

The
Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers

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

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EMF Board & Friends, continued from page 3

and floated, gossiped and philosophized, talked and taught writing with Ellen. Ellen is still a frequent companion on Ann's explorations of the landscape of the imagination.

Don Snow met Ellen Meloy in 1978 when the two of them were stripping grad students at the University of Montana. Ellen's boyfriend married Don's girlfriend, leaving Ellen and Don

with nothing but their writing and the occasional bottle of tequila. They remained friends. Don created *Northern Lights Magazine* where some of Ellen's first essays appeared, along with her artworks and cartoons. Don now teaches at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA, and regularly introduces students to the works of Ellen Meloy in his environmental literature course.

Patti Borneman works for the Biomimicry Guild, an innovation consultancy in Helena, MT. She met Ellen in the 1980s when her husband Bill began working with Ellen's soon-to-be husband Mark. A lasting friendship ensued, built on a mutual love of good food, good wine, good books, and Ellen's good dog, Coeur d'Alene. After Ellen moved to Utah, Patti followed Ellen's remarkable literary accomplishments. Later, Patti designed and launched the *EllenMeloy.com* website. Now, as a board member, she manages the website and contributes in

innumerable ways to keep the EMF on track, focused, and moving forward.

Sandy Shuptrine lives in Jackson, WY, but frequently wanders down to the Utah desert. She met Ellen and Mark when she volunteered to work at the check-in point for San Juan River floats. Though she didn't know it at the time, she also met a number of Ellen's friends with whom she would later work with in Ellen's memory on the Ellen Meloy Fund.

John Wilson, also a Montana grad-school friend, introduced Ellen to the river world of trout, flies, boats, and playing hooky. Ellen's talents overshadowed everyone, but all her fishing friends really wanted to know was, "Can she row?" Happily still in Montana, John just finished a 30-some year career of environmental activism. He and his air guitar are now on the "pro-fun" circuit, haunting Montana rivers as well as bonefish flats in warmer climes.

When **Beth Satre** was in junior high, her sister Kay moved in with Mark's brother Tim and her family was welcomed into the extended Meloy clan. As a result, Beth got to know Ellen and Mark over the course of many dinners, family celebrations, and much laughter in Helena along with hikes, hijinks, and sing-a-longs while camping at Crow Creek. Still living in Montana, Beth is a graphic designer who dabbles in photography and loves the wilderness.

Kim Konikow heard Ellen speak at the Great Salt Lake Festival Book Festival and then joined her for dinner, along with friend Greer Chesher and Chip Ward. She remembers thinking how wonderfully bright and sardonic and beautiful Ellen was. A city-girl, she started reading Ellen's books and was transformed. Kim volunteered to assist the EMF, bringing to the table her vast and practical experience as a strategic consultant in the arts. She resides in Southern Utah.

Amy McHarg Irvine Receives 2009 Desert Writers Award

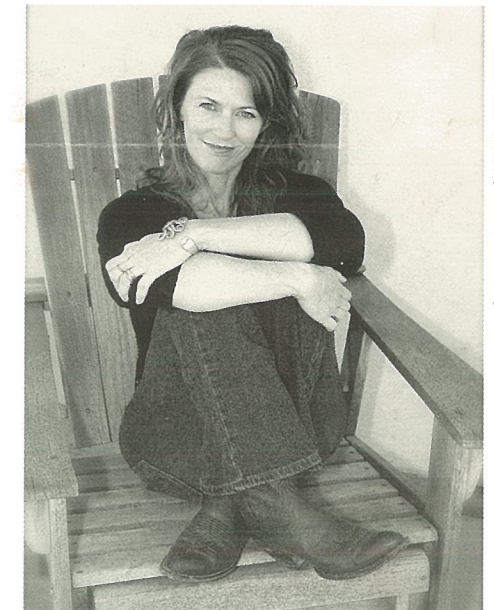
The Ellen Meloy Fund (EMF) has chosen Amy Irvine as the recipient of the fourth annual Desert Writers Award. A grant of \$2,000 will support work on her upcoming book *Terra Firma*, a "vertical journey" into the Utah desert.

The EMF supports writers whose work reflects the spirit and passions for the desert embodied in Meloy's writing and in her commitment to a "deep map of place." Before her untimely death in 2004, Ellen published four books, numerous articles and radio commentaries, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and received the John Burrows Association Medal for 2007.

