



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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Calling Ellen *by Don Snow • Whitman College • Walla Walla, WA*

At a Conoco station in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, July 1993:

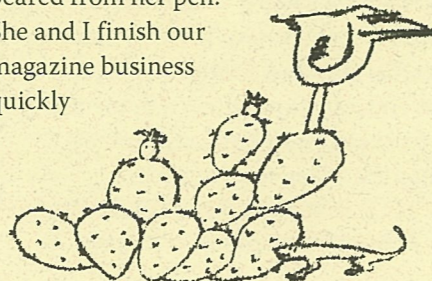
I'm on my way to float the Smith River with my fiancée, Dorothy O'Brien. It's our pre-nup float—we're getting married next week, and we want some quiet days together amid deep creases of a river canyon before the guests arrive. I have some business to conduct with Ellen, some business involving an essay she has placed in the magazine I co-edit, *Northern Lights*, but I

It's an amazing thing to watch a friend fold herself into a private space—the pleats of a river canyon maybe—and emerge an artist fully fledged. And not just any artist but a great one. And yet Ellen remained Ellen, true to those who loved her, even as she dazzled us, book by book.

had gotten out of Missoula without contacting her. (You know how river trips go....) I've got one last chance before heading into terra-incommunicada. I spot a pay phone in White Sulphur (remember pay phones?), the last town we hit before the put-in. I place a call to Ellen, hoping like hell she'll pick up. She does.

The editor-to-writer chat goes fine. I just need her approval to make a pair of tiny changes in her manuscript before heading to press. She and I are old friends going all the way back to grad school days. I've read her earliest work, including her creative non-fiction Masters thesis "Song Dog," and by now, the early-90s, I have also published several of her first essays in NL. She's a dream to edit. An Ellen manuscript is nearly flawless, the lines and images layered and gorgeous, the humor sharp, the textures in the prose crisp. But no book has yet appeared from her pen.

She and I finish our magazine business quickly



and I note how happy she sounds over the phone.

"It's gone," she announces. "The book manuscript. I sent it to Henry Holt this morning."

On time. Maybe even ahead of schedule—I really can't remember. I do remember sharing that moment of joy with her. Her first book had been accepted by Henry Holt & Co. She'd been writing for months, not saying much about it. All we knew was that it was a river book, based on her time on the Green with Mark.

"What's the title?" I ask.

"Raven's Exile."

"Huh. Intriguing." Little did we know.

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canyon maybe—and emerge an artist, fully fledged. And not just any artist but a great one. And yet Ellen remained Ellen, true to those who loved her, even as she dazzled us, book by book.

I'm writing here six years to the month of her death. I use Ellen's work every semester in my classes; I help introduce the next generation to her. And it's easy to do, here at Whitman College. Ellen spent the last evening of her life with twenty Whitman students and their professor, Phil Brick, camped outside of Bluff on the Whitman biennial adventure known as Semester in the West. On this mother of all field trips, Phil makes sure that his charges meet some of the Best of the West; Ellen had been their writing teacher for a week in the canyons of the San Juan. They loved her. In her sly way, she did extraordinary things for them, for their writing and thinking and sense of care. She helped get them out of their boxes, the little disciplinary boxes we academics like to case them in. Those boxes can become coffins. Ellen couldn't let it happen.

Today I'm thinking of what more I can do for her. She certainly did a lot for me, for all of us. She still does—just read the books. And think about joining us in honoring her memory through the Fund.

Notes from Mark, *cont from page 1*

The Fund's Work

The fund has 16 hard-working board members and two tasks.

We're not looking for a cursory ride across the desert with a sampling of nature; we're looking for writers willing to inhabit the desert and dig deep.

Our first task is procuring and investing funds to allow a perpetual stipend to writers on an annual basis. Thanks to the willingness of Ellen's friends and relations to dig deep into their pockets, we are nearing our initial goal of \$100,000. Our second task is perhaps a greater challenge: delving into the world of working writers in search of worthy candidates. To date, we've spent no money on publicizing the fund and soliciting applications for the award—we've reached out primarily through

word of mouth and personal contacts. But, we plan to increase our outreach and expand our efforts to include literary organizations, art councils, magazines, editors, and academic programs. Every board member has agreed to spread the word about the award to these entities in their state of residence, and any help would be welcome.

