Chapel Hill.

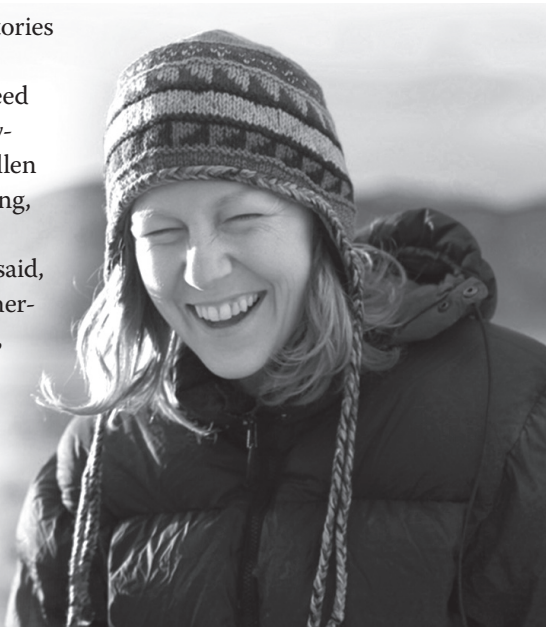
An Awards Committee of four EMF Board members unanimously recommended Harris, who had applied twice before, as this year's recipient. EMF Selection Committee Chair Don Snow said, "This year's application is by far her best. It is apparent that her book proposal has progressed, and her writing has become sharper, warmer, and more focused." Committee member Ann Walka of Flagstaff, Arizona, noted how well Harris pulled together "a tapestry of many threads," taking note of the work of "other, earlier explorers of high mountains and

plateau deserts and weaving those stories into her own."

The selection committee also agreed that among this year's applicants, *Cycling Silk* was most reminiscent of Ellen Meloy's work, in its personality, daring, and imaginative scope.

Upon receiving the award, Harris said, "Ellen Meloy writes of wild things – herself included – with such dazzle, wit, and wonder. From the astonishing poetry of her words to the soaring, exploring life and spirit they reflect, she is a role model of mine in more than simply a literary sense. I am so honoured to be associated with her legacy through this award."

The Ellen Meloy Fund gave its first award – \$1,000 – in 2006. As the fund has grown, the board has increased the grant award. With news that the EMF had reached its \$100,000 goal, the award went to \$3,000 this year.



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—Kate Harris

Bluff Sculpture honors Ellen *by Mark Meloy*

Healing the loss of a friend has a long and mysterious incubation, particularly enlarged in the death of a woman in her prime. For Bluff sculptor, Joe Pachak, a beloved friend who profoundly influenced the shape and direction of Ellen's written word, appreciation ripened eight years later with the completion of a bigger-than-life abstraction of stone, steel, color and concrete – a bighorn sheep of the spirit world that resides on the bank of the San Juan River.

As well as being a writer, Ellen worked to ensure and improve the quality of life in southeast Utah. A member of the Bluff City Historic Preservation Association, she helped gain a conservation easement for the Jones Farm, preserving open space at Bluff's eastern edge. Proceeding west is a walking trail along the river to Sand Island Campground. The sculpture will be placed next to her river on that public trail. Next time you venture to Bluff, walk into the gentle evening and see it.



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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The Phantom Committee *by Don Snow • Awards Committee Chair*

Literacy is a heritage, and it is the responsibility of each generation to pass along the universal joy of discovering literary masters. When I was in grad school with Ellen at the University of Montana, I frankly never dreamed that she would one day distinguish herself as an American literary master (who would think that of a friend?). But she did.

Today, 35 years later, I have the joy and honor of introducing Ellen's work to my bright young undergraduates at Whitman College, where I have taught for more than a decade.

When I joined the Fund's board three years ago and took on the task of chairing the 2010 awards committee, it occurred to me that Whitman students who show up in my various nature-writing classes might be interested in the inner workings of a national literary competition. So I created a one-credit Independent Study for Spring semester 2010 and invited one student to enroll. Jullianne Ballou, a senior English major from Austin, Texas, took me up on my offer and worked closely with me through the awards process.

Jullianne loved the work and, ambitious person that she is, parlayed her brief involvement with the Fund into a post-grad editing internship

at *Oxford American*, one of the premier regional literary journals in the country. Following her six-month stint at O.A., Jullianne applied for a highly prestigious editing fellowship at the University of Texas Press. She was among 70 national applicants and won the award, a year-long professional introduction into book-editing.

The following year, three students stepped forward and expressed interest in the Ellen Meloy Independent Study. My first inclination was simply to choose one and continue the pattern set by Jullianne, but upon reflection, I realized that if all three students joined in, we would have, essentially, a second "awards committee" — a student committee which could shadow and parallel the work of the actual committee (which also happened to be three members, plus myself).

So in 2011, Environmental Studies students Naomi Gibbs, a senior, Gaea Campe, a junior, and Madelyn Peterson, a sophomore, joined the inde and conducted its affairs exactly as the official committee did.

This past spring, we did it again, only this time six students joined, all of them juniors enrolled in the major I help direct, the Whitman Environmental Humanities major. Eric Niehaus and Ryann Savino, both from California, were joined by Libby Arnosti (Minnesota), Matt Beatty (Indiana), Molly Esteve (Oregon), and Clare Sobetski (Colorado) in the third annual Ellen Inde.

