



**FREQUENCY NORTH:
THE VISITING WRITERS READING SERIES
AT THE COLLEGE OF SAINT ROSE**

**SELECTED PUBLICITY CLIPS
2006-2014**



A PAGE from Matt Madden's "99 Ways to Tell a Story."

FROM FRIDGE TO GOP

Will "Frequency North," the College of Saint Rose's new visiting writers series, be the rebellious younger sibling to the New York State Writers Institute's starry lineup? The series opener suggests as much. Brooklyn illustrator Matt Madden will discuss his new graphic collection "99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style," in which an interrupted trip to the refrigerator is rendered in scores of comic-book modes, including superhero-ish and Tintin-style. The Phoenicia-based political poet Sparrow is likely to discuss his unsuccessful run for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination, which inspired his book "Republican Like Me."

7:30 tonight. Room 206, College of Saint Rose Picotte Art Center, 324 State St., Albany. 454-2812. Free.

A real sketch of a story

New graphic novel shows the creative process at work

By **MICHAEL JANAIRO**, Staff writer

Click byline for more stories by writer.

First published: Sunday, February 19, 2006

Raymond Queneau's "Exercises in Style" is a so-called classic for writing students, because it takes a vignette and retells it in 99 different ways.

Though a man encountering a stranger twice in one day isn't that compelling, some of the variations are quite witty and fun, especially ones that transform the story into an ode, a sonnet and a haiku.

Most, however, read like "Saturday Night Live" skits: humorous ideas that quickly turn tedious in the follow through, such as one written entirely in passive voice. Others with headings such as "Antiphrasis," "Paragoge" and "Litotes" are sure to send you running for a dictionary of literary terms, and you may never want to look at Queneau's book again.

Now, the graphic novelist Matt Madden along comes (literally: he appeared Jan. 26 at The College of Saint Rose's new reading series, Frequency North). He was so inspired by Queneau's book that he wrote his own: "99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style" (Chamberlain Bros.; 207 pages; \$16.95).

He states in his introduction that "99 Ways" took six years to write. So if it can be considered an apprenticeship under Queneau, then Madden has accomplished a rare feat: he has surpassed the master.

Madden's story, or "template," is an eight-panel comic that shows a writer getting up from his computer; crossing into a room with a refrigerator; being asked, "What time is it?" by someone upstairs; responding, "It's 1:15"; and then staring into the fridge and thinking (in a thought bubble), "What the hell was I looking for, anyway?!"

Sure, it's just as mundane as Queneau's story, but Madden shows me what I failed to see in the earlier book -- the creative process at work (in graphic detail, no less). I even laughed out loud at times.

Madden retells the story by changing such things as point of view (first person perspective; voyeur's perspective), formal constraints (one panel; 30 panels; all horizontal; all vertical), and comic styles (manga; romance; fantasy; political; underground). He even includes such radical alterations in homage to other artists, such as the 19th-century Swiss cartoonist Rodolphe Toppfer; Richard F. Outcault, creator of "Hogan's Alley"; and Jack "King" Kirby, creator of Fantastic Four and Captain America.

The visual medium makes comparing versions immediately possible. The variations make evident how any one decision in style, content or form can alter the substance of the story. And those choices, when taken to their logical extremes, can lead to fascinating distortions, such as what is taken away and the heightened drama of eight panels in extreme close-up. What these exercises add up to is a way of seeing that expands the possibilities of storytelling.

Of course, my ability to see this now has everything to do with the books' contexts.

Queneau's book was written in French in 1946 (and translated into English) and alludes to a kind of pre-television erudition and education (such as classical Latin and Greek), with an appeal to a modernist mind-set, no doubt shaped by the contemporaneous advent of the dada and surrealist movements.

Madden, on the other hand, is a contemporary from New York City. And though I was never a comic book fanboy, I did grow up reading them, including comic-book versions of classic literature.

So, for me, Madden's text alludes to more familiar cultural artifacts, such as a character's use of a laptop, or a parody of a public service announcement promoting safe sex, or an homage to the ubiquitous Charles Atlas comic-book advertisements in which the weakling gets sand kicked in his face. And like most everything nowadays, the book has a related Web site, <http://www.exercisesinstyle.com>.

Will Madden's book become the next classic text for writing students? I hope it isn't limited to just that. The book's readability and appeal make it essential for the libraries of illustrators, artists, graphic novelists, writers, readers and anyone who enjoys exploring the wonders of storytelling and the mysteries of creativity.

Michael Janairo can be reached at 454-5629 or by e-mail at mjanairo@timesunion.com.

[Skip to content](#)



- [Customer Care](#)
- [Place an Ad](#)
- [E-mail Updates](#)
- [Get TV Weekly](#)

timesunion.com

[timesunion.com](#) [Web Search by YAHOO!](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [U.S. & World](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Cars](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Help](#)

[All timesunion.com blogs](#) | [City Brights](#) | [Capitol Confidential](#) | [Crime Confidential](#) | [On the Edge](#) | [Table Hopping](#) | [The Advocate](#) | [Read & React](#) | [The Buzz](#)



[Books Blog: A Conspiracy of Smart People](#)

A place for Capital Region readers and writers to share all things literary
[About the Contributors](#)

[David Lehman interview](#)

September 30, 2007 at 5:17 am by [Michael Janairo, Arts & Entertainment Editor](#)



Love of language
By MICHAEL ECK

[David Lehman](#) likes poetry. Yeah, yeah, everybody likes poetry. But Lehman likes it in a “you’re scaring me” kind of way. One wonders if he might actually come through the phone line and leap into the living room to start reciting Byron, Shelley, Keats or perhaps one of his own wildly inventive works.

Lehman has no fewer than half-a-dozen collections to his credit, but he is also the editor and founder of “The Best American Poetry” series (which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year); a literary critic; and editor of the 2006 anthology, “The Oxford Book of American Poetry.”

He reads and writes lots of poems.

Lehman, who is also on the core faculty of the graduate writing program at New York University, will kick off the third season of The College of Saint Rose’s “Frequency North” writers series on Thursday. Frequency North describes itself as an “aggressively eclectic”

[RSS](#) [Posts](#) | [Comments](#) [Log in](#)

Recent Comments

- [Book giveaway: ‘Moby-Dick’ \(12\)](#)
 - o [Vincent Zandri](#): What’s interesting is that as wonderful holding that dogeared copy o in your hand (and...
 - o [PW](#): The book I return to ove and over again is James Joyce “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young...
 - o [Jason](#): Because it reminds me my more youthful, free-thinki slightly pessimistic days, I’ve read...

program of readings curated by Daniel Nester, an assistant professor of English at the school.

To give you an idea of just how passionate Lehman is about poetry, consider this. He once assigned himself the task of writing a poem a day, which he then did for 140 days straight. His most recent collection, “Jim and Dave Meet The Masked Man,” co-written with James Cummins, is made up solely of sestinas, a tortuously strict and convoluted form dating back to the 12th century.

Presently he’s working on two more collections, one on the theme of memory and another in which every poem is in the manner of another poet, such as “Shelley, Keats, Rilke or Gertrude Stein,” he explained.

Thankfully, he didn’t pop out of the phone during his interview last week, but he did hold court on his favorite topic.

Here’s just a little of what he had to say:

Q: What makes a good poem?

A: A good poem will have language that is fresh, vivid, real and imaginative, or at least has an imaginative approach to language.

The first obligation of a poem is to arrest the reader, to make one pay attention. The poet doesn’t have a lot of time to do that, especially in the world of today’s diminished attention spans.

One thing you need in a poem is for that poem to impart pleasure, for that poem to make the reader want to read it; to sustain the reader’s attention. But that’s just a bare minimum. What you would like ideally would be something more, whether complexity of thought; brilliance of insight; extraordinary wit; the cleverness of stating in a new way an old truth; or a new perception that’s never been made before.

You want that in poetry and you want a poem that has a quality that compels you to reread it, a poem that makes you want to read it a second time — not necessarily because it’s difficult, but because you’re attracted to it.

Good poetry should be capable of yielding itself in more than one reading.

Q: What makes a good reader?

A: A good reader is someone who loves words and loves language and loves literature; and who is open to it. It’s someone who is willing to be read by the work just as he or she is reading the work, that is to say, to allow the work to speak to you and to take in what is being said as if you’re having a dialogue with it.

I think a good reader is someone who has a certain amount of humility but who at the same time also has certain expectations and demands.

Q: What is the value of poetry today?

A: Poetry has survived thousands of years and it will continue to do so. I think its uses are many. People are always astonished that poetry has a readership, but it does.

Post 9/11, poems were circulated by electronic means as a way not only of comforting or reassuring but also as a way of having a dialogue about what had happened. Poems like W.H. Auden’s “September 1, 1939” made the rounds. People looked to poetry for something that they were getting nowhere else.

Q: Could you address contemporary poetry culture?

A: There are lots of different ways an interest in poetry manifests itself.

The most common way today, as it has been for the past many years, is for poetry to be centered in universities and among literary circles.

One of the things that’s different today, though, is that where poetry readings were once exceptional and associated with particularly flamboyant figures like Dylan Thomas, Robert Frost or Allen Ginsberg, now we have so many readings that it seems a primary way of dissemination.

- [Poems, love and sex \(3\)](#)
 - [travesti](#): thank you for sharing travesti
- [Book giveaway: ‘Three Cups of Tea’ \(8\)](#)
 - [Mary Beth Biette](#): REACH FOR YOUR DREAMS NO MATTER HOW HIGH OR LIFE IS A BROKEN WINGED BIRD THAT CANNOT FLY! This..
 - [U2](#): Emily Dickinson’s “Became Could Not Stop For Death” has always gotten closer to me as grow...
 - [Ljanna](#): My friend tree I sawe you down but I must attend a older friend the sun -Lorine Niedecker. I came across...

Categories

- [Audio Books](#)
- [Authors](#)
- [Awards & Contests](#)
- [Blook](#)
- [Book videos](#)
- [Classic books](#)
- [General](#)
- [Giveaway](#)
- [Graphic Novels](#)
- [Haiku](#)
- [Local](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [New Books](#)
- [News roundup](#)
- [Off Topic](#)
- [Philippines](#)
- [Readings & Events](#)
- [Recommendations](#)
- [Reviews](#)

Twitter Updates

- My Top 3 Weekly #lastfm artists: G Laswell (15), Sean Hayes (3) and Orchestra (1) [#](http://bit.ly/bFMrvj) June 29, 2010 2:51 pm
- NYTimes: No Sex Please, We’re M Class [#](http://nyti.ms/d36CTH) June 2010 10:13 pm
- NYTimes' David Carr reads @timesunion RT @carr2n: dude loc EXACTLY like the kind to hire guy beat a rest. critic [#](http://bit.ly/9FkI18) June 25, 2010 3:56 pm
- I'm at Dia:Beacon (3 Beekman St, Beacon). [#](http://4sq.com/4LXQmp) June 25, 2010 12:32 pm
- Barrington Stage's 'Sweeney Todd' a bloody good time. High energy. Swi pace. #theater <#> June 23, 2010 11:4

We have, here in New York City, on any given night, five or six poetry readings at least, and they're not just in universities or colleges or libraries; they're also in bars and cafes and at monuments and other places. Poetry's venue has enlarged itself.

Q: As an editor, do you ever get tired of reading poem after poem?

A: Well, you know, what Samuel Johnson said of London is also true of poetry. He said that when a man complains of being tired of London, what he means is that he's tired of life.

Poetry is so various and so rich that it's hard to imagine being bored by it, at least for me, luckily, because as you said, I have to read an enormous amount.

