

2008 Award Applications Due

The deadline to apply for the 2008 Desert Writers Award is December 31, 2007. Please refer all interested applicants to www.ellenmeloy.com for application information.

Ellen Lives on Through Her Writings

Ellen never was far from her journal. At home, on the road, on the river, or simply outdoors, she regularly recorded her thoughts and the things she discovered. She sketched out her experiences and impressions of the places she inhabited and those she visited. In her field notes from 1982, on one of her first trips from Montana to the deserts of southern Utah, she wrote:

"The sun that sets this evening is not entirely a summer sun, yet it lights the sandstone cliffs like orange fire. The spires – odd and mysterious – of Monument Valley are lavender and one dimensional. The angle of light stirs me to near weeping. I feel a very deep and primal homesickness that I want the desert to be where I live. Inside me, not outside. Swallow it. Nothing draws me back to the north country. I would prefer this gypsy life of moving just a few miles each day, within this Four Corners area. The sun is near the horizon here on the mesa top, only the low bushes make shadows. The campers on the other end of the rim silhouetted in gold... peaceful, slow movements – watching. Below the two curves of river sweep around canyon walls in deep shadow. And I can look down on the backs of birds."

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2007 Writer's Award Presented to Lily Mabura

The second annual Desert Writers Award was recently presented to Lily Mabura, a native of Kenya, who currently lives in Columbia, MO. Mabura will receive a grant of \$1,000 to support

her project, *Beyond Archer's Post*, and plans to travel to the Chalbi Desert and Lake Turkana in the North Eastern Province of Kenya to write about the region's nomadic ethnic groups and arid landscapes.

The Ellen Meloy Fund (EMF) for Desert Writers supports writers whose work reflects the spirit and passion for the desert embodied in Ellen's writings. Greer Chesher, chair of the EMF awards commit-

tee, said, "Lily Mabura writes with precision and clarity, imagination and a deep particularity. Her intention to explore the remote and dangerous desert lands of Kenya and her talents as a writer make Lily an excellent choice for this award."

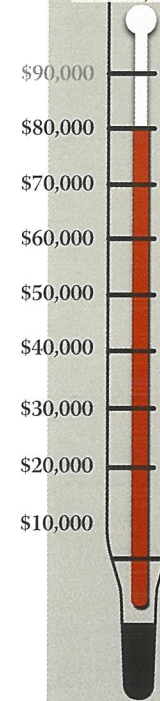
When discussing her project, *Beyond Archer's Post*, Mabura noted, "It is difficult to travel to this region

(2007 Award, continued on page 2)

With Your Support the Ellen Meloy Fund Continues to Grow

Thanks to the generous donations of so many of Ellen's great friends, we

Fund Goal \$100,000



are proud to report that the fund has reached \$80,000. We have given cash awards to two writers, while doubling the amount of the award offered for 2008. With support and recognition from our fund, both writers are doing great things.

Please find time to send us your tax-deductible contribution for 2007 so we might reach our current goal of \$100,000. The \$100,000 endowment provides the income for our annual award and modest operating expenses. The Fund is nothing more than Ellen's 200-plus friends who have kept her memory and her legacy growing.

American Museum of Natural History Honors Ellen

by Mark Meloy, Executive Director

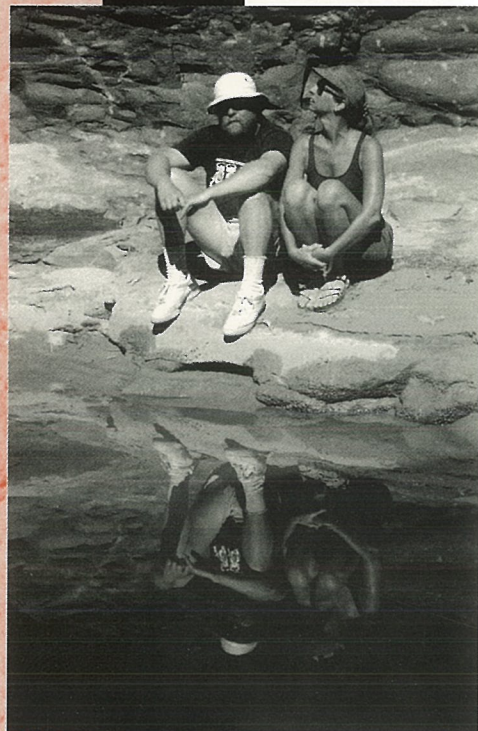
Ellen and I went to New York a few times and they were joyous trips, quite the contrast to Bluff, the necessary adjustment, from the spare desert to the land of opulence, enormous. A worldly woman, Ellen was up to the task; beautiful in her evening gown, black of course, she had the poise to charm the luminaries of the publishing world, which seemed to us as though in another country if not another planet. Ten years ago we were in New York to receive the coveted Whiting Foundation Award. That honor and stipend really cemented her writing career, and fostered an all important ingredient of self-confidence.

In April of this year, I went again to New York and again for a cele-

bration of Ellen. On this trip, without Ellen by my side, I accepted for her the extremely prestigious John Burroughs Association Medal for 2007. The Burroughs award, given annually since 1926, is the gold standard of nature writing, shared by the likes of Rachel Carson, Loren Eiseley, Barry Lopez and Peter Matthiessen.