The Annual Award Process

Each year the board elects a selection committee that heads up the awards process. Writers apply by submitting a writing sample and a description of a writing project they would like to pursue. The names are removed from the materials before the review process begins so that all applications are judged solely on the caliber of the writing and proposed project.

"I am deeply honored to join the Ellen Meloy family of writers. Ellen combined the artistry of words with the lens of a scientist. She was a gifted writer and an empathetic soul. I am continually struck by the eloquence and ingenuity of her language; I am changed by the thoughts she placed in my head."

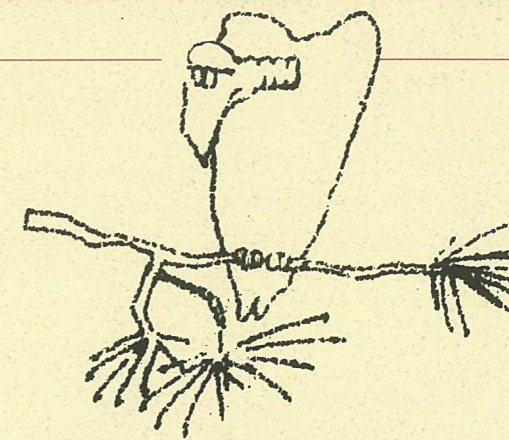
Michelle Lanzoni

Lanzoni, *cont from page 1*

Southwest, southern Africa, and the Middle East.

"Thirst is a most potent force. It can be used to promote conflict or peace. It drives ambition and innovation and promotes human collaboration. Humans thirst for justice and dignity and belonging sometimes as much as we do for water. To experience thirst more acutely, I travel to regions where wa-

ter (or clean water) is scarce and where conflicts over water resources erupt in war. Thirst is the great equalizer. We must drink water or die. Using research, literary journalism and creative nonfiction I hope to persuade a drastic reexamination of our relationships to water and encourage a reverence for life."



Our selection committee is often asked about the basic quality we look for as we choose a writer to fund. The answer is a commitment to the deep map. We're not looking for a cursory ride across the desert with a sampling of nature; we're looking for writers willing to inhabit the desert and dig deep. In five years we have funded five great writers. Given the vigor of our board, we have a long life ahead.

Dear Mark,

Just a brief note to say how much Debra and I admire what you're doing with the Ellen Meloy Fund. Your dedication and your actions not only honor Ellen but the landscape you shared with her and the tradition of storytelling of which she was such an accomplished practitioner.

You make the whole company of men and women writing about language and culture look good.

We send you every good wish for the new year.

All best,

Barry Lopez, Finn Rock Oregon

A book edited by Barry Lopez includes excerpts from Ellen Meloy's writings. HOME GROUND: Language for an American Landscape is a collection of more than 800 fading landscape terms. November 2006.

In 2010, Lanzoni also received an Outstanding Committee Award from the Clinton Global Initiative University to build ten small-scale wastewater treatment plots in the Ganges Strip and the West Bank in order to produce water that is suitable for olive tree irrigation.



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for Desert Writers
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The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

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

Supporting the Fund

Ellen Meloy Fund offers an annual award of \$2,000 to an individual to celebrate 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 to donate through PayPal or use the envelope inserted in this newsletter to mail a check. All contributions are tax deductible.

Introducing a Few Members of the EMF Board

LEONORA DITZLER is Ellen's niece and daughter of Grant, which probably explains a lot.... As a teen, Lenora loyally followed Ellen around the desert. As an adult, she follows Ellen's example of how to live a meaningful life: by folding art and science together into a daily practice; indulging in a healthy dose of wanderlust; and giving in to a deeply-felt pull towards wild and open spaces. Lenora's pursuits have led her on wacky travel adventures, onto the decks of many commercial fishing boats from Maine to Alaska, into the vegetable garden, and finally into the classroom. She now teaches Environmental Science to art students in Napa, CA; there you'll find her in the garden, plotting revenge on the cabbage moth, recounting tales of the high seas, and sketching designs for her new chicken coop.