Each year, at the end of the year, the guest editor of "The Best American Poetry" says to me, "I can't believe you have to do this again next year, I've done it for one year and that's enough."

It is overwhelming, but I love it.

Q: Do the editor and writer within you ever clash?

A: I'm of the belief that a busy person gets more things done than a lazy person. I have energy enough to sustain more projects than one. I also feel that there are different parts of the mind that are at work on different things.

One thing I've done over the past few years is make watercolor paintings. I know that when I paint it's a different part of my brain at work. The part of my brain that's involved when I write or edit a book is obviously not engaged at the time when I'm making a painting.

Editing and writing are probably closer to each other than either is to painting, but they each fulfill different functions for me. They don't clash.

Q: What reading material has been at your bedside lately?

A: This week I've been reading William Wordsworth, Thomas Gray, Elizabeth Bishop, Walt Whitman and the Greek poet Konstantinos P. Kavafis.



Posted in [Authors](#) | [Add a comment](#)

[RSS feed for comments on this post.](#)

Post a Comment

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Note: All comments are read and approved before they display. Comments with profanity or personal attacks will be rejected.

[Mom Makes \\$6975 a Month \(Ron Block\)](#)
[Are Online Jobs the next big thing? We Investigate. Read More Here.](#)
[WNTV9.com/Ron-Block](#)
[Ron and Susan's Condo In Paradise](#)

• **Archives**

- [-] [2010](#) (72)
 - [June 2010](#) (10)
 - [May 2010](#) (3)
 - [April 2010](#) (2)
 - [March 2010](#) (18)
 - [February 2010](#) (9)
 - [January 2010](#) (30)
- [+] [2009](#) (14)
- [+] [2008](#) (122)
- [+] [2007](#) (746)
- [+] [2006](#) (41)

• **Pages**

- [About the contributors](#)

• **Bookmarks**

- [albany poets >>> News](#)
- [Anecdotal Evidence](#)
- [BlogLily](#)
- [Book Trout](#)
- [Chekhov's Mistress](#)
- [Don Wilcox](#)
- [Edward Schwarzschild](#)
- [Harlem Writer](#)
- [Hodge Podge Books](#)
- [Jennifer Roy](#)
- [Kanlaon](#)
- [Maud Newton](#)
- [My Story Lives](#)
- [National Book Critics Circle](#)
- [Niggerati Manor](#)
- [Of Books and Bicycles](#)
- [Paul Grondahl](#)
- [Pinoy Centric](#)
- [Red Fox Books](#)
- [The Accidental Reader](#)
- [The Beat](#)
- [The Elegant Variation](#)
- [The Literary Saloon](#)
- [The Millions](#)
- [The Morning News](#)
- [Thursday Poets Blog](#)
- [WAMC Book Show](#)
- [Words Without Borders](#)

PICKS OF THE WEEK - March 13-19

Today

GAWDY, BAWDY

It's a combination that's worked before: C-R Productions at Cohoes Music Hall is teaming up two of its best actors with its best director for a classic musical, "42nd Street." Jessica Costa and Jerry Christakos have both lit up the stage in Cohoes a number of times, and Tralen Doler has directed some of the venue's best entries, including "Anything Goes," "A Chorus Line" and "Chicago." Together they'll sing the "Lullaby of Broadway" as they "Shuffle Off to Buffalo." **8 p.m. tonight through Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday. Through March 30. Cohoes Music Hall, 58 Remsen St., Cohoes. 237-5858. \$23-\$32.**



TIM RAAB/NORTHERN PHOTO

THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS berates John Adams (Gary Lynch) in the opening number of the musical "1776," running at the New York State Theatre Institute at Russell Sage College in Troy through Wednesday.

WORDS UP

"Aggressively eclectic," that's what Daniel Nester calls Frequency North, the literary series he founded and runs at The College of Saint Rose. To illustrate the point, consider the slate that's featured tonight: novelist/memoirist Darcey Steinke and poet Gregory Pardlo. Steinke, who made a splash in certain literary circles with "Suicide Blonde" (1992), has recently published "Easter Everywhere: A Memoir" (Bloomsbury, 2007) about her "spiritual search for truth" that draws on Steinke's life growing up in upstate New York. Pardlo's book "Totem" (Copper Canyon Press, 2007) was chosen as the winner of the 2007 American Poetry Review/Honickman Prize, making him the first writer of color to win this prestigious award. **7:30 tonight at the Neil Hellman Library, 392 Western Ave., College of Saint Rose, Albany. Free. 454-2812.**

LONELY LADY

Kid Lang, who has used the past two decades to turn herself from goofy New Wave country good-time girl to moody post-Piaf chanteuse, unveils songs from her just-released disc "Watershed." **8 tonight. Proctors, 432 State St., Schenectady. 346-6204 or**

Friday

SING FREEDOM

Some things, like the Declaration of Independence, never go out of style. Ergo, the New York State Theatre Institute is reviving its popular production of "1776," Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards' musical about the creation of that defining document. Ron Holgate, who won a Tony Award for his portrayal of Richard Henry Lee in the original Broadway production, returns to direct. Recommended for ages 11 and older. **8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. Through March 19. Schacht Fine Arts Center, Russell Sage College, Troy. 274-3256. \$10-\$20.**



NOT TOBY KEITH

One country superstar sings of America putting a boot in the anatomy of its enemies, but Trace Adkins takes a slightly more nuanced path to red-state hitmaking. With comedian Bill Engvall. **7:30 p.m. Friday. Times Union Center, 51 S. Pearl St., Albany. (800) 303-8368. \$39.75.**



ALEX BROOK LYNN

SLAM POETS Shappy Seasholtz and Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz will be guests at The College of Saint Rose's Frequency North Reading Series in Albany to discuss the competitive nature of the genre, which got its start in 1986 in Chicago.

Spotlight on slam

'Words' traces history of poetry movement

By **AMY HALLORAN**

King pins — or at the very least, key members — of the slam poetry world, Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz and Shappy Seasholtz are coming to The College of Saint Rose's Frequency North Reading Series at 7:30 p.m. Thursday. This stop will be the grand finale on a tour that included a major pit stop in Detroit, where Aptowicz hosted the first Women of the World Poetry Slam. The pair of poets, who happen to be a couple but only occasionally work in duet, hit the road primarily because of "Words in Your Face: A Guided Tour Through Twenty Years of the New York City Poetry Slam" (Soft Skull Press; 400 pages; \$17.95), Aptowicz's recently published history of the slam poetry movement.

The book covers the history of slam, which began at Chicago's Green Mill in 1986 when Marc Smith invented a competition format to get audiences into the bar. The habit spread quickly to New York City, where Bob Holman enthusiastically birthed the NYC slam, which in turn pushed poets into the national spotlight in a fashion that had not occurred since Edna St. Vincent Millay toured to sold-out crowds in the early 20th century.

Aptowicz says she is pleased with how the book is being received within and beyond the slam community, especially because people have told her they were inspired to attend slams entirely because of the book. "Words in Your Face" is chockablock with interviews from key figures in the New York City slam world. Shappy Seasholtz, whose first name apparently flows from the fact that he's "shockingly happy," gives a great take on slam styles and how they vary by city. The book, published by Soft Skull Press,

which is known within the world of writing for its nonmainstream texts, was out of stock at several local bookstores when I was seeking it.

I caught up with the poets by e-mail in the midst of their travels.

Q: Do you think Bob Holman has been successful in his mission to popularize poetry?

Aptowicz: I think Bob Holman has been — and continues to be — utterly successful in his mission to popularize poetry. In the years since the Poetry Slam was invented by Marc Smith in Chicago and the years since Bob Holman began

promoting it in his unique way in New York City, I think you can gauge a profound difference in how poetry is viewed.

Take the hip-hop community, for instance. As described by Bill Adler in his interview in "Words In Your Face," rappers would refuse to come to poetry events, because they feared it would make them seem weak or "effete." Now, 10 years later, rappers are appearing alongside Sonia Sanchez and Oscar Brown on HBO's "Def Poetry" and embrace the label poet.

I don't think you would ever imagine 20 years ago that teenagers in the roughest parts of the city would not only admit to writing poetry, but perform in front of their peers on a weekly basis — and yet that's exactly what the success of the NYC youth organization, Urban Word (which was founded with the help of Bob Holman) proves.

Q: How do page poems differ from stage poems and should they even be compared? Or is slam poetry a different medium, like plays vs. novels?

Aptowicz: I think performance poetry and "page poetry" are becoming more and

Frequency North Series

■ **Who:** Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz and Shappy Seasholtz

■ **What:** The slam poets appear as part of the Frequency North Reading Series

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** Neil Hellman Library (First Floor), 392 Western Ave., College of Saint Rose, Albany

■ **Admission:** Free

■ **Info:** 454-2812;

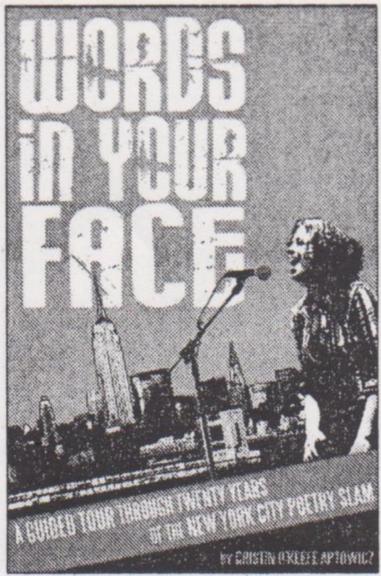
<http://frequencynorth.com>

more aligned in this new millennium. Some of the most respected "page poets" — Billy Collins, Paul Muldoon, etc. — have held sold-out shows at the Bowery Poetry Club. Similarly, many of the best known "performance poets" are coming out with major press books as well. I think as the audience for poetry broadens and deepens, the lines between page and stage — or "academic" and "slam" poetry — will get more and more blurred.

Q: What is it, you think, that appeals to audiences about improv acting and poetry slams?

Seasholtz: First of all, I think the crowd is proud of themselves for getting out of the house to see a live show, so they are ready to have a good time. What could be more exciting than seeing a show where anything can happen? I think it really creates a bond between the artist and the performer when something totally unexpected happens. With poetry slam I feel like people really feel differently about their politics and worldview after hearing so many different voices talking about issues that matter to them. Not that that will happen every week, but that possibility is always there!

► *Amy Halloran is a freelance writer living in Troy.*



PREVIEW

ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE FOR SEPT. 25-OCT. 1, 2008

MUSIC KITCHELL STORMS IN 6

MOVIES LEE'S 'MIRACLE' 27

THEATER 'GHOST' PREMIERE 34

TIMES UNION

ALBANY, NEW YORK



What on Wat

David Rees skewers politics and policy with 'Get Your War On.' / 18

Oh yeah!
Operation:
Enduring Freedom
is in the house!

PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]



Aug. 28, 2007



DAVID REES



THE THIRD "GET YOUR WAR ON" BOOK contains strips from the first two books as well as newer strips, up to Aug. 8, 2008.



Mar. 28, 2002



"GET YOUR WAR ON" COMICS USED BY PERMISSION OF SOFT SMALL PRESS

Feb. 14, 2003

Explosive content

BY AMY HALLORAN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES UNION

David Rees' 'Get Your War On' a satiric take on a divisive issue

The College of Saint Rose's Frequency North Reading Series kicks off its fourth season today with a bang in Albany. Two sticks of literary dynamite are set to detonate for mature audiences: David Rees and Rachel Shukert.

Rachel Shukert is a satirist who works in a variety of media, including plays. Her memoir "Have You No Shame?" was released this past spring.

