



MARCH NEWSLETTER
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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

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President's Message

ROBERTA GATES, *President*

Soon you'll be receiving a letter in the mail asking you to contribute to our Patrons Fund, which I hope you'll consider doing since this is the primary way that we fund our prizes to authors.

As you know, our mission, as determined 94 years ago by our founding members, is "to encourage high standards and to promote literary ideals among American writers." We do this by seeking out new and promising writers whose literary efforts and ideals make us confident that they'll go on to write more, and perhaps even better, books. This was certainly the case with some of our best-known

writers, such as Carl Sandburg (1933), William Maxwell (1938), Toni Morrison (1978), Jane Smiley (1982), and Gillian Flynn (2007).

Winning authors generally say that the recognition they receive from us is what they value most, but the cash prizes are also important. If we didn't offer monetary awards, authors and publishers would be unlikely to send us their submissions. In addition, we want our winners to come to the awards luncheon if at all possible, so the prize money we give them helps to defray at least part of their travel expenses.

Also, in a world where the arts are getting short shrift in many of our schools and college, and where millennials tend to prefer video

games over reading, it's more important than ever to shine a light on the literary voices that have something important to tell us. We can rely on the news media for facts, but literature gives us the chance to experience diverse lifestyles and perspectives from the inside out. What is it like to live in another country? To be a refugee seeking a permanent home? To cope with mental illness or addiction? To be a young woman trying to make it in a man's profession?

These are some of the things books can teach us, whether fiction or nonfiction, and our prizes help to send the message that we believe in the transcendence of literature and want to do everything we can to support it. ■■

M A R C H P R O G R A M

Betsey Means Presents Picasso, Picasso & Paris

by ROBERTA GATES

BETSEY MEANS, an actress and popular FAW performer, returns on March 8 for a portrayal of Gertrude Stein (1874 – 1946), the formidable American patron of the arts who hosted a Saturday evening salon at her Paris home at 27 Rue de Fleurus, which was just off the Luxembourg Gardens. Those whom she entertained included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Ezra Pound, Henri Matisse and—most notably—Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973), the Spanish painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist and stage designer who is known as the co-founder of or the Cubist movement.

Make your luncheon reservation now so you can be in the audience when Gertrude Stein and her guests gather for



Jane Austen festival in Bath, England

an evening of art, literature and gossip. Betsey Means, who promises both an educational and entertaining afternoon, is a professional actress who has performed with the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Shakespeare on the Green, the Blue Rider Theatre and the Chicago Children's Theatre.

READERS & REVIEWERS

By ROBERTA GATES

Six FAW members met on February 8 for a cozy discussion of *Brooklyn* by Colm Tóibín, a novel about a young girl who emigrates from Ireland to Brooklyn in the 1950s.

Roberta Gates, the facilitator, opened the discussion with a biographical sketch of Toibin, who uses his hometown of Enniscorthy, Ireland, as a setting in Brooklyn, as well as in several of his other books. Of interest to the group was Tóibín's own admission of having grown up in a house of silences—an influence that can certainly be seen in Brooklyn.

A lively discussion followed, focusing on the various forms of prejudice in the book and the protagonist's seeming passivity. Did she really want to leave Ireland or was she talked into it? Did she want to get married and, if so, did she end up with the right man?

Tangentially, the group also learned about Peggy Iska's Irish aunts who reminded her of some of the characters in the book because they always seemed to know what was going on with everyone in Peggy's extended family. In addition, Vivian Mortensen shared reminiscences about studying in a Welsh village that was like Enniscorthy, recalling that its residents kept such close tabs on her that one man actually came up to her at one point and said, "I saw you buying a pastry last week"!

Next Readers and Reviewers Meeting, April 12, 2017

On April 12, Ida Hagman will lead a discussion on *Persuasion* by Jane Austen. *Persuasion* is Austen's shortest book and, according to many scholars, her most autobiographical.

Ida taught literature, composition, and humanities courses at the College of DuPage and Oakton Community College. In addition, she recently attended the Jane Austen festival in Bath, England, and took part in the Grand Promenade. (See photo on the cover page.)