"Amy Irvine explores her bonds with her native terrain—the marks her people have made on the country and the ways the landscape shapes

her—in elegant and often surprising language, language rich with imagination, humor and emotion," says Awards Panel member Ann Weiler Walka. "Her intensity and intelligence have created a deeply layered map of home. In her new project she intends to extend the atlas into unknown territory."

A wilderness advocate for many years, Irvine writes "I am a daughter of Deseret. Colorado Plateau and Great Basin provinces combined have defined my family history; we have been weathered by its topography, its resources, its religion... There is nowhere else I could live, nothing else I could write about." The *Los Angeles Times* suggested that her book *Trespass: Living at the Edge of the Promised Land*, which received the 2008 Orion Book



Amy McHarg Irvine

Award, "...might well be *Desert Solitaire's* literary heir."

(2009 Award, continued on page 2)

The Fund Moves Forward by Mark Meloy, Executive Director

The ten directors of the Ellen Meloy Fund, some of Ellen's closest friends, got together in Zion National Park in early Spring. We spent the day gazing at the gorgeous rock towers rising above the Virgin River as we considered the business of the Fund.

Our objective is plain: to provide financial assistance to writers seeking the literary heart of the desert. We do this to perpetuate Ellen's legacy, literature as deep map of place,

and we are proud to be celebrating our fourth award to a deserving writer, this year for \$2,000.

Each year, friends of Ellen contribute their time to consider dozens of applications, writing samples, and project descriptions to select the most outstanding proposals to receive our support and admiration. Hundreds of hours are donated in remembrance of a woman who brought us four celebrated books, bringing places we love to word.

Despite the economy, the Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers has stayed on track. The endowment of our all-volunteer organization became considerably smaller over the last year, but due to the overwhelming generosity of our original contributors, we remain successful and optimistic.

Just as Mother Nature and the financial markets challenge us to take

(The Fund, continued on page 3)

photo courtesy of SUSIE GRANT



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Message from the Ellen Meloy Fund Co-Chairs

Tony Jewett & Joan Miles • Helena, Montana • June 25, 2009

With the giving of the fourth annual EMF award to Amy Irvine this year, it seems in many ways that the Fund has reached a new milestone. What began as an energetic tribute to perpetuate the memory of a beloved friend and uniquely gifted human being has evolved into a stable and lasting organization; no longer is the Fund just an organization dedicated to the perpetuation of Ellen's remarkable career and life. It now has established a place within the world of literary organizations as a legitimate voice, providing a recognized and coveted tribute to talented writers focused on the desert world.

The Fund does have its challenges. The global economic downfall has cut our endowment by nearly 40 percent, a loss made more difficult to accept since it was built piece by piece over the last four years with the very generous and on-going gifts of so many of Ellen's wonderful friends and family. The EMF Board is composed of busy people, pursuing professional careers and packing the most we can into our personal lives—making it challenging to find the time required to keep the EMF growing and focused. Yet despite these issues, the Fund not only persists, but grows and flourishes.

This past March the Board met in Zion. Members came from all over the West to participate, some driving 16 hours. It was an important gathering, as we were looking for solutions to a declining endowment and the need to re-establish our momentum. The 48 hours the Board spent together, including a day meeting with the valley floor of Zion as our backdrop, were both invigorating and reinforcing.

The Board's Awards Committee announced the selection of the enormously talented Amy Irvine as this year's recipient of the EMF Desert Writer's Award.

We put together a new fundraising plan and selected several new Board members to bring new abilities and commitment to our group. We took stock of—and great joy in—the remarkable evolution of the Fund from a concept to the lasting, stable, committed, and recognized organization it is today.

As we send this update to all of our supporters and Ellen's circle of wonderful friends across the country, we sincerely hope you continue to think of the fact that Ellen's memory and talent persists in the works of artists like Amy Irvine. With your on-going help and persistence, the Fund's Award will continue to grow in stature and presence within the literary world for decades to come.



2009 Award, *continued from page 1*

Embarking on a new book, Irvine writes that in *Terra Firma* she intends to “go deep.” Guided by Jungian archetypes, the lives of resident animals and the findings of drill rigs and coal miners, she aims to “plot the points of a subterranean diagram—charting the vital, relatively unknown layer of the vast map of Deseret” and posing metaphors for our own psyches. She adds, “Such a dive will add a new perspective to the way we see ourselves in relation to such sacred space.”

The grant from the EMF will allow Irvine to make “forays to the increasing number of drill rigs, uranium mines, and coal seams in southeastern Utah,” as well as the time and quiet to write.