David Rees is the author of a comic called "Get Your War On," a left-wing political strip composed of two clip-art characters. The comic runs in Rolling Stone and a number of alternative newspapers across the country, including the Chicago Reader, the Hartford Advocate and The Stranger in Seattle.

The strip became a play, and is now animated. The animated comic runs exclusively on 23/6 (<http://www.236.com>). A quick Internet tour of Rees promises that the evening will be hilarious and likely more than worth the free

admission.

Here is an edited version of an e-mail conversation with Rees.

Q: I've read that you thought of "Get Your War On" ("GYWO") in response to the post-9/11 cultural landscape. Was this strip the first idea you followed as your feelings and thoughts developed?

A: No, I started "GYWO" right after America began bombing Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom.) The comics was the means by which I sorted out all my conflicted feelings about 9/11 and the "war on terror." It came to me really quickly in an emotional rush.

Q: Did your approach to the comic change after the play toured?

A: I wasn't involved in the play; the Rude Mechs (theatre company) approached me about using the dialogue from the comic strip and staging their own audio-visual interpretation, and I said "Yes."

I saw the play a couple times, which was a good experience. As you know, the comic strip

Reading

DAVID REES
with RACHEL SHUKERT

- **When:** 7:30 tonight
- **Where:** The College of Saint Rose, Events and Athletics Center, Second Floor, 420 Western Ave., Albany
- **Cost:** Free
- **Contact:** <http://www.strose.edu/Visitors/frequencynorth/frequencynorth.asp>
- **Note:** This program is recommended for those 18 and older

is very declarative and strident, and I thought if I ever animated it or made my own play out of it, I would introduce more awkward pauses and questions — make the tone more hesitant. I've tried to do that with the scripts for the animated version of "GYWO."

Q: Does your work change with audience responses, i.e., do you have a torrent of e-mail and if so how do you combat it, absorb it?

A: Back in the fall of 2001, I got a lot of e-mail. Mostly positive. Some death threats and other pleasantries, but it was never really bad. Most people were supportive of the content, if not the tone (i.e. some people had issues with the profanity).

Q: How do you develop ideas for "GYWO"?

A: On the morning a comic is due, I read the newspaper and then bang my head against the wall until a comic falls out.

Q: What kind of projects are you pursuing now? How is "Relationships" shaping up?

A: Thank you so much for mentioning "Re-

lationships," my masterpiece! (Note: This comic is about shapes in relationships.) The big project I'm working on now is (finally) converting my Web site to blogging software, so I can post comics easily (without futzing with HTML) and keep the site constantly new and updated. I will also be blogging about the election on my site ... and of course, posting new "Relationships" at every opportunity.

Q: Tell me about your reading habits, the ones of your formative years and any current reads you care to reveal.

A: I read a lot as a kid, and I'm trying to get back into reading for pleasure. I've really neglected that practice in the last 10 years. These days I mostly read political blogs, which is no path to mental health. I always buy those big, hardcover books about the war on terror ("The One Percent Doctrine," "Imperial Life in the Emerald City," etc) and read, like, 30 pages before throwing them against the wall and screaming to myself.

Q: What comic strip artists, authors and

illustrators do you admire?

A: Tom Tomorrow; Walt Kelly; Charles Burns; Paper Rad; Michael Kupperman

Q: Did you always want to make comics, or did you study something else more financially promising at Oberlin, too?

A: I studied philosophy, the only discipline less financially promising than left-wing political cartooning.

Q: Has wearing your politics on your sleeve caused any dramas at, say, Thanksgiving dinners?

A: No; my parents are in some ways more liberal than me. They are 70-something die-hard Episcopalians, so they are disgusted by the un-Christian politics of Bush and Co.

Q: Do you want to pursue political topics in January?

A: Yes; I'm working on a humor book that is totally apolitical. I'm sick of following the news. America is doomed.

► Amy Halloran is a freelance writer from Troy.

timesunion.com

Alice Fulton discusses tales of Troy

Alice Fulton continues to be inspired by her hometown

By **C.J. LAIS JR.**, Staff writer

Click byline for more stories by writer.

First published: Sunday, November 9, 2008

Alice Fulton has never left Troy. Sure, the multiple award-winning poet, author and recipient of MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships now lives in Ithaca and is the Ann S. Bowers Professor of English at Cornell University. In her heart and mind, however, she is never far from her hometown.

Her latest book, "The Nightingales of Troy" (Norton, 256 pages, \$23.95), is a collection of related short stories chronicling 100 years in the lives of a family of Irish-American Trojan women.

Wise and lyrical, the 10 stories shift tones and language as the decades glide by, from the turn of the 20th century through the present.

"The sisters in the book were based on my aunts," she says, "though I took liberties and fictionalized. 'I told lies in order to tell the truth.'"

Fulton — who will appear at the University at Albany on Tuesday and The College of Saint Rose on Wednesday — recently talked with the Times Union via phone and e-mail from the home she shares with her husband, artist Hank DeLeo.

Q: Did the desire to write about Troy come first or was it the idea of a collection of stories?

A: I've written about Troy from the beginning, so that must have come first. I was drawn to Troy as a setting for stories because it's a fascinating place. It has a rich history and a turbulent, evocative present. I love the place.

Q: Were there any major themes you were trying to get across with these stories?

A: Themes kind of snuck up on me. Altruism is one theme. Many of the characters grapple with the notion of how much they can give before they're used up. Another theme is loneliness. One character says, "Troy must be the loneliest place on Earth." And I think the book is about love. For me it was very much about love and being able to put on paper the feelings of love I had known.

Q: Did you grow up with a strong sense of female energy?

A: I had wonderful aunts and sisters, so I guess I was immersed in female culture, which of course is just human culture. The women in the book face universal problems. Human problems, not female problems. I drew on family stories when creating the characters and their dilemmas. And toward the end of the book, actually from the 1960s onward, I also drew on my own experiences.

Q: You met a couple of the Beatles. Was that through your time as a DJ at WRPI? Did you use that experience to inform the story "The Real Eleanor Rigby"?

A: I met John Lennon after I interviewed Yoko. It was September of 1973. Someone said to me, "Capitol Records wants to know if you want to interview Yoko." I said, "Of course, yes." George Harrison I met in a similar way, through a friend with connections. He seemed a very kind person, very solicitous. He had the reddest lips on the planet, it looked like he had been up all night eating pistachios, the kind that came in red shells that had to be pried open with your teeth. That was my exact thought at the time. A couple of things George said — and one thing he did — are actually in the story.

Q: Does that story, along with the later ones, feel more personal to you because they are in your time period and influenced by your memories?

A: At first, stories that drew on my own experiences seemed hardest to write, so I wrote them last, after I'd learned a little more about technique. Once I got into them, they were the most enjoyable. It's hard to see yourself objectively, see your own weaknesses, but in the end, I hope I was able to laugh at myself.

Q: What kind of research did you need to do for the historical passages?

A: The research was so engrossing; it was hard to stop. The Troy Record was an invaluable source of news and information about the various decades. At first, I read it on microfilm in the Troy Public Library, but I then was able to get the microfilm through interlibrary loan. I also read magazines and journals published in each decade. And I visited all the sites I write about in the book — from the Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville to OTB in Lansingburgh. Friends and relatives who lived in Troy were a huge help. One of the fascinating things about memory is that two people experiencing the same event will remember different aspects.

Q: What did you learn about Troy that you had never known?

A: I learned so much. I learned that Troy had two floating "dance gardens" in the '30s, The Ship of Joy (which was owned by my father) and The Paradise. Also, there was a lot of illegal bootleg whiskey being made during the '20s and early '30s. I learned that radioactive rain fell on Troy in 1952. I learned that people, including children, frequently drowned in the Hudson River. From ads in the Troy Record, I got an impression of elegance and affluence as well as poverty and tragedy. There were some elegant items to be purchased at the downtown stores — silk umbrellas, petticoats in colors like sandalwood, Bagdad blue, Mephisto red, verdigris and Tiffin. Those are all color names from the 1930s that I found in an old Frear's ad. One of my earliest memories is eating in the mezzanine restaurant in the Frear. I remember getting a lime soda with a lot of crushed ice in it and a glazed French doughnut. I'd never had anything like that before.

Q: What is (was) your favorite and least favorite part of Troy?

A: I like the Oakwood Cemetery, with its lakes and waterfalls and spectacular view of Troy. It's quiet and lovely and there's such a sense of the 19th century. I half-expect a horse-drawn carriage to roll by. I love the area of Lansingburgh around the Herman Melville house, right on the river, with its own little park. I enjoy the area around the Troy Library, Russell Sage and Washington Park, the beautiful old row houses, brownstones and brick, with the iron railings made locally. And when I'm in Troy, I stop in Market Block Books, in the lovely old flatiron building, with original woodwork and tin ceilings. I also like to visit the places in Troy where I hung out as a teenager — South Troy, Sycaway, Beman Park, Prospect Park. I don't have a least favorite part, really. Even the aspects of Troy that are rundown or in disrepair are interesting.

Q: Do you think Troy still has validity in the 21st century?

A: Troy is so much more interesting than most places in this country because of its wonderful old buildings, the sense of history that's tangible. Too much of America has become strip malls, big box stores, a landscape of blaring consumer blight. But Troy has character, an identity. When old buildings are cared for they become part of the present. Because Troy has kept aspects of its past, its present is richer and deeper. How rare it is to get the chance to be a time traveler. I think there are models, other cities that have retained their history and charm and that's become their strength. I think Troy learned that lesson with its old buildings. It would be foolish to make the city look like some brand X, generic place. It will become a place you drive through. Troy should very proud ... and don't knock down anymore buildings!

C.J. Lais can be reached at 454-5562 or by e-mail at clais@timesunion.com.

Alice Fulton appearances

Where: University at Albany uptown campus, 1400 Washington Ave., Albany

When: Tuesday

Seminar: 4:15 p.m., Assembly Hall, Campus Center

Reading: 8 p.m., Recital Hall, Performing Arts Center

Admission: Free

Info: New York State Writers Institute, 442-5620; <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/>

Where: The College of Saint Rose Events and Athletics Center, 420 Western Ave., Albany

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

Admission: Free

Info: Frequency North, 454-2812

Grand slam

Taylor Mali brings message of popular poetry to the people

By **MICHAEL LISI**

Special to the Times Union

Once a month, slam poet Taylor Mali takes a group of slam poets to Manhattan's Upper East Side to read to a group of nursing home residents — most have no clue what a slam poet is or does.

It makes for an interesting afternoon.

"We've been reading poetry to the old ladies there for seven years, and they have gotten one of the greatest educations in American spoken word," the 44-year-old Mali said in a recent phone interview.

Mali, who is as confident as he is creative, is one of America's most successful slam poets — poets who memorize and perform their works in judged competitions called poetry slams. His teams have won four National Poetry Slam competitions and he was featured in HBO's 2003 special "Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry" and the 1997 documentary "SlamNation."

Mali taught at private schools for nine years before leaving the classroom in 2000. But he never lost his love for teaching. A num-

Taylor Mali

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. today

■ **Where:** The College of Saint Rose, Saint Joseph Hall Auditorium, 985 Madison Ave., Albany

■ **Tickets:** Free

■ **Contact:** <http://www.strose.edu/news>

ber of his poems deal with what he considers to be the "nobility of teaching," including "What Teachers Make," his best-known piece.

He will read tonight at The College of Saint Rose.

Q: What is slam poetry?

