

# MFA AT EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

## Creative Writing Program

Newsletter... May-June 2019.....



### What's Inside

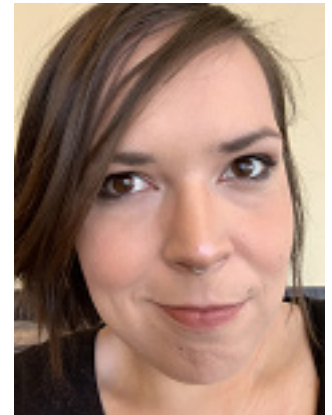
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## Willow Springs Books, Willow Springs Magazine, Writers in the Community & Get Lit! Welcome 2019-2020 Leaders!



**Get Lit!** welcomes next year's Assistant Coordinator, Claire Walla! Claire is joining the incoming nonfiction class in EWU's MFA program in creative writing. We'll be SO sad to see Kailee Haong go, but we're excited to meet Claire soon and start planning for 2020! Claire comes to Get Lit! from Topanga Canyon, CA where she currently teaches middle and high school English. Her past lives include producing news segments for the Huffington Post, reporting for a small town newspaper, and writing freelance articles about the film industry. Claire earned her BA in Modern English Literature from the U.C. Santa Cruz and is thrilled to be heading up to Washington from sunny SoCal to read write and even run in the rain.

Libby Patrick is a first-year fiction student at Eastern Washington University. She hails most recently from Georgia, although she's hung her hat all over the U.S. She lives in a camper with her dog, Starla, and cat, Grunt, and enjoys the privacy that lifestyle affords (and the ability to control the thermostat at all times). "It's an honor to be chosen as next year's managing editor for *Willow Springs Books*. From the beginning—as a lowly reader and copy editor—my goal has been the success of the press, and I'm eager to move forward to that effect. We have some amazing projects coming up: a new edition from our Zodiac Poetry series, the publication of our Spokane Fiction Prize winner. I can't say enough about how pleased I am to be able to work so closely with such an amazing press and such an amazingly talented group of people. I'd like to thank Taylor Waring in particular for his patient tutelage. Here's to a successful and productive coming year.



## Welcome Ya'll



**Writers in the Community** welcomes Emalee Gillis, the author of the memoir entitled, "The Other Side of Madness: Adventures on the Path to Living Well with a Mental Illness." Her TEDx Talk based on the book will be coming out soon. Her writing has appeared in numerous regional journals including the Inlander and Northern Reach magazine. Her previous positions include the Associate Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and co-owner of a consulting firm that specialized in rural development. She served two years in the Peace Corps in Gabon, Africa.



Kimberly is an enthusiast and avid overcommitter. She's most enthusiastic about being the managing editor of Willow Springs Mag next year. "There's nothing more satisfying than seeing our beautiful magazine come together and holding the final product. It's also a joy to let writers know they've been accepted. I love working with fellow EWU students and Polly Buckingham to create the best possible magazine, from genre meetings to edits to cover design. I look forward to working with you next year and making more magic for issues 85 and 86!"





“This collection is magical,  
hypnotic, brilliant.”

~ Paul Harding, Pulitzer Prize  
winning author of *Tinkers*.



Gregory Spatz has written stories that drive our attention inward. The stories in *What Could Be Saved* hooked my interest and drew me into a narrative both timeless and modern. Being fascinated with the discovery of global corruption, of dealers creating fake violins and forging papers, Spatz started researching in 2012, wanting to tell the stories of the dark underbelly of this world, and of the collectors who crave to own old violins made by famous families. Once he started writing the actual novellas and short stories that make up this collection, the characters took on a life of their own..

As I started reading the first novella, the title piece, I was hooked—drawn into a story both timeless and modern, with believable characters enmeshed in the human condition that makes good stories universally relevant. As Spatz wrote, the global corruption theme faded, blending into the tapestry, becoming only one of many threads that pulled me along. Stronger than those original ideas, is the journey of a young man, in our modern world, who is struggling with the pull between following in his father’s footsteps—making and repairing violins—and trying to find his own way and his own separate place. Love and loss run on threads of mysticism and magic realism, events catching us by surprise, propelling us forward through the novellas and stories in this collection.

In the second piece, *We, Unlovely, Unloved*, Spatz gives working class violins their own voices. The serendipity and tragedy of connections made and lost, weaves tales that touch the heart. As a reader, when I suspend logic and let words carry me through this specialized world, I don’t have to know anything about violins to love them and be moved. However, more than once, my curiosity drove me to Google a particular violin maker!