If you plan to attend the Readers & Reviewers discussion of *Persuasion* in April (and we hope that you will!), please let Ida know by e-mailing her at iehagman@gmail.com. ■■



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations for the March 8, 2017 meeting of the Friends of American Writers are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 5. Please note, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, please contact only Lorraine Campione (773-275-5118) or Pat Adelberg (847-588-0911).

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place. The cost is \$45 payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the group request to avoid confusion. Please note, if you make a reservation and find you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Foundation Fund Update

A note on the history of the Foundation Fund. FAW President Anne

Haines established the Foundation Fund during her term of office (1959-61). This special fund assured that there would always be funds to cover the annual awards. Through contributions of \$100 or more, participating members increased the principal, with the interest being available at the discretion of the Board of Directors. This fund was generously boosted in 1961 with a \$12,000 bequest by member, Bess Harrington Cook.

The Foundation Fund as it exists today was established in October 1984 when almost \$22,000 was transferred from the treasury of FAW to an account designated as the Foundation Fund by President Jane Ledered, Treasurer Alice Lohrer, and Trustees Corinne Silver, Angeline Higginson, and Geraldine Parker.

Today, FAW utilizes the Foundation Fund to award scholarships to worthy new writers at Roosevelt and National Louis Universities. These annual student scholarships began in 1999 and are funded from the interest money from the Foundation Fund. The program was broadened to also

donate a scholarship to a National Louis University student in 2002. Each year the two winning students and their faculty sponsors are invited to the November FAW luncheon to meet and speak with members.

Foundation Fund gifts can be made in a member's own name or in memory of a friend. Gifts of \$100 or more entitle the donor to be listed in the FAW Yearbook as a Foundation Fund contributor. FAW is a tax exempt organization. Recently, gift of \$100 was made to the fund in memory of Frances S.Zehr, a journalist and member of the National Federation of Press Women. We thank the donor for this gift.

Foundation Fund Chair, Linda Gustafson, announced that she and member Tammie Bob are also working with Columbia College of Chicago to establish a FAW scholarship there.

Literature Awards Committee TAMMIE BOB, Chair

The literature committee had a very productive, lively three-hour meeting during which we were able to nar-

row a field of about 40 books to 15 fine books. We will carefully examine these books over the next few months until we arrive at our winners.

Many thanks to Karen Burnett, Mary Robb Clarke, Angela Gall, Roberta Gates, Ida Hagman, Ellen Israel, Kathy Katz, Meghan Maleski, Diane Miller, Karen Pulver and Trish Ronan, who read and came prepared to discuss more than the usual number of books this month. We missed Diana Adams who was there in spirit. Generally a three-hour meeting is difficult and exhausting, but this one was filled with energy and laughter as well as respect and consideration for the many books and their authors.

Young People's Literature Awards

MARTI DANIELS

The YPLA Committee met in January to discuss the 18 books that had been selected from among the many submissions for awards consideration. The remaining books constitute a good mix of picture, middle grade, and young adult books. The next meeting of the group is scheduled for mid-February to determine the finalists. The YPLA is planning to hold a book sale at the April luncheon of FAW.

Membership Report

Ida Hagman

Membership Chair Ida Hagman announced that plans are underway to conduct a membership drive as a means of increasing FAW membership. As part of this plan, Ida will bring both membership forms and addressed envelopes to future meetings to facilitate the process of returning completed forms.

Ida would like to get the message out that membership in FAW is both a rewarding and deeply satisfying experience. The organization helps discover and assist new writers and allows for lively discussion of books among members at our monthly luncheons. She encourages members to bring friends to these luncheons so that they may share in the camaraderie and experience the satisfaction of helping young writers get started on the path of their life's work. Please let our President, Roberta Gates, or Membership Chair Ida Hagman know if you are planning to bring a guest.