A: There is no such thing as slam poetry. There are poetry slams. When people say "slam poetry," they usually mean loud, angry, button-pushing poetry that is immediately accessible. The world doesn't need any more poetry about otherness and flowers, written in language we can hardly understand. We need poems about the common joys that everyone suffers.

Q: When you read, you're part

stand-up comic, part teacher and part passionate poet. Is that what it's like for you on stage?

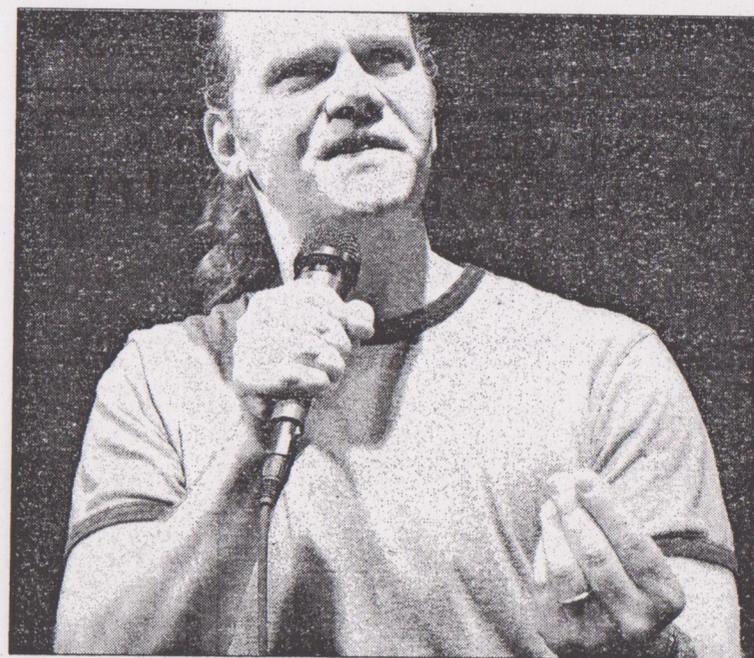
A: I've always said that. The Latin poet Horace said, "The task of the poet is to instruct or entertain. We must reserve our greatest respect and admiration for those who can do both at the same time." I love when people say they wish they had me for a teacher, and I hate hearing them say, "If you were such a good teacher, why aren't you doing it anymore." Who says I'm not? I just have a different kind of classroom now."

Q: One of your goals is to recruit 1,000 new teachers, yet you quit teaching. Why?

A: I may be more useful to the teaching profession outside of the classroom. The only reason I left teaching was because I kept getting poetry reading offers so far away that forced me to get a substitute. I was popular enough as a poet that I was becoming a bad teacher.

Q: What can people expect at your upcoming performance at The College of Saint Rose?

A: There will be no poems to make



TAYLOR MALI'S poetic sensibility comes out of a desire to celebrate common joys.

you say, "Awwww, that was sweet." I write poems that remind what language can do. There will be people who will be dragged to my performance thinking they are going to hate it, and they will leave saying,

"I never thought poetry could be like that."

► *Michael Lisi is a local freelance writer and frequent contributor to the Times Union.*

Author Darcey Steinke's has been a life spent searching for a faith in God that would be real and demanding but still broad enough to incorporate her doubt. In her most recent book, the memoir "Easter Everywhere," she writes about her own life — from her childhood as the daughter of an overworked minister and a clinically depressed former Miss Albany, through teenage experiments with sex, and through marriage and divorce and raising a child alone — with compassion and unflinching honesty.

Steinke is also the author of four novels, two of which were New York Times Notable Books of the Year. She will read from her work at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, as part of the Frequency North Visiting Writers Series.

Ministering was the family business, and so of course church rituals seeped into her play as a child. Her outlook tended toward the broad-minded even then: She once had an argument with a neighborhood girl about whether the number of leaves on a nearby tree was finite or infinite. "Inside the branches were buds, ten years of buds, maybe twenty, backed up and waiting to blossom ... If I agreed that the number of leaves was finite instead of infinite, didn't that mean God wasn't in the tree, or in the world for that matter?"

As an adult, she comes to find solace in mystical writings as well as a remarkable spiritual mentor in the form of an Episcopal nun who teaches her that sorrow and suffering can bring her closer to, not further from, God. Sister Leslie tells her: "The ambivalent parts of your life, the painful parts, Darcey, these are the holy parts. This is where God resides." Steinke writes that recently she has come to see the wooden slats of the crucifix pressed against one another "as a symbol of my own existential conflicts."

The author spoke recently from the home she bought and refurbished in Brooklyn, where she lives with her 14-year-old daughter.

Q: You have a long-standing connection to Albany, right?

A: Yeah, my mother was born and bred in Albany and still lives there. My mother and father met at the large Lutheran church in Albany where she was a parishioner and he was the minister's son.

Q: Your book is full of details about events from throughout your life. Do you have a good

Want to go?

■ **Author:** Darcey Steinke

■ **What:** The author of "Easter Everywhere" will read from her work.

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** College of Saint Rose, Saint Joseph Auditorium, 940 Madison Ave., Albany

■ **Info:** <http://www.frequencynorth.com>

memory about events and conversations?

A: Yeah, I do. I have memories from far back, and they have a lot of texture, and I can call them up fairly easily. And there are always things now that happen, and a memory will come to me, and it comes in a very lovely form, like smells and colors.

Q: Your faith seems to be "catholic" in the literal sense of the word: all-embracing.

A: Everything is God — I mean, that's the whole point of everything, right? So there's no reason to exclude anything. God is the very ground of our being; the beautiful earth, our bodies, communion among people, all creatures, even darkness and mystery, all this is God. But it's hard, because you have to try to figure out how you're going to live with the fact that everything's included.

Q: As a child, you thought that the Loch Ness monster was a little like God: "she showed herself very rarely and her very existence was in heavy dispute." You're not a person who thinks dogmatically, "You've got to do this or that to pass through the eye of the needle." Is there a big practical difference for you, for your life, in terms of whether God exists or doesn't exist?

A: In a very basic way I would say that the idea of being held and the possibility of being held, that would be what would be at stake. One of the prayer practices I learned from reading the ancient mystical work "The Cloud of Unknowing" was to pretend I was resting in the huge cupped palm of God's hand, sort of like Fay Wray resting against the fleshy part of King Kong's thumb. Peaceful. But the thing is, I don't really think you can be without God — you can only think you are without God. Everyone feels separated from God at different times for different reasons.

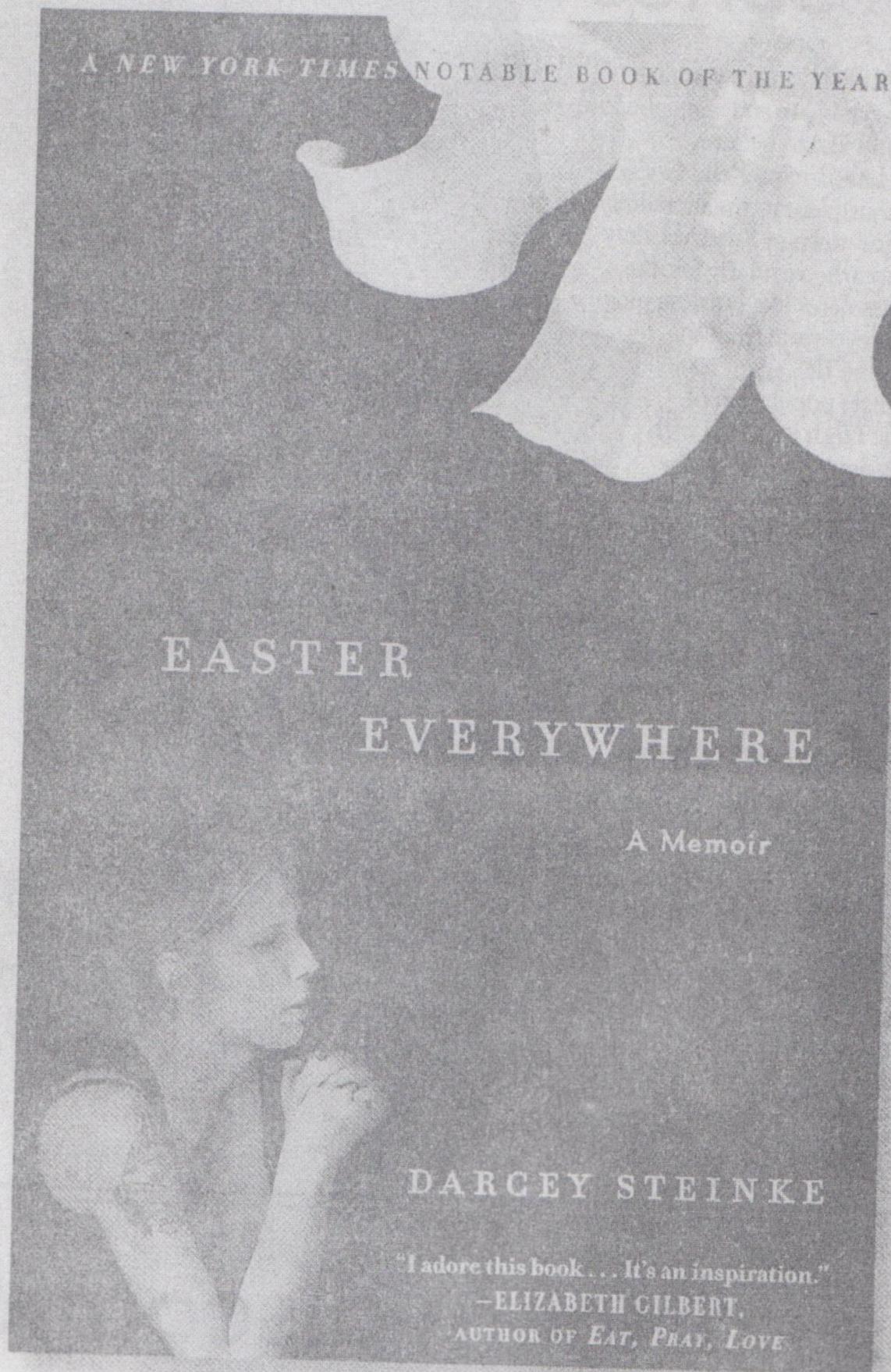
► Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer who lives in Guilderland.

In "Easter Everywhere," (Bloomsbury USA, 240 pages, \$14.95) Steinke describes the weddings she performed as a child in imitation of her father's work as a minister:

"I would marry anyone: Mandy Messner to her brother Greg, Greg to my brother David. The bride wore a waterlogged T-shirt as a veil and held a bouquet of withered altar flowers. I married dogs and cats, as well as a pet squirrel and a guinea pig. Life was not a requisite for marriage. I married the jungle gym to the swing set and the toaster to the blender. I made marriages that would better both parties, darkness to Popsicles and bath time to cotton candy."



Books



Author finds
beauty, faith
in reality

Festival celebrates literary magazines

BY SARA FOSS
Gazette Reporter

An all-day festival celebrating literary magazines and small presses will be held at The College of Saint Rose on Saturday.

Called CAPITAL LIT, the festival is designed to make people more aware of the variety and quality of writing published in literary magazines and by small presses, and connect writers with potential vehicles for their work. Literary journals will be available for \$2 and books for \$4.

Co-sponsored by The College of Saint Rose and the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, the festival will run from noon to 6 p.m. in Saint Joseph Hall Auditorium on Madison Avenue. It is open to the public.

Daniel Nester, a College of Saint Rose assistant professor of English who has published several books through the independent publisher Soft Skull Press, is organizing the event. "All writers get their start in wee small publications," said Nester, who has been published in journals and anthologies that range from the prestigious to the obscure.