Spatz tells how he has always connected music with stories. “When I was five or six, my parents were reading aloud to me from J.R.R. Tolkien,” he says. “Pretty much simultaneously, I heard the Mendelssohn violin concerto. I could not believe or understand how these two artistic expressions weren’t one and same thing—the lyrical, soaring violin and the narrative. Ever since, music and stories have been intertwined and at the center of my life.” He begged for violin lessons and began playing at six years old; he still plays fiddle professionally with John Reischman and the Jaybirds, a bluegrass band, and bouzouki with the old-time world-folk string band Mighty Squirrel.

The subtitle of this book, *Bookmatched Novellas & Stories*, has a specific meaning that comes from the woodworking involved in making violins. Spatz explained this term by telling me how his wife, Caridwen, who is also a fiddler and violin maker, cuts a round of wood. When you split the pieces out, you can match the wedges end to end and the pattern of the grains are mirror images, end to end. In the same way, narrative threads, characters and particular violins run through *What Could Be Saved*, matching parts of the first and last novellas, and the inner two short stories. Although separate and stand-alone, the ‘book-matched’ nature gives the reader a hint of connection between them. This new book by Gregory Spatz is a powerful and satisfying read.

Born in New York City, Spatz holds degrees from Haverford College, University of New Hampshire, and The University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop. He now lives in Spokane, Washington, where he teaches in the MFA program at the Inland Northwest Center for Writers, Eastern Washington University. Spatz spent his youth in New England, mostly in the Berkshires.

Besides *What Could Be Saved*, Spatz also authored the novels *Inukshuk*, *Fiddler’s Dream* and *No One But Us*, and the short story collections *Half as Happy* and *Wonderful Tricks*. His stories have appeared in many publications, including *The New Yorker*, *Glimmer Train Stories*, *Shenandoah*, *Epoch*, *Kenyon Review* and *New England Review*. The recipient of a Michener Fellowship, an Iowa Arts Fellowship, a Washington State Book Award, and an NEA Fellowship in literature, he teaches at Eastern Washington University in Spokane. ~KR

**Book Release Event for Gregory Spatz & John Keeble**  
**Saturday, June 1st, 2019**  
**Downtown Spokane Library, 3rd Floor**



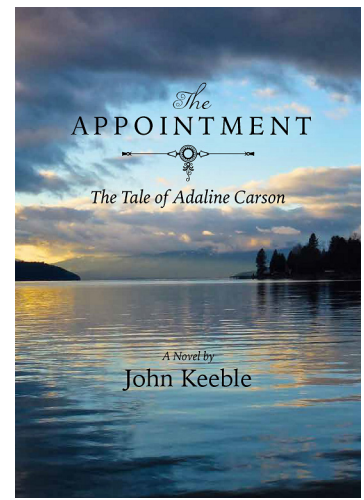
# The Appointment

*The Tale of Adeline Carson*

A Novel by  
John Keeble

“Only in the hands of a novelist as compassionate and brilliant as John Keeble can history moan, facts bellow, and stories vibrate with the eternal ambiguities of human nature—brutal and hauntingly beautiful. *The Appointment* is more than a stirring story; it’s a call to account, itself an appointment finally to reckon with the boundless sins and sorrows of the ‘settling’ of the American West. Essential and unforgettable.”

~Kathleen Dean Moore, author of *Piano Tide*, a novel



During the summer of 2017, as I was preparing to move to Spokane to begin the MFA program at EWU, I decided that the best way to really get to know the professors was to read what they’d published. After reading works by all the current professors, I picked up the novel, *The Shadows of Owls*, by professor emeritus, John Keeble. Although retired, I figured his work might reveal something about the program, since Keeble was the person whose efforts started, and then grew, the MFA program we have today.

I found *The Shadows of Owls* to be a thrilling ride. The *Seattle Times* said, “Keeble has crafted an armchair gripping eco-thriller that is broad and generous in its portrayal of people caught in the grip of unchecked power.” Drawn into the story, I was rooting for the well rounded and human protagonists. I was saddened and satisfied by an ending that was both tragic and hopeful. According to Wikipedia, “Keeble is known for his literary treatment of political and ecological concerns, particularly in the western landscape of North America, as well as for his exploration of the intersections and tensions between the past and present of the American West and the people and animals who inhabit these spaces.”

Keeble’s new novel, *The Appointment, The Tale of Adaline Carson*, released this month, is character driven, but this time the characters are based on real historical figures as they move through the American West. The book jacket tells us that, “The action of this novel takes place in the West, but it is not a “Western;” and though its central focus is the life of Adaline Carson, daughter of the famed frontiersman Kit Carson, it is also not a biography. Set in the time of the California gold rush, it is a detailed and graphic elegy for America’s wide open plains, rivers, and mountains, and the people who lived in and passed through them, both for good and ill. It is a clear-eyed vision of how greed, love, frontier mastery and the doomed native tribes contended for control of this stupendous immensity, and how one young woman and her father were taken up in the resulting maelstrom that has become our history.