Ellen had a quarter-century, passionate affair with red stone. Most writers engage their subjects with interest and curiosity. Not Ellen. She was literally taken by the landscape, body and soul.... Serious, sensual, and humorous – Ellen's deep map of home was always fluid. She needed to live what she wrote. She left four books, innumerable essays and 25

(Burroughs Medal, continued on page 3)





The Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

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

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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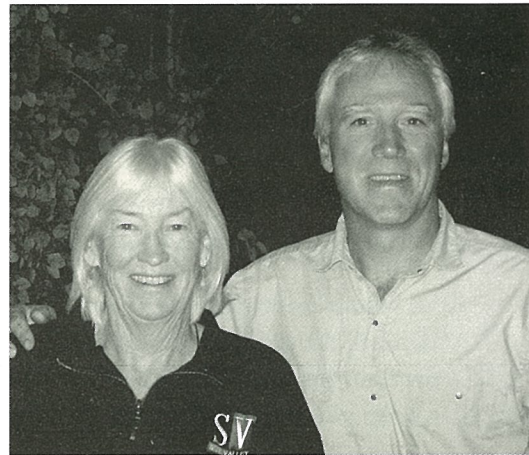
Message from the Ellen Meloy Fund Co-Chairs

Tony Jewett & Joan Miles • Helena, Montana • November 4, 2007

Today marks the third anniversary of Ellen's passing, and as we sit here preparing to write our Chair's column for this year's Ellen Meloy Fund newsletter, we realize how lucky we are. Last night we had dinner with a number of Ellen's old friends, and we had a chance to reflect on how fortunate we have been to have our lives filled with so many talented, kind, and genuine people. Too often we become so busy that we lose track of the depth and value of these relationships, or find that distance and time separate us from those who have helped shape us.

The EMF is one small way all of us whose lives have been shaped by our friendship with Ellen can keep the flame of remembrance burning. This year we provided our second award – to the talented and interesting Lily Mabura. The Fund's endowment continued to build and grow. We topped \$80,000 and are closing on our goal of \$100,000.

Our memories of Ellen live on uniquely and joyously within each of



Joan Miles and Tony Jewett

us. The Ellen Meloy Fund is another way you have all helped perpetuate her writing legacy and her personal stamp on the planet.

We hope you see in this update the great strides we are making toward our mission to provide other talented and aspiring Ellen Meloy's an opportunity to grow their talents and skills. And, we also hope you consider a gift to the Fund this year. It will help us reach our full endowment goal and set the Fund on a path of permanency and financial stability. 📖



Lily Mabura

2007 Award, *continued from page 1*

of Kenya due to extreme terrain and banditry or militia incursions from Ethiopia and Sudan.... Like most Kenyans, I am petrified by the region, but there is the writer in me who really wants to see it and, gradually, my curiosity has eclipsed my fears, even though I suspect my real test is yet to come. I am hoping that my experience and the stories that emerge from it will enlighten others about this region, which deserves more attention in terms of humanitarian aid, education, security, environmental conservation and infrastructure."

The EMF Board wishes Mabura well as she embarks on this challenging and exciting journey and looks forward to learning about her experiences in her future writings. 📖

A Letter from an Appreciative Reader

Michael Aune • Lynden, Washington • June 26, 2007

In late May, Kathy and I returned to the Colorado Plateau. We both enjoy reading. She bought a soft cover of *The Anthropology of Turquoise* while at Canyonlands, and I read it as we camped and wandered what had been my backyard for 11 years. I lived in Montana in the early 1980s, in Wyoming the last half of that decade, and in Arizona from 1990 until we moved to the Pacific Northwest in 2001. We at one point were seriously considering the Bluff area as our home around 1997. I photographed with black and white film the old Buick under the sign there several times. Why black and white with such vivid colors everywhere? I did shoot color, as you can see from the enclosed cards from the Colorado Plateau, and I could never do justice to what my eyes told my brain. My poetry inside the cards was a feeble attempt to attach feeling to place.

Now, at age 57, I have some neurologic challenges. I used to backpack into the solitude of wild country until I was 49, then went for hikes that later became strolls. Now they are stumbles. Among the things that are going downhill on a narrow and rocky path is my vision.

I read aloud parts of *Anthropology* to my wife – Ellen's description of colors and textures and sounds, of how the slick rock and sand and water felt. Kathy is reading it now. I told her, when I handed her the book, that if things deteriorated for me further, and I would be able to read only one book before lights out ... I would want to read and hear Ellen's descriptive voice once again ... to remind me. Kathy said I should tell you. So I have. 📖

Ellen receives John Burrough's Association Medal

continued from page 1

volumes of field notes. Arthritis in her hip, a congenital condition exacerbated by years of rowing boats and hiking trails, left her mobility compromised, an unacceptable condition for the perfectionist she was.

The dedication in the book *Eating Stone* is to me, but it is written in Navajo, a language I do not comprehend. For unclear reasons, I sought a translation only last week, choosing to ask the native clerk at our market in Bluff. She read it and read it again and looked at me perplexed. Could it say simply, 'Can you fix my vehicle?' Clearly it was a bit of mischief, probably a phrase taken from some antiquated guide book to travel on the reservation. Humor laced with certain poignancy about her own condition.

There will never be another Ellen Meloy, but her legacy lives on. The John Burroughs Medal places her where she deserves to be, among the giants in her field. Throughout her career she worried about failure, today she discards that worry. In her honor, the Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers (www.ellenmeloy.com) was started. A cash stipend is given yearly to a writer who carries on the tradition Ellen started. The fund accumulates through individuals giving relatively small amounts, but there are a lot of us. 📖



The American Museum of Natural History awarded Ellen Meloy the 2007 John Burroughs Association Medal. The award, given annually since 1926, is the gold standard of nature writing, shared by the likes of Rachel Carson, Loren Eiseley, Barry Lopez and Peter Matthiessen.