This is a rare and wonderful experience for young students — a chance to read original essays by working writers (all of them of course anonymous in the competition) within the context of a real-world literary contest. Since all of the students who have participated possess genuine interests in writing, editing, and the literary life, they benefit from exposure to writing "in the raw," much as it may appear on the desks of magazine, journal, and book editors across the country.

And, if Jullianne Ballou's success is any indication, some of our students may discover that their brief exposure to the Fund can open doors into the anterooms of their professional careers.





EMF Board in Bluff

The EMF Board met in Bluff this spring where discussed business and hiked the Red Rock Country. Here you see (left to right) Ann Walka, Mark Meloy, Crystine Miller, Grant Ditzler, Lenora Ditzler, Kathy Lodato, Joan Miles, Don Snow, Tony Jewett, and Jake Lodato.

We're impressed by the caliber of people who apply for the Desert Writers Award. Here is a little bit about the 2012 runners up and their projects.

JULENE BAIR lives in Longmont, CO. Her first book, *One Degree West: Reflections of a Plainsdaughter*, traces her early life as the child of Kansas farmers during the turbulent '60s and '70s when corporate, industrial farming began to drive thousands of family farms and ranches out of business. *One Degree West* won numerous awards when it appeared in 2000. Julene's EMF project, *Paradox and Providence: Essays from the Heart of Wildness*, takes place in the Mojave Desert where Julene lived for two years in a very remote stone cabin known as The Rock House. In *Paradox*, Julene returns for a visit with her young son, and her re-connection with The Stone House and the vast desert surrounding it triggers the reverie propelling this memoir-in-progress.

ELLEN WATERSTON hails from Bend, OR, where she works on poetry and essays. Her writing is centered mostly in ranch life lived in dry country – portions of the Great Basin known as the Oregon High Desert. Ellie ranched for two decades amid Oregon's wild desert outback. Her 2010 memoir, *Where the Crooked River Rises*, won accolades from fellow Northwest writers John Daniel and Kim Stafford and placed Ellie in the forefront of Oregon essayists. She applied to the EMF in 2012 for support for her second collection of essays from the High Desert, *Twelve Mile Flat*. She writes, "My approach is at once personal, philosophical, metaphorical, and anecdotal ...each essay a friendly persuasion, luring the reader to engage in the desert through my own experiences in this rugged place, bolstered by real facts, real people, real occurrences."

“Being in this land, you realize how intimate it is, a tight neighborhood of canyons, plains, rivers, plateaus, and mountains. Maybe every geography is like this, but we belong to this one. It is a home in itself. When I received Ellen's award, I understood even more who and what I was writing for. I felt rooted into this lineage of writers and readers who know what it means to stand on this iron-rust ground and belong.”

– Craig Childs, Recipient
2011 Desert Writers Award

BROOKE WILLIAMS of Castle Valley, UT, is a fifth-generation resident of the place Brigham Young called “Deseret.” Brooke's 1999 memoir, *Halflives: Reconciling Work and Wildness*, plumbs the ever-widening gap between our economic and spiritual lives – between the traps of urban livelihood and the soul-satisfactions of wilderness adventure. Brooke's application to the EMF was to support work on a new book, *Ground Truth: The Desert, the Dog, and a Dead Man*, a rambling (in the best sense) investigation of desert maps made by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and other agencies. Brooke proposes to “ground truth” in these maps – meaning, in his words, to document “important aspects of the landscape that aren't noted on maps.” Those “important aspects” transcend the physical as they seek to connect political, cultural, and personal responses to the vast desert terrains of the Colorado Plateau.



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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 use the envelope inserted in this newsletter to send a check. All contributions are tax deductible.

Introducing New Members of the EMF Board

JAKE LODATO discovered Ellen and her books through his wife, Kathy, and her volunteer BLM ranger work with Mark Meloy at Sand Island (Bluff), UT. He finds Ellen's contact with her subjects and her ability to share it with readers extraordinary, and learns more with each reading. What Jake enjoys most is Ellen's sense of humor--wry, self-deprecating and delightfully inappropriate. In a longer life he knows they would have become really good friends. Jake and Kathy live in Malaga, near Wenatchee, WA, and travel each spring and fall into "Ellen country"—the desert southwest..

CRYSTINE MILLER first encountered Ellen's work through Ellen's sister-in-law, Kay Satre (a professor of English), while attending Carroll College. She instantly fell in love with Ellen's connection to the land,

her humor, and ability to find and tell the story of the desert. Crystine's interest in Ellen's work has guided her in many academic pursuits including writing her undergraduate thesis on *The Anthropology of Turquoise*. Currently, Crystine

lives in Tempe, AZ, where she is getting her PhD in English from Arizona State University. After living in the mountains of Montana and the valleys of Oregon, she is excited to get to know the desert landscape that Ellen so loved.



*A pottery shard
that the board
found on one of
their hikes in Bluff.*

*Short bios from
the other EMF
Board members
ran in a previous
newsletter and
can be found at
www.ellenmeloy.com/board.htm*

*All Illustrations
by Ellen Meloy.*