Go to www.ellenmeloy.com for more information about Ellen Meloy, the Fund for Desert Writers, and the annual award.

The Fund, *continued from page 1*

a time out, giving becomes more imperative. When I called to congratulate Amy Irvine, this year's award recipient, she told me the support will be the “shot in the arm” that gets her going again on a project nearly abandoned because of the numerous challenges she faces. The publishing world is contracting along with the economy. That makes it doubly hard for the lone voices out west to be heard. Our small but prestigious award can be the extra nudge a writer needs to get published.

We understand the importance and gravity of our work and proceed, just as Amy has, with renewed determination to reach our goals, while protecting new contributions from future downturns. With that in mind, all future revenues will be deposited in more secure investments for steadier growth.

In a radio press conference following our 2009 award, Lee Austin of Utah Public Radio asked me how the Fund got started. In my usual bull in the china shop sort of way, I said I got out our address book and started asking friends for money. I quickly found out just how many generous friends and admirers we have. The response was huge and extremely gratifying, and will continue to insure the success of our efforts.

Thanks to all who have helped us.

EMF Board Members & Indispensable Friends

Tony Jewett drifted to Helena penniless, homeless and happy in 1980. Armed with a crate of Campbell's soups and a heating coil, he took up temporary professional refuge at the Montana Environmental Information Center, where he met both his wife, Joan Miles, and his lifelong friend Ellen. Ellen became the center of a circle of friends devoted to all-day fun and laughs, any-excuse excursions into the ‘great out-a-doors’, and making the world a better place through environmental advocacy. Ellen once rescued Tony from the arresting clutches of a rural Montana sheriff whom Tony had (for some reason) mistaken for the friendly Easter bunny. They remained entwined by a shared passion for the red rocks to the south and the search for the next chapter ahead.

Joan Miles lives, plays, and works in Montana. She met Ellen in the Environmental Studies graduate program in Missoula, and Joan and Ellen later joined Don Snow in working for an environmental advocacy group in Helena. The three were known to do things like pack a picnic dinner, drinks

and fancy hats, and turn a field trip to the toxic waste pit in Butte into a “pit-nic.” Ellen abandoned the job and the house she shared with Joan when she met Mark Meloy and drifted south to the Utah desert.

Grant Ditzler is Ellen's brother and bon-vivant elementary school art teacher in San Francisco. Over the years Grant and his wife Frances were frequent seasonal visitors to the Meloy-Ditzler residence in Bluff, UT, where they offered Ellen wise tidbits of advice and moral support in how to handle Mark and served as arbiters of the unanswerable on long summer evenings spent on Ellen's front porch gazing down at the bluffs over the San Juan.

Maile Meloy is a novelist and short-story writer and Ellen's niece. She grew up in Montana, where Ellen was an inspiring and entertaining presence. The summer Ellen's first book, *Raven's Exile*, was published, Maile was living with Mark and Ellen in Utah, and working on the Green

Giving to the Fund

The Ellen Meloy Fund offers a yearly award of \$2,000 to an individual to write about the desert from the desert. The level of support and number of awards will increase as the principal of the fund develops through effective fundraising and investment.

Most of the funds will be raised from individuals; all donations are tax deductible. Arrangements can be made to accommodate personal financial situations, including gifts over time. Contributions of \$100 or more will receive either a hardbound first edition of Ellen's Pulitzer Prize finalist, *The Anthropology of Turquoise*, inscribed by Mark Meloy, her husband, or a CD with 22 of Ellen's Utah Public Radio commentaries. Please specify whether you would prefer the book or the CD.

You can contribute in two ways—either visit www.ellenmeloy.com and donate through PayPal or simply send a check payable to “Ellen Meloy Fund” to the following address.

Ellen Meloy Fund
D.A. Davidson & Co.
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Helena, MT 59624

River. She credits Ellen with making it seem possible to make a life and a living as a writer.

Greer Cheshier is a writer living in Rockville, UT, with the Adventure Dog Bo, the Jack Russell Terror Minnie, Marion Blackberry the cat, and horses Valiant and Rowdy. She met Ellen through the exchange of funny postcards, and wishes she still received them.

A poet and naturalist, *Ann Weiler Walka* writes, teaches and occasionally leads museum expeditions into the Colorado Plateau backcountry. Her family moved to Bluff at the same time as Mark and Ellen, and for nearly ten years Ann hiked

(*The EMF Board, continued on back*)