He said he appreciates writers who look out for small journals and presses after they become successful. "Journals help writers out when they're beginning," he said. "I have nothing but love for small journals. I grew up as a writer of small presses."

Nester said only a small publisher would have been willing to publish his two books about the

rock band Queen, "God Save the Queen" and "God Save the Queen II." The books are unusual — a mix of prose poem, memoir and liner notes.

CONNECTION WITH READERS

With smaller publishers "there's less of a filter," he said. "There's a greater connection to the reader, because there are fewer people between the reader and the writer." This is the first time the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, which represents independent publishers of fiction, poetry and prose, has brought its literary magazine and small press fair, now in its sixth year, to Albany.

"This is a unique opportunity for authors and people who love to read," said Jamie Schwartz, program director at the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

Literary magazines and small publishers "are mission-driven to publish literature," Schwartz said. "In a publishing landscape that continues to conglomerate and publish less and less poetry and fiction, [literary magazines and small publishers] give voice to people and entire communities who wouldn't otherwise be supported."

CAPITAL LIT's schedule includes a panel discussion on publishing with editors and publishers at 2 p.m. and readings by local authors at 5 p.m. At 7 p.m. Nester will host "Karaoke + Poetry = Fun" at Valentine's in Albany. Hundreds of literary journals will be available at the fair, and the staff from 20 journals will be in attendance, and available to answer questions.

Lit fete

Small press fair features Capital Region authors

By **BRANDON JEFFS**

Special to the Times Union

Last February, Shane Jones's first novel, "Light Boxes," was published by Publishing Genius, an independent publisher in Baltimore. All 600 copies sold out. And then Spike Jonze ("Where



JONES

the Wild Things Are") bought the rights to turn the Capital Region author's book into a film.

The novel tells the story of an author named February whose despair at an endless winter affects not only him and his writing, but his fellow townspeople, whose fates are deter-

mined by what he writes. A town girl, however, attempts to insert elements of hope into the author's manuscript, which in turn will

Albany Lit Mag & Small Press Fair

- **When:** Noon to 6 p.m. Saturday
- **Where:** College of Saint Rose, Saint Joseph Auditorium, 940 Madison Ave., Albany
- **Cost:** Free
- **Info:** <http://www.clmp.org>

change the fate of the town.

In May, "Light Boxes" will be reissued by one of the big-name publishing houses, Penguin.

On Saturday, you can hear Shane Jones speak about his story and read from his work at the first Albany Literary Magazine & Small Press Fair. The event takes place from noon to 6 p.m. Saturday at the Saint Joseph Auditorium at The College of Saint Rose.

The afternoon will include panel discussions by regional publishers, sales of journals and books at reduced rates and readings from Jones and two other Capital Region writers: Tobias Seamon, poetry and fiction writer, "mockumentary" director and frequent contributor to The

Morning News online magazine; and Saint Rose professor Barbara Louise Ungar, who will conclude the event with a reading from her latest book of poetry, "The Origin of the Milky Way."

The event is a result of both Capital Region readers' interest alongside independent publishers that are seeking exposure, said Daniel Nester, who started the Frequency North reading series, which is co-sponsoring the event with the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, an organization that provides a forum for the development of small publishers of fiction and poetry.

Nester himself is no stranger to independent publishing. The Saint Rose professor has had three books published by Soft Skull Press, including 2009's "How to Be Inappropriate."

Nester's goal with the event is to provide readers and writers with the opportunity to learn about independent publishing from editors themselves. The press fair is free and open to all ages from high school seniors thinking about majoring in English, to a 90-year-old poet, Nester said.

"If you're a writer, this is nerd heaven."

An after-party featuring open-mike poetry and karaoke, described by Nester as a "dynamite format," will begin at 7 p.m. at Valentine's, 17 New Scotland Ave., Albany.

► *Brandon Jeffs, a senior at Siena College, is a Times Union intern. He can be reached at 454-5457 or bjeffs@timesunion.com.*

"LIGHT BOXES" by Shane Jones, originally from an independent publisher, will be published by Penguin in May.



Meeting All Your Party Needs

Authentic German Food
Bavarian Manor



COUNTRY INN & RESTAURANT

"...no matter what's being served, one does not eat German food with a sense of boredom." — Chef Magazine Jan/07

Open Thurs. - Sat. 5-9pm • Sun. 1-8pm

Thurs-Prime Rib Special \$16.50 Complete
Sundays - Senior Discounts

Just 40 minutes south of Albany.

For easy directions, check our website
www.bavarianmanor.com

518-622-3261



Private Parties • All Occasions
Luncheons • Dinners

FAMOUS SOUP & SALAD BAR
PRIME RIB • STEAK • SEAFOOD

1632-A Central Ave., Albany

456-1653

www.butcherblockrestaurant.com

PICKS OF THE WEEK · Sept. 16-22

Thursday

Novelist and essayist Stephen Elliott's "The Adderall Diaries: A Memoir" has been called genius by both the San Francisco Chronicle and Vanity Fair. Elliott injects humor into unexpected places. For instance, his list of books "also by Stephen Elliott" at the front of this book comes complete with asterisks and footnotes like "This is my best book. You should read this one first" or "This is my first book and I don't recommend it." "Adderall Diaries" explores a murder his father may or may not have committed, the author's own wretched childhood, his drug use, and his addiction to S&M. The Washington Post calls it a "provocative, masterful, thrilling ride." Elliott will be reading at The College of Saint Rose as part of the Frequency North Visiting Writers series. **7:30 p.m. Thursday, Free. Standish Rooms, Events and Activities Center, 420 Western Ave., Albany. 454-2812 <http://www.frequencynorth.com>**



STEPHEN ELLIOTT

BOOKS

HOUSE ENVY

**Prolific writer
Meghan Daum fights
real estate addiction**

BY ELIZABETH FLOYD MAIR
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES UNION

If you visit the website of journalist Meghan Daum — who'll be in town this week to read from her new memoir — plan to spend some time. There's a lot to do and see there.

You can watch the trailer for the animated short movie being made from one of her essays (I've heard of short stories, but an essay being made into a movie?). You can click on any one of the weekly op-ed columns she writes for the Los Angeles Times. You can read articles either "by Meghan Daum" or "about Meghan Daum."

Daum's new book, "Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived In That House," is an account of the author's self-described "real estate addiction," her hunger "to the point of weakness for something that would root me to the earth."

The author grew up in the suburbs of Ridgewood, N.J., a place "too rich for our blood and too uncool to ever truly own up to." Her father wrote jingles, and her mom was a housewife and piano teacher who "devoured shelter magazines" and took Meghan along to open houses on weekends "as if she were dangling a new life in front of me."

Finding and outfitting a house becomes for her an all-consuming passion ("I looked at realtor.com so frequently it appeared on my computer browser if I so much as typed the letter r"), a form not only of self-expression but self-actualization.

Her story is finally one of learning

to be at home in her own skin and relax her standards for perfection enough that, as she writes, "if a piece of your house falls off and you don't know what to do with it, throwing it in the trash and forgetting about it is a perfectly viable option."

Daum is the author of the essay collection "My Misspent Youth" and the novel "The Quality of Life Report," a New York Times Notable Book. She has contributed to NPR's Morning Edition and written for numerous publications, including The New Yorker, Harper's Magazine, GQ, Vogue, and The New York Times Book Review.

She spoke by telephone from her home in Los Angeles, the seventh place she has lived as an adult ("I'm an expert mover") — about her writing and her ongoing search for the elusive perfect — and affordable — house.

Daum, 40, was recently married — her husband is a reporter for the L.A. Times. She will be speaking on Thursday night at The College of Saint Rose in Albany as part of the 2010 Frequency North visiting writers series.

Q: You've got the L.A. Times column, a blog, your books, other magazine articles. How do you get so much writing done?

A: I have the weekly column. But the New York Times columnists write

twice a week, so I always think I'm a big slacker. I do that, and I do a lot of magazine freelancing, but not as much lately. I did this book, and I'm sort of starting a new book, hopefully.

It kind of seems a lot, maybe cumulatively over the years. I've been doing this for at least 15 years now. Out in L.A., I get the occasional offer to do a celebrity profile, and I don't always have the discipline to turn it down; the money's kind of tempting.

Q: I loved reading



About the book

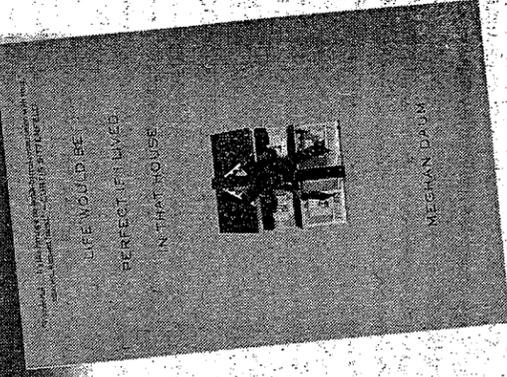
"Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived In That House" by Meghan Daum (Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, 256 pages, \$24.95)

■ What: Meghan Daum will read from her work

■ When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ Where: College of Saint Rose, Standish Rooms, Events and Activities Center (2nd floor), 420 Western Ave., Albany

■ More information: www.meghandaum.com; www.frequencynorth.com



your essays on your website. For instance, the one where you compared the Octomom and the Duggars to the people featured on the new TV show "Hoarders" and suggested that maybe they were trying to "hoard" children.

A: I'm glad you "got" that! My philosophy about being a columnist is that it's my job to suggest different ways of looking at something. I'm not interested in declaring what is true, or not true, or how something should be. I want to make connections or offer perspectives into something that might be a little bit counterintuitive. A lot of the time, I'm sure I'm wrong. I'm sure that the way I'm looking at something is probably not the best way to look at something. Sometimes I even say as much. But I really see the column as a suggestion, more than a declaration. And I see the essay the same way.

A lot of people aren't used to that, and so I get a lot of people mad at me all the time. My inbox is just crammed with hate

mail. **Q:** Do you have still-unfulfilled house longings?

A: Every day. I get up and look at the real estate sites. We sold my house in April. It was too too tiny. And I wanted to get in before the tax credit expiration. We're renting now and looking for the perfect house. The interest rates are amazing and the prices are amazing. But there's nothing on the market. Anyone who's not in desperate straits isn't going to sell right now.

Q: What are some of the qualities in a house that speak to you?

A: I'm such a sucker for old houses — anything with wainscoting, wide plank hardwood floors, or built-in cabinetry. If a house has original built-ins or beveled glass, I would overlook the fact that it didn't have a roof or was infected with mold.

► Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer living in Guilderland.

FREQUENCY NORTH

Frequency North, the College of Saint Rose's visiting writer's series, calls itself "aggressively eclectic." This is a reputation the 2011-2012 series, which kicks off this week, is shooting to uphold. The first installment in this year's lineup is a visit from National Book Award finalist Dana Spiotta (pictured) and celebrated Albany author Tobias Seamon.



Albany author Tobias Seamon.

The New York Times named Spiotta's debut novel a Notable Book of the year, and described the author as having "an uncanny feel for the absurdities and sadness of contemporary life and an unerring ear for how people talk and try to cope today." She has been garnering critical acclaim since and awards since.

Booklist praised local boy Tobias Seamon's "stylistic inventiveness and skill" in his novel, *The Magician's Study*, as "nothing short of breathtaking."

Frequency North welcomes Dana Spiotta and Tobias Seamon to the College of Saint

Rose's Saint Joseph Auditorium (985 Madison Ave., Albany) tonight (Thursday, Oct. 27) at 7:30 PM. The reading is free and open to the public. For more info call (800) 637-8556 or visit strose.edu.