In Memoriam

Sadly, we announce that FAW member Mary Katherine Dowd, age 92, of Chicago, Illinois, passed

away on February 1, 2017. She was surrounded by family and friends. Mary resided her entire life in Chicago, initially on the South Side, then in Lincoln Park, and most recently downtown at the lakefront. As a young girl, she travelled to Ireland and spent summers visiting relatives. A graduate of Loretta High School and Rosary College, Mary had a long career as a Chicago Public School teacher at Kelvyn Park High School, where she served as faculty advisor to the school's newspaper. She then worked for many years for the Chicago Board of Education as an editor of curriculum materials, until she retired. Mary was an active member of the condominium building where she lived, a long-time board member of Big Sisters, and an active participant in many of their fund-raising activities, including their Christmas and St. Patrick's Day gatherings.

We also learned of the passing of Marion June Blaney, (nee Brendel), the mother of longtime FAW member Carol Eshaghy. Ms. Blandy, who was 97 years old, passed away February 3, 2017. Our deepest sympathies go out to Carol and her family at this sad time.

FEATURE ARTICLE

by Shirley Baugher

IT HAPPENS IN MARCH

YOU might wonder, "What's so special about March?" You will be surprised to discover there's a lot to learn about the third month of the year—or for those born before 150 B.C., the first. According to old Roman calen-

dars, a year was only ten months long. It began in March and ended in December. Because December was the tenth month, it was named for the Latin number ten (decem). The Romans didn't bother naming January and February. They simply called that time "winter."

But, back to March and what makes it so special. First off, March is a great month for basketball. From the middle of the month until the first of April, sports fans experience the period known as "March Madness." During that time, Americans take to their couches in droves to watch the basketball playoffs, the semi-finals, and the finals featuring the best college teams in the country. It's also the period that American companies lose nearly two billion dollars in wages paid to unproductive workers who spend company time discussing and betting on their favorite NBAA teams. Little known fact, in 2015, fans bet more than two billion dollars on teams participating in the NBAA championship tournament.

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March Madness

From where did the name March derive? Turns out the month was named for the Roman god of War Mars, a mythical ancestor of Rome's founders, Romulus and Remus. When the winter frosts melted and the ground

became suitable for planting, Roman farmers could return to farming. By the same token, the warriors who were unable to take to the fields during the cold winter months, could resume fighting. And so, off to battle they went. It would seem that the Pentagon follows the Roman calendar. With the exception of the war in Afghanistan, nearly all major U.S. military operations since the invasion of Vietnam have begun in the month of March. These include Vietnam (March 1965), Iraq (March 2003), and Libya (March 2011.)

March also ushers in the infamous "Ides of March," which we are told we must beware. What are the "Ides of March?" On the Roman calendar, the middle of every month was known as the Ides. The Ides of March occurred on March 15, a day that correlated with the first full moon of the year since winter didn't count. Supposedly, in 44 B.C., a seer told Julius Caesar that his downfall would come on the Ides of March. Caesar shrugged off the warning. When the day came, he laughingly told the seer that the Ides had come and nothing had happened to him; to which the seer replied, "Aye, Caesar, but it has not gone." Caesar continued on his way to a meeting of the senate and was murdered when he arrived. He would have done well to heed the seer's warning.

Beware the Ides of March

There are other less drastic March happenings. March heralds the arrival of Spring, proverbially coming in

like a lion and going out like a lamb. Daylight saving time begins in March—to the delight of some (another hour of daylight) and the chagrin of others (having to set the clock ahead and then remember to set it back in the fall.) In March, St. Patrick’s Day sends many out to their favorite watering holes to celebrate Ireland’s favorite saint having run the snakes out of their country. To commemorate the event, many cities dye their rivers green.