AMY IRVINE MCHARG is a sixth-generation Utahan and longtime wilderness advocate with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. Amy lives with her family in southwest Colorado, where she writes and keeps goats. Her second book, *Trespass: Living at the Edge of the Promised Land*, won the 2008 Orion Book Award and the 2008 Colorado Book Award.

Since 2003, **SANDY SHUPTRINE** has been spending 'mud season' in Jackson Hole where she resides with her family, on the banks of the San Juan River near Bluff, volunteering for the BLM. There she met Mark and Ellen. Ellen's prose continues to pull her onto the slickrock of Comb Ridge searching for early spring wildflowers and soaking up the dramatic 360° vistas into four states. Sandy's dreams of actually finding time to write seem easily diverted

by the daily routines of a volunteer river ranger. Ellen's books have provided a readily accessible venue for enjoying the familiar desert landscape at any time. She would have dearly loved getting to know Ellen better and perhaps having her as a companion hiker or river runner on occasion.

RENA SATRE MELOY wishes she had Ellen's voice—both how she remembers it sounding in real life, like rich amber, as well as how she captured it in words on a page. Rena also wishes she had Ellen's height. Although she can only covet these, one thing she and Ellen share whole-heartedly is a reverent love for sunshine. Rena, Ellen's niece, grew up in Helena, Montana and currently works as a graphic designer and artist in Portland, Oregon. And yes, she still worships the sun every chance she gets.



Lanzoni Receives EMF Award in 2010

Last year, the Ellen Meloy Fund chose Michelle Lanzoni, a native of the Boston area, as the recipient of the fifth annual Desert Writers Award. A grant of \$2,000 will support work on her upcoming book *Thirst*.

"Michelle Lanzoni is a young writer at work on the most important environmental issue on earth—the issue of water availability to human beings and natural systems," said

Awards Panel member Don Snow. "Michelle has done original research in some of the driest places on the planet where she sees that water scarcity and human conflict increasingly go hand-in-hand. She writes about it with wit, grace, and beauty. We can hardly wait to see what she will eventually produce."

Trained in biology, Lanzoni writes, "My desert vision links landscapes to water sources. It moves in degrees of salt. Some of these water sources, such as the Colorado River or the Jordan River, are visible. Other sources, such as the over-mined aquifer beneath the Gaza Strip, are not. Key to this landscape map is an intimate familiarity with salt. The dissolved salts carried in rivers, aquifers, and wells map the water's history and deepen the landscape's story. *Thirst* could be divided into three sections—Hydrogen, Oxygen, and Salt."

Snow noted that Lanzoni's work arises from a long tradition of scientifically-oriented natural history writing but also shows a rich familiarity with the language of social and environmental justice. "She's a holistic thinker, very much in the mode of Ellen Meloy. Like Ellen, Michelle profoundly perceives the human connection to the most elemental aspects of our lives—water, earth, animals, air."

Lanzoni writes, "From a young age I sensed deserts are birthed through the most elemental decisions. When I was sixteen I traveled to the Kalahari desert of Botswana, and I drank, for the first time, water too salty to bear. I have since been molded by deserts of the American

Notes from the EMF Executive Director

by Mark Meloy

What started out five years ago as a shot in the dark is now a reality. Contributing hours of grateful effort, a handful of Ellen's friends and relations have created a literary institution in her name. The Ellen Meloy Fund reveres authors who work to illuminate desert environments with skill, heart, and humor.

Her writing blended personal experience with brilliant biographies of the occupants of her deserts; the obsessed scientist seeking method and location of mating humpback chubs, her band of bighorn sheep returning from certain extinction, waterfowl lost in the neon

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glitter of Las Vegas. These stories profoundly affect the way people experience and understand the desert, revealing its grain and enhancing its natural patina. In Ellen's name we seek to enlarge literary geography, history, nature, politics, biology and poetics of place. To that end, our fund offers a monetary boost to encourage continued immersion into the "deep map of place."

(A Message from Mark, cont. page 3)

(Michelle Lanzoni, cont. page 3)