Books

Unfinished story gets an ending

Acclaimed crime writer completes disturbing story of a young girl's disappearance

BY ELIZABETH FLOYD MAIR
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES UNION

Megan Abbott, one of the nation's top mystery writers, will give a reading in our area on Thursday. Abbott, who has been called "the queen of noir," has written four crime novels to date that call to mind modern versions of the hard-boiled stories of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, told from a woman's point of view. Abbott's first novel, "Die a Little" (2005) was nominated for the coveted Edgar award for mystery writing, and her third novel, "Queenpin" (2007) won both the Edgar and the Barry awards.

Her newest novel, "The End of Everything," seems a departure, in many ways, from her earlier books. It features two 13-year-old girls, Lizzie and Evie, who live next door to one another in an unnamed Midwestern suburb — not unlike the one where Abbott grew up in Michigan. The girls are "body-close" and know everything about one another, because of "all those nights knotted together in the tent in the backyard, or showering the chlorine off in the bathhouse at the pool, lying in the plush grass by the soccer field, comparing injuries, pushing our fingers in each other's violet bruises." They know all about one another, until suddenly they don't. Evie, Lizzie notices, has begun to keep secrets that Lizzie cannot pry from her.

Then, late one spring afternoon, Evie disappears. When the detectives are left completely stumped, Lizzie — who was the last one to see her friend — sets out to uncover what happened. Abbott said in a recent telephone conversation from her home in Queens that she meant Lizzie to be "like a Grimm's fairy tale version of a Nancy Drew." Lizzie begins to stumble upon one secret after another, including a creepy neighbor who may have been watching Evie for months, and Evie's own father, Mr. Verver, whose relationship with Evie's glamorous older sister, Dusty, 17, seems much closer than most father-daughter bonds.

Is Lizzie — who begins to inhabit her missing friend's world and to have some secrets of her own — blinded by her growing infatuation with Mr. Verver?

Abbott, 40, works part-time as a grant-writer at a nonprofit, which she says is a good balance to writing fiction ("It's good to be reminded of the rest of the world — there's a self-absorption when you're writing and creating your own world all the time that I fear a little bit"). She originally intended to become a professor, and only "started writing fiction on the side" while working on her dissertation.

She spoke on the phone about her own memories of being 13 and revealed that this book in fact marks the completion of the first manuscript she ever started.

Q: How vivid were your own memories of being 13?

A: I had sort of forgotten how intense being 13 was. The more I began to remember it, it became these sensate memories, of the world of that time. And this would have been the early 80s, and it was definitely a time when parents were more permissive of their children. You know, you could sort of go and explore the world more at that age by yourself. I just suddenly started to remember what it was like at that age—the fantasies you have of the way things could be, and the feeling that your heart's going to burst, and the way every day something happens that seems like it's "the end of everything." That hyperbolic quality

was something I just sort of wrote my way into.

One of the hardest things was to take my adult sense of caution out of it. We're sort of used to young teenage boys being curious about sex — it's

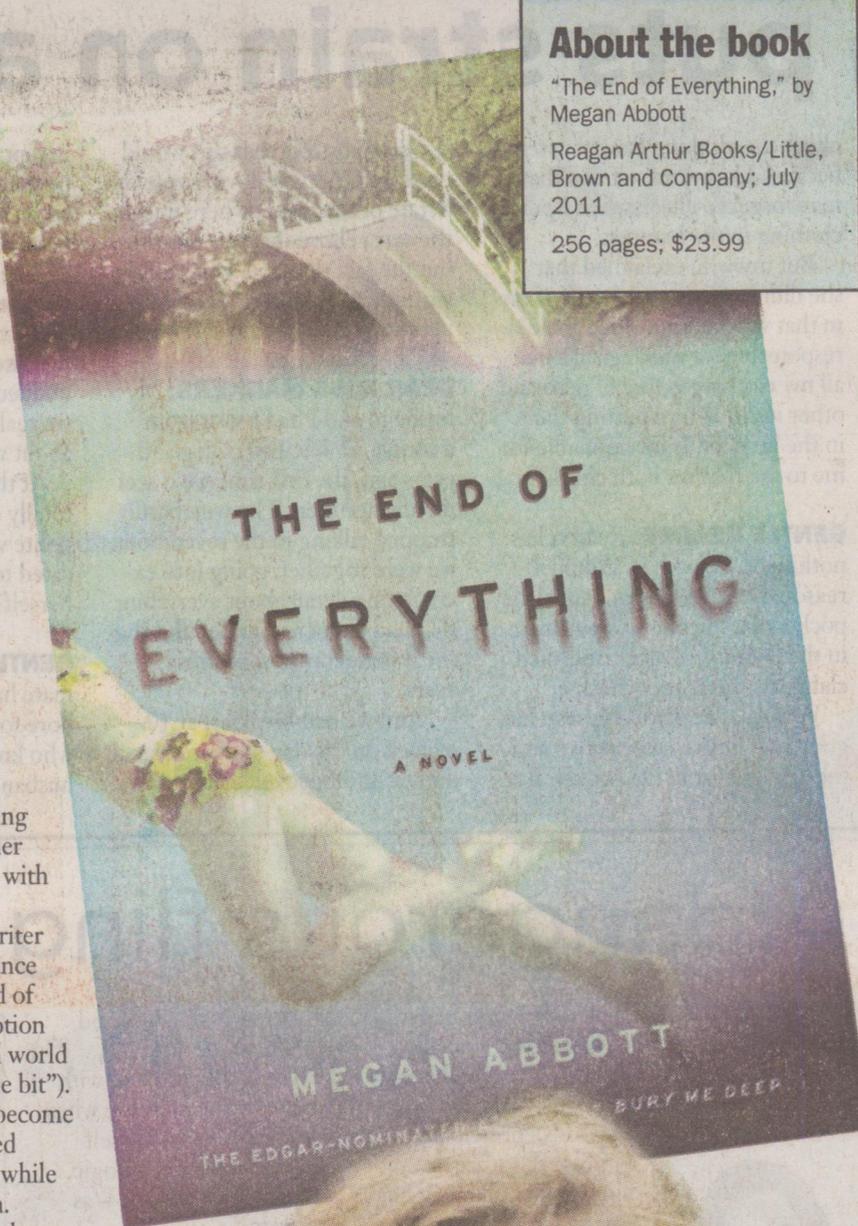
Please see **ENDING 15** ►

About the book

"The End of Everything," by Megan Abbott

Reagan Arthur Books/Little, Brown and Company; July 2011

256 pages; \$23.99



ENDING

▼ CONTINUED FROM 13

almost just a source of humor, how sexually fascinated they are. I think it's more uncomfortable for us to think of girls that age having those feelings, because we worry so much about girls' safety. It was a strange terrain to find myself in. In many ways it felt like my darkest book, because it was going into these places we don't necessarily like to look at, the kind of thing we want to forget about being 13. Especially if we have kids, which I don't, but —

Q: It's a tightly plotted book.

When you started writing, did you know how it was going to end?

A: Not really. You know, it's funny, I first started writing this book 15 years ago, before I wrote any of the other novels. Almost none of my original writing is still in there. But back then I wrote maybe 30 pages of it and then the last scene. And when I picked it up again, I knew where I wanted it to end, so it was a matter of trying to pace it in between.

Q: What did you think about — how creepy was Mr. Verver's approach to parenting?

A: It's funny, I've had so many different responses to him, from readers. To me, he is just careless. I don't think he realizes how seductive he is. He has emotional needs that he fulfills with these girls' attention. But I think he means very well and does not know what he does. I remember knowing a few dads like that when I was a kid — not to that extreme, but dads who maybe just didn't know how to show how much they loved their girls. I think father-daughter things can be really complicated that way. Somehow Mr. Verver doesn't see that he's ruining everything for these girls, creating a hunger in them that is always going to be unfulfilled, because of the completely inappropriate longings that his daughter has for him. So to me he's careless without being malicious. He's dangerous by accident, almost.

► Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer living in Guilderland.



BOOKS

Her way: Author Melissa Febos, who gained notoriety for chronicling her days as a dominatrix, to speak at College of Saint Rose. **3**

books

Master of her own desires



If you go

■ **What:** Author Melissa Febos; prize-winning young poet Eduardo C. Corral also will read.

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** The College of Saint Rose, Standish Rooms, Events and Athletics Center (second floor), 420 Western Ave., Albany

■ **More information:** <http://www.melissafebos.com>; <http://www.frequencynorth.com>



Author says chronicle of S/M world flowed from lifelong urge to write

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

Melissa Febos has always loved secrets. As a child, she liked to bury household objects in the yard of her family's home on Cape Cod and then cut out the insides of her books as a hiding place for the hand-drawn treasure maps that showed their location. As an adult, the allure of secret power helped draw her to the life of a dominatrix.

Febos' memoir, "Whip Smart: The True Story of a Secret Life" (St. Martin's Press/Thomas Dunne Books, 2010; \$14.99), outlines her experiences working for several years, during her early 20s, in a Manhattan S/M (sadism/masochism) "dungeon." "Whip Smart" describes in graphic detail the work of a dominatrix; administering enemas, role play, nipple torture, bondage and peeing onto naked men.

But what really distinguishes the book —

makes it so moving and disturbing — is the author's steely intelligence and the honesty with which she charts her responses. We see her, for instance, sitting on a subway train headed to work, cupping her hand over her mouth and whispering her own name, "Melissa," in an effort to access a more innocent self.

As Febos becomes adept at the job, she discovers that what motivates her is not simply the cash and an almost-anthropological curiosity, but the extreme rush that comes from the job's constant reminder of her own sexual desirability. Eventually, she gets clean of the drugs that had started out as recreational and gradually become a habit. Later, with the help of a therapist, she is able to quit the job itself.

Febos teaches creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College. Her essays have appeared in the New York Times, Salon and many other publications. On Thursday at the College of Saint Rose, Febos will read from "Whip Smart" and from the

novel she is currently writing.

Q: Your memoir is very frank. Were there any parts that were especially hard to write about?

A: This book was simultaneously the easiest and most difficult writing I've ever done. It had the thrust of a story that wanted to be told, and so came out of me quickly, but yes, much of the content was painful to look at, as one has to, in order to write about an experience.

I was somewhat dissociated from a lot of the experiences during their happening, and so ultimately, I ended up feeling them even more during the writing process than I did in life. I had to walk back through all the addiction, sober this time, and feel what I was numb to the first time around.

Q: What are your thoughts on the "Fifty Shades of Grey" phenomenon? I guess many women have found it liberating and empowering.

A: I think that its power to spur a more thoughtful public discussion of women's sexuality, and sex in general, has value. How the media has treated

it has been extremely revealing — disappointing, but not surprising. As a literary work, I don't think there's much to be said.

Q: How did you make the transition from dominatrix to writer?

A: I was a writer long before I was a dominatrix. Writing and reading are the only pastimes I've ever really cared about doing. My sense of myself is always a fluctuating thing, though I always felt like a writer, as someone interested in stories and language. I started out writing poems when I was a kid, and some stories, but didn't get serious about fiction until I was in college. I never planned on writing memoir, and in fact I harbored a lot of judgments about memoirists, particularly young ones. It simply turned out that the best story I had to tell was my own. The most urgent story, anyway.

Q: You write near the end of the book about your life after stopping work at the dungeon — about

Please see **DESIRES 11** ▶

books

A fiesty kind of faith

Author holds Catholic church dear while challenging it

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

The “reinvention” in the title of Kaya Oakes’s memoir “Radical Reinvention” (Counterpoint Press, 2012) cuts two ways. It’s the story of a progressive, well-educated young woman’s return to the Catholic faith, as well as a call for the church to acknowledge the changing beliefs of its adherents.