In mid-March, the sun shines on the equator for the Vernal Equinox and gives us a near 50-50 split of day and night. And for all you social media fans, March is the month that Jack Dorsey founded Twitter (for better or for worse) and tweeted to the world, “just setting up my twttr.” Many Marches (though not this one) allow us to celebrate Easter toward the end of the month, and to gorge on discount Easter candies the following Monday. And that’s that for March this year. ■■

The Reading Corner

Lucky Boy
By Shanti Sekaran

Reviewed by
SHIRLEY BAUGHER

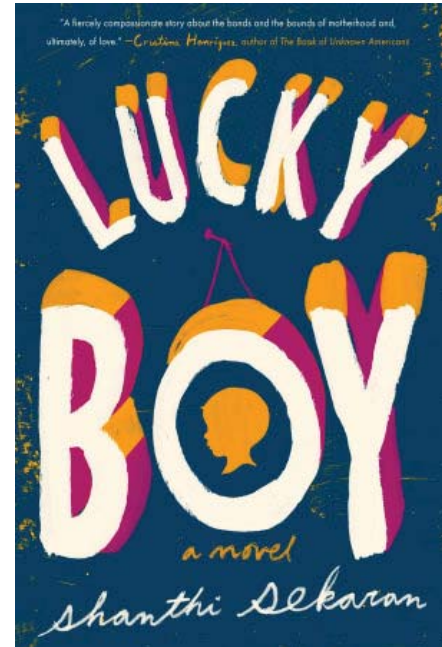
THERE could not be a more timely novel than Shanti Sekaran’s “Lucky Boy.” The author shows us the human consequences of the deportation of illegal immigrants—even those who have come to this country with hopes of a better life for themselves and their children and who have worked hard to make that possible. Solimar Castro Valdez (Soli) is such a person. Her father sold everything he had to get her out of the dying Mexican village in which she lived and which offered her no future. He wanted to get her to California and the promise of a good life. The unscrupulous relative to whom he gave his money abandons Soli and she falls in with a band of thugs who beat and rape her. Among them, however, is a gentle soul who becomes the love of her life. He impregnates her but is separated from her before they reach their destination. Soli manages to make her way to California and to the apartment of another undocumented woman, her

cousin Silvia. At first, Soli is lucky. She gets a job with a kind-hearted, successful couple, the Cassidys, who take her in and care for her even after the birth of her child, Ignacio—or “Nacho” as she calls him—the “lucky boy” of the story.

While this is Soli’s story, it is also the story of Kavya and Rishi Reddy, an Indian couple who live in the so-called “Gourmet Ghetto” of Berkeley, California. Kavya is head chef at a Berkeley sorority house, and Rishi is a brilliant engineer at a successful technology firm run by a fellow Indian engineer. Kavya and Rishi want very much to have a child but have been unable to make that happen. Inevitably, the Reddy’s story and Soli’s collide with life-changing results.

Through no fault of her own, Soli is taken into custody by immigration officials. When it is learned that she is illegal and has no papers, she is separated from Ignacio and placed into a detention center for deportation back to Mexico. The fact that she was gainfully employed and making a good home for herself and her child does not matter to the system. All that does matter is that she is illegal and therefore, must go.

When they are separated, Ignacio is placed in a care center with other abandoned children. It is assumed he will be placed with foster parents who might eventually adopt him. He ends up at the home of Kavya and Rishi who, despite recognizing that the child’s mother is alive and might



try to get him back, come to love the boy deeply and want to adopt him. They call him “Iggy.” They gain his trust and his affection. They tell him stories. They take him on expeditions. They shower him with all the material things a little boy could want. Above all, they make him feel safe and wanted. All the while, in the background, there is Soli who lives only to get back her heart—her son.

Soli is treated badly in the detention center, where conditions are deplorable, and her pleas to be reunited with Nacho are ignored. She spends her days (and nights) plotting to escape and eventually manages to do so. She even learns the name of the couple who have taken “Nacho” in and are raising him as their own. The rest of the story revolves around

Continued ►



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Soli's determination to get Nacho back and the Reddy's determination to keep him. You will find yourself taking sides as to which side should gain custody of the "lucky boy" who is so loved by the opposing forces. Spoiler alert, I did; and I chose the wrong side.

Despite the headlines about the "need for" deportation of illegals, "Lucky Boy" puts a human face—or faces—on how the process actually affects the unfortunate ones who fall victim to the system. The book takes you on an emotional journey that will leave you shaken and saddened. There are no bad guys in this story and no obvious hero. You will root for one side, then the other. Even after you have made your choice, you will, like Tevye, say, "on the other hand," even though there is no other hand. ■■



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