In the United States, Oakes points out, recent polls show that more than 75 percent of practicing Catholics support gay marriage and civil unions, and more than 98 percent of Catholic women use birth control. “Even if those numbers are somewhat skewed,” she writes, “we really are a majority. The more vocal minority of conservative Catholics is “just a hell of a lot louder,” she concludes.

The book is an accessibly written, amusing account of what drew her back to the church that she left as a rebellious middle-school student, before she could ever finish catechism classes and be confirmed. It traces her efforts to reconcile herself to the chasm that often exists between church policy and her own beliefs — for instance, that married women like herself should be allowed to make their own informed decisions on birth control, or that sexual orientation is a gift from God.

Oakes, 42, teaches writing at the University of California,

Berkeley and lives in Oakland. This summer she will launch a new online magazine of women’s writing about faith and culture.

Oakes will visit Albany on Thursday to read from her work at the College of Saint Rose as part of the Frequency North writers series. Joining with her will be highly regarded Albany-born poet David Yezzi. Fittingly enough, the reading will be held in the sanctuary. Oakes answered questions recently about her reinvented faith.

Q: If you were choosing the next pope, what sort of person would you look for? (Oakes was interviewed before the pope’s selection.)

A: Someone like St. Francis of Assisi: humble, visionary, tolerant, compassionate. A real listener. Someone who’s lived and worked on the margins of society: among the poor, alongside women and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer/questioning) people. Someone who’ll clean up all the corruption and actually do something about the sexual abuse cases (like selling off some of the Vatican art to pay compensation to victims, and pursuing legal punishment for the criminals). Someone who’ll toss off the fancy vestments and walk around in the simplest clothing and just be real and human. Someone who’ll bring the church into the 21st century.

Q: How likely do you think the Church is to pick someone who



If you go

Catholic activist-author Kaya Oakes and Albany-born poet David Yezzi read from their work

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** College of Saint Rose, Hubbard Interfaith Sanctuary, 959 Madison Ave., Albany

■ **Note:** This event is presented as part of the College’s Social Justice Week being held on campus March 16 to 23 and is sponsored by the college’s Office of Spiritual Life and Community Service.

■ **More info:** <http://www.oakestown.org>



will bring the religion forward and not keep it stagnant or move it backward?

A: My heart says it should be likely, but my logic says it’s not. Nonetheless, I take the advice of an older friend who used to be a Carmelite sister: she hopes that even if we end up with another reactionary Pope, he’ll wake up one night and say, “My God, I need to fix everything, right now.” The writer Mary Gordon says that the election of John XXIII was a kind of miracle, and progressive Catholics “wait in stubborn hope for the return of a miracle.” I’m in that crowd.

Q: How do you reconcile your own progressive outlook with the Church’s much fustier approach to human nature?

A: It’s an everyday battle, to be

sure. But just yesterday, in the homily at my church, the priest reminded us all that God’s love is both fatherly and motherly: God is ultimately genderless. As someone who supports LGBTQ rights and believes in equality above everything, being reminded of that concept is important. Like the theologian Sister Sandra Schneiders says, “God is not two men and a bird.”

Q: Early on in your return to faith, you worried that if the Pope really knew your beliefs, you’d be excommunicated. Still worry about that? And how comfortable do you feel, as a progressive, at your own local church?

A: I do feel that within my own parish, and the other parishes I’ve visited, that equality is a

non-issue. Our door greeter is an out lesbian. Same-sex couples come to Mass. There are support groups for LGBTQ Catholics at many churches around the world. It is simply not a big deal. Whoever the new Pope turns out to be, if he wanted to excommunicate me for believing in equality, he’d have to excommunicate the majority of Catholics as well. Catholics actually poll as having a greater support for equality than any other Christian denomination. That’s a lot of excommunications! I’m assuming the Pope will have a lot more pressing things to deal with, like cleaning up the corruption at the Vatican.

► Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer. Reach her at elizabethfloyd@mair@gmail.com.

AUTHOR Q&A

Revisiting poet's past

Jade Sylvan's memoir a tale of relationships and lessons learned

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

"Kissing Oscar Wilde: A Love Story in the City of Light" is Jade Sylvan's memoir of a "pansexual" poet's 20s spent in the poetry performance scene in Boston, amid loveless erotic entanglements and very intimate but sexless friendships.

It will strike a chord with any readers who have themselves been young literary bohemians making decisions on the basis of the question, "What would Patti Smith (or Bob Dylan, or Oscar Wilde) do?" In the book (Write Bloody, 2013), Sylvan fulfills a long-held dream of traveling to Paris to read original work to poetry slam audiences there, and begins to long for the seemingly impossible, a partner who would be both lover and friend.

Sylvan is the author of the poetry collection "The Spark Singer" and the novels "TEN" and "Backstage at the Caribou." She lives in Cambridge, Mass. As part of Frequency North Visiting Writers Reading Series, Sylvan will read at the College of Saint Rose on Thursday. She answered questions recently about her

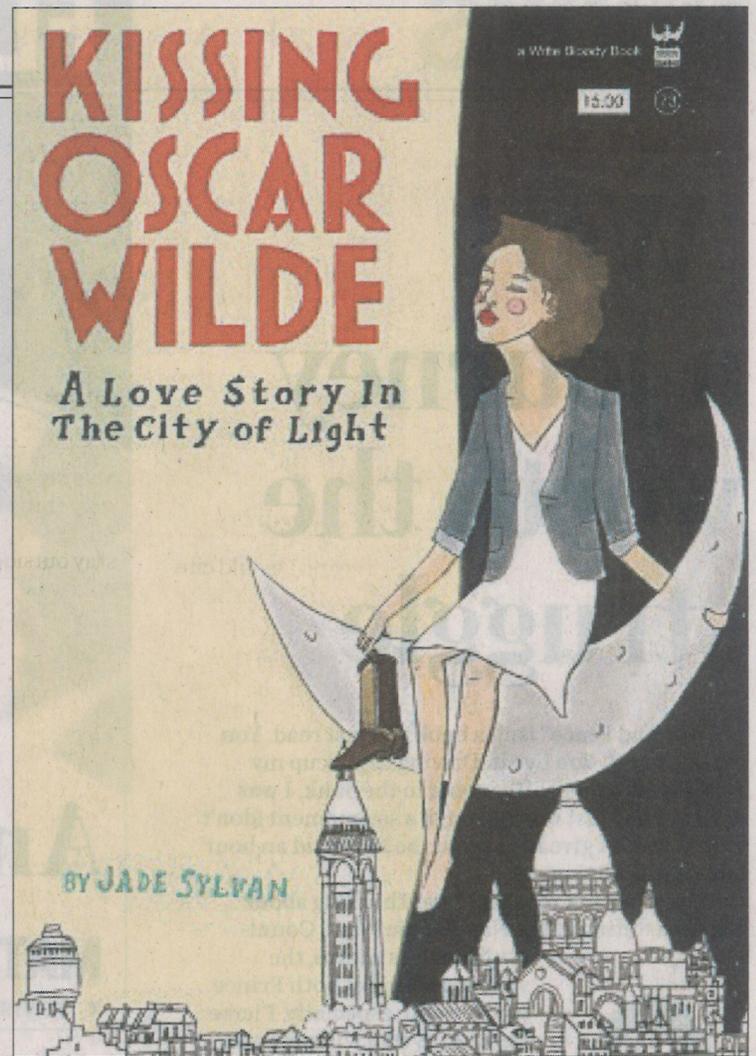
writing.

Q: You write great and lively dialogue. It's very exact, down to, for instance, the kinds of mistakes that French people speaking English might make (as when Adélaïde talks about Japanese puppet theater: "I did some Butoh. Do you know the discipline? It was very inspiring"). How do you do that? Tape recorder? Notes at the time? Great memory?

A: I have an ear for how people talk, and my brain latches onto verbal idiosyncrasies. Dialogue has always been one of my strengths, and also one of my favorite parts of writing. I love characterizing people, places, and situations by the way they're written, not just what is written.

But we all have tricks. For some of the French/English mistakes, I read over a lot of Facebook conversations and email exchanges with people in the book. A few lines were lifted directly from these online conversations. I also had a few videos on my phone of Adélaïde and another friend, Dareka, that I used to get their pattern of speech right. It was super fun.

Q: You don't seem to call yourself bisexual so much as "queer" or sometimes "bi." You also use terms like "pansexuality"



If you go

Jade Sylvan reads from her memoir "Kissing Oscar Wilde"

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** College of Saint Rose, Standish Rooms, Events and Athletics Center (2nd floor), 420 Western Ave., Albany

■ **Note:** This event is free and open to the public.

■ **More information:** www.jadesylvan.com; www.frequency-north.com



and "fluid sexuality." Can you talk about labels and which one seems least wrong for you?

A: That's a really tricky question. The biggest issue I have with the term bisexual is it adheres to a binary gender system that I don't believe in. I think of gender as a fluid spectrum

(that looks so much grosser than intended when I write it out), so bisexual just doesn't cut it as far as how I actually experience my attraction to other people.

For instance, I'm attracted to certain types of masculinity, but whether the person who

Please see **POET 12** ▶

POET

▼ CONTINUED FROM 3

embodies these types has a penis or a vagina, or even whether they identify as a man, a woman, or something else, has little to do with my attraction. I write a little about why I like the word "queer" in "Kissing Oscar Wilde." Lately, I've been describing myself as pansexual, partially because it has the word "pan" in it, and that makes me think of the Greek god.

Q: Maybe it was because the tenor of the early chapters, but I went into the book expecting more sex. It's actually pretty chaste.

A: Heh. So did my publisher. He wrote me when it went to print saying, "I can't believe you didn't bang either of these characters in the end!" (Whoops, maybe that was

a spoiler?) I intended the book to be a deconstruction of romance and what we think of as romantic love. I wrote it during what I call my "bachelor monk phase," when I foolishly thought that by staying single and penduluming between asceticism and sluttiness I could figure out how love worked.

I don't know if I figured that out, but I did notice a LOT of cultural messages about romance and sex that shape people's lives and expectations of given situations.

I was interested in not fulfilling expectations. In not giving the sexual tension its consummation. In asking if love is less valid from a distance.

► *Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer. Reach her at efloyd@nycap.rr.com.*

Witnesses to a cannabis shift

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

Published 4:04 pm, Friday, January 31, 2014

College of Saint Rose alumna and investigative journalist Alyson Martin, co-author of "A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition," will return to her alma mater on Thursday as part of the Frequency North visiting writers series to discuss the book.

"A New Leaf" (The New Press, February 2014), co-authored with Nushin Rashidian, explores the rapidly changing social and legal attitudes toward cannabis in the United States. Twenty states have legalized medical marijuana, and two — Colorado and Washington — recently legalized the plant's general use. Yet nearly half of all drug-related arrests still involve sale, production, or possession of cannabis.

A native of Feura Bush, Martin lives in New York City. While in high school she interned at the Times Union. She attended Saint Rose and worked at the Post-Star in Glens Falls before going on to Columbia University for a graduate degree in journalism.

Martin will be joined by her co-author, Rashidian, for the talk at Saint Rose and two other local events this week.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the kinds of research you did for this book?

A: Most of the research was through first-person interviews. Over the course of eight months, we drove from Maine to California and back again and stopped in nearly every state with a cannabis law. Including a detour to Mississippi to visit the federal cannabis farm, which is the only place that it is federally legal to grow cannabis, the trip totaled 30,000 miles.

We dug up hundreds of documents at the Library of Congress in D.C. and interviewed researchers from California to Israel. The benefit of the road trip was the ability to see the country in transition. We saw legislation debated in New Jersey, dispensaries thrive in Denver and get shut down in Los Angeles. We were in Oakland the night legalization failed in California in 2010 and in Seattle when it passed in 2012 in Washington and Colorado. We met people who used cannabis as a medicine until they died and others who have wound up in federal prison for growing according to state law.

Q: Do you think that most states will eventually follow Colorado and Washington's lead? And what's behind the shift in public opinion?

A: We anticipated change, but not this quickly, not every step of the way.

When we started reporting for "A New Leaf," we sensed that we were witnessing the end of a prohibition, but there was no proof of that yet, and the country still had only a dozen medical

cannabis laws (the number has nearly doubled since then).

Some states are already preparing to follow Colorado and Washington. Oregon and Alaska will have legalization on the ballot this year. California will vote on legalization in 2016, likely along with a handful of other states. But most states will probably wait to see the outcome of these experiments.

There are many reasons for this shift.

Nearly two decades of exposure to medical cannabis made people more comfortable with the plant. It was down the street, people were talking about it, family members were getting recommendations from doctors. Then the economic downturn around 2007 and 2008 made the idea of taxing cannabis particularly appealing. Some states were bringing in tens of millions of dollars on just medical, and others wanted in.

Also, if general use cannabis was regulated and taxed, people realized that would be money away from cartels and toward schools, for example. At the same time, deaths related to drug war violence in Mexico were rapidly increasing; there have been more than 60,000 to date. People realized that American consumption of cannabis, among other drugs, was empowering criminals.

More recently, the ACLU report that showed racial disparity in cannabis arrests between blacks and whites was particularly striking. Blacks are on average four times more likely than whites to be arrested for cannabis possession, even though they consume at comparable rates.

Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer. Reach her at efloyd@nycap.rr.com.

If you go

What: Alyson Martin and her coauthor, Nushin Rashidian, discuss their book "A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition" and sign books at three local venues.

7:30 p.m. Thursday: The College of Saint Rose's William Randolph Hearst Center for Communications and Interactive Media (CCIM), 996 Madison Ave., Albany

7 to 8:30 p.m. Friday: Rock Hill Bakehouse, 19 Exchange St., Glens Falls

3 p.m. Saturday: Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza, 1475 Western Ave., Albany

Cost: All events are free.

CONTENTS

THINGS 2 DO

Music	4
Dance	5
Stage	5
Comedy	5
Films	5
Words & Ideas	5
Family Fun	6

MUSIC

New CDs	10
Danu	10
Juicy J	10
Bars & Clubs	11
Rebecca Angel	11
Coming Attractions	12
Windscape	16

VISUAL ARTS

Exhibits	7
"Color/Form"	9

FILM

Youth FX	19
New Movies	21
"Need for Speed"	21
Movies in Brief	22
Movie Clock	24
New DVDs	25

STAGE

"O'Malley's Irish Pub"	20
------------------------	----

EVENTS

St. Patrick's Day	18
-------------------	----

HOW TO REACH US

PICKS OF THE WEEK ➤➤

Thursday

A poet who works in a pool hall and a poet who's a professor are set to speak this week at Frequency North: The Visiting Writers Reading Series at The College of Saint Rose. Performance poet Sean Thomas Dougherty has written and edited more than a dozen poetry collections, including his forthcoming



DOUGHERTY

"All I Ask for Is Longing: New and Selected Poems 1994-2014." Dougherty works in a pool hall when he's not lecturing. January Gill O'Neil has written "Underlife" and is set to release a new poetry collection, "Misery Islands," this fall. She is the executive director of the Massachusetts Poetry Festival and an assistant professor of English at Salem State University. **7:30 p.m. Thursday. Free. Standish Rooms, Events and Athletics Center, The College of Saint Rose, 420 Western Ave., Albany. (800) 637-8556; <http://www.strose.edu>**

JANUARY
GILL O'NEIL



Saturday

The Flood Road Band has co-hosted the annual Rhythm on the Ridge folk music festival in Rotterdam. Now, the Capital Region bluegrass act is starting a tradition on the east side of the Hudson River with its Rhythm on the River Americana Music Fest. The one-day showcase features Flood Road (3:40 p.m.) and five other area acts, including the Ramblin' Jug Stompers (5:50 p.m.) and the Red-Haired Strangers (7:10 p.m.). Also on the bill: Ray Murray & The Bomb Squad (1 p.m.), The Nellies (2:20 p.m.) and Everest Rising (4:30 p.m.). **1 p.m. Saturday. \$5. Revolution Hall, 425 River St., Troy. 273-2337; <http://brownsbrewing.com>**

Thursday

Sunday

BOOKS

A perspective of her own

Poet January Gill O'Neil has many jobs but one true calling

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

January Gill O'Neil, whose narrative poems set out to transform the everyday into the extraordinary, will read from her work at The College of Saint Rose on Thursday as part of the Frequency North Visiting Writers Series. Also reading at the same event will be nationally renowned performance poet Sean Thomas Dougherty.

Gill O'Neil's debut collection of poetry, "Underlife," came out in 2009 from CavanKerry Press. The book explores topics that include food, sex, love, race and motherhood, as in the poem "In Praise of Okra," about the often-despised vegetable "brought from Africa as seeds, hidden in the ears and hair/of slaves" that nurtured generations, as African-American cooks "took the unused & the throwaways/& made feasts;/we taught our children/how to survive,/adapt."

A second collection of her poetry, "Misery Islands," is forthcoming this fall (CavanKerry Press, September 2014).

If you go

Poets January Gill O'Neil and Sean Thomas Dougherty

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

■ **Where:** The College of Saint Rose Events and Athletics Center (Standish Rooms, second floor), 420 Western Ave., Albany

■ **Notes:** This event is free and open to the public.

■ **More information:** poetmom.blogspot.com; www.frequencynorth.com

Gill O'Neil is executive director of the Massachusetts Poetry Festival and an assistant professor of English at Salem State University. She also maintains a popular blog, poetmom.blogspot.com.

She answered questions about her work from the home that she shares in Beverly, Mass., with her two children:

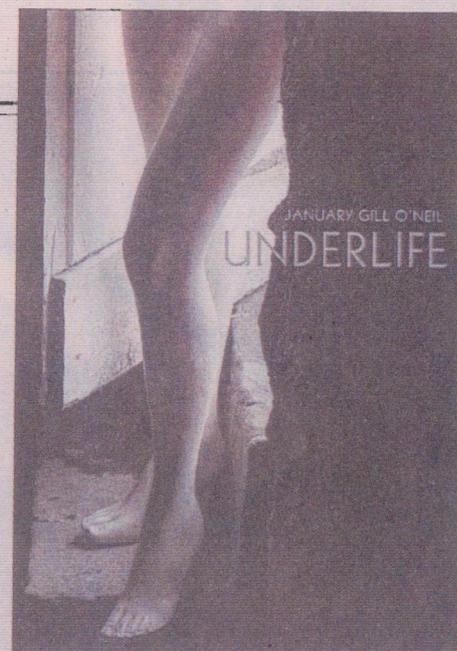
Q: What made you start your blog, and has it been helpful to your writing?

A: It was around 2005-2006. I had just had my second child, settling into a routine with work and family, but I was unfulfilled creatively. My grad school friends were making inroads in their careers, but I had stalled out. It's hard getting sitters, to go out to a writers' workshop or reading. So I started the blog as a way of reaching other writers.

In 2006, blogging was fresh and online writing communities were booming. Each week, I'd write a poem, post it, get feedback, then go to someone else's blog to give feedback. Before I knew it, I had enough for the manuscript that was to become my first book, "Underlife." And many of those writers who were blogging then are well known and have gone on to publish multiple books. I can't say enough about the value of the Internet for writers looking for community.

Q: You teach full-time at Salem State University, are executive director of the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, and are a single mom to two kids (ages 10 and 8). How do you find time to write?

A: It's hard balancing work, family



January Gill O'Neil, celebrated poet, will speak at the College of Saint Rose on March 13.

and writing — especially with the festival coming up in May — but it's good work, which makes it completely and utterly worthwhile. Teaching, running the festival and writing keep me centered and grounded. Poetry is not a job, it's my vocation. It's the center of who I am and what I do. I've been able to structure my life so that my vision of what my life should be is in line with my values, and I'm grateful for that.

Q: Did you write as a child? Did your parents support you in that?

A: I wrote terrible song lyrics as a child. But my parents always supported me in whatever I wanted to do.

Q: Could you tell me about why you favor the narrative form? Do you ever feel pressure to "radicalize" or otherwise update the form you write in?

A: I don't feel any external pressure to change my style. I don't write for an audience, I write for myself. That being said, I want to challenge myself in my writing, so I'm trying to break out of the tight little column poems and break the line into couplets and tercets. It helps me move the narrative into a more lyric space.

► Elizabeth Floyd Mair is a freelance writer. Contact her at efloyd@nycap.rr.com.

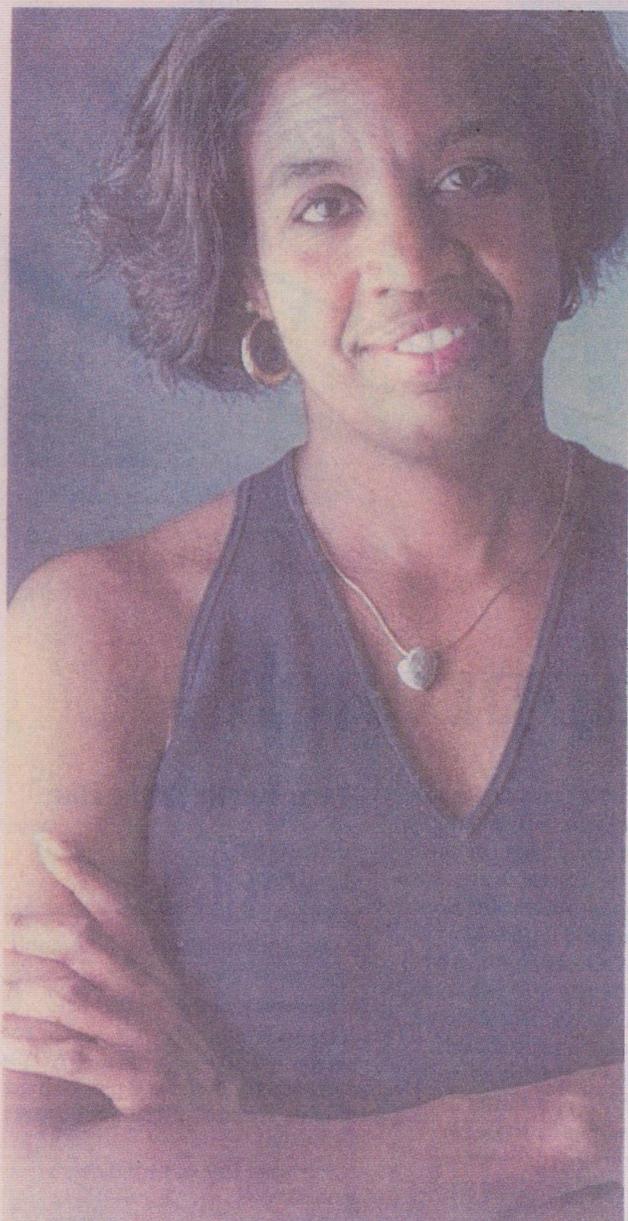


Photo by Rachel Eliza Griffiths