Keeble found that there were no historical records containing any interior life for Adaline as everything written about her was penned by others. When I asked him how much of the story was driven by these fictionalized, historical figures, he said that pretty much all of the characters’ inner lives were fiction. “I write by the seat of my pants,” he told me. Once starting the story, with much of the research in the back of his mind, and otherwise ongoing, and as the characters take over and move the story into unexpected places, he was able to construct an interior life for Adaline.

There is an “Afterward” at the end of the novel, where Keeble addresses the challenges of being a man, writing about a half Arapaho woman: “I have tried to avoid appropriating Adaline, to maintain a respectful distance from her. As I have portrayed her, she started out believing she had an appointment, or rendezvous, to keep with her father. As is often the case with children of the famous, this expectation was never fully realized. What such children may be left with is the bitter disappointment at not being able to take on the aura of the parent, which becomes compounded and even more galling when the parent—no matter how thoroughly he changes, and no matter how much he favored her—has earned a reputation of being a killer of like-blooded indigenous people. If nothing else, this novel is a fragile testimony to my efforts to understand the durability of American racism, particularly when it applies to women, and of our colonial practices, the language with which we attempt to explain such practices, our arrogance in the midst of platitudes, and the extraordinary contradiction of espousing the abolition of slaves while continuing to find new and sometimes more cruel ways to enslave them, and, more telling, our continuing enslavement and disenfranchisement of indigenous populations.” I am looking forward to reading this novel! ~KR

John Keeble’s awards include a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, the Washington State Governor’s Award, and Eastern Washington University Trustee’s Medal for Teaching and Research (1980). He was nominated in 1993 for a Northwest Regional Emmy for his writing of the documentary film “To Write and Keep Kind,” a biography of Raymond Carver, which won a Blue Ribbon at the American International Video Festival (1993) and First Prize in the Documentary Category at the New York Film Festival (1993). He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for the piece “Black Spring in Valdez,” written for *The Village Voice* about the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989; Keeble arrived at the site on April 8, 1989, and traveled back and forth from his home in Spokane County, Washington, to interview fishermen and Native Americans, public and corporate officials, and hundreds of scientists for the human-caused environmental disaster.

**Book Release Event for Gregory Spatz & John Keeble**

**Saturday, June 1st, 2019**

**Downtown Spokane Library, 3rd Floor**



# Cheers Kudos & Events

## Cassandra Bruner

Congratulations Cassandra, class of 2018! Cassandra won the 7th Annual Frost Place Chapbook Competition and her book, *The Wishbone Dress*, will be published September, 2019, by Bull City Press. Cassandra also receives a fellowship to the Frost Place Poetry Prize Seminar, \$250, and a week to live and write in the Frost Place house in Franconia, NH. The winning chapbook was selected by judge, Eduardo C. Corral.

Congratulations again, Cassandra!! She is also this year's Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow through WICW (Wisconsin Institute of Creative Writing)! All the amazing details are at: <https://creativewriting.wisc.edu/fellowships.html>

## Mary Christensen

Congratulations Mary, class of 2017! Mary has two poems, *Twined*, and *The Denunciation*, forthcoming in New Limestone Review.

## PhD Bound with full TA funding: Mary Christensen

Congratulations Mary, class of 2017! Mary will be attending The University of Southern Mississippi's PhD in English/Creative Writing program with an emphasis in Poetry.

## Paul Lee

Congratulations Paul, class of 2014! Paul is headed to Missouri for the 2019 PhD program.

## Zac Ostraff

Congratulations Zac, class of 2016! Zac is headed to Texas Tech for the 2019 PhD program.



**Book Release Event:  
June 1, 2019 7:00 PM**

**Downtown Library  
Gregory Spatz &  
John Keeble read from their  
new books!**

**VoiceOver, Saturday, May 11th  
7:00PM at Lindamans**

## Aunties Events

**Tuesday May 14 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Pete Fromm: *A Job You Mostly Won't Know How to Do*

**Wednesday May 15 - 7:30 - 8:30 p.m.**

Poetry Night at Auntie's Bookstore with Francesca Bell, Tiffany Midge, Martha Silano, and local favorite Maya Jewell Zeller

**Wednesday May 22 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Simeon Mills and Rob Schlegel Reading

**Saturday June 8 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Dana Haynes: *St. Nicholas Salvage & Wrecking*



# Letter from the Editor

Dear MFA People!

This is the last MFA Newsletter of the 2018-2019 school year! It covers May & June, through graduation. There will be a new one in the fall once the new academic year starts! Our wonderful MFA graduate reading will take place on Friday, June 14th. Everyone may attend.

Please note the great Book Release event on June 1st for two of our own, Gregory Spatz and John Keeble. All the details on page two and three.

Finally, John Keeble, professor emeritas, explained to me how this MFA program got it's start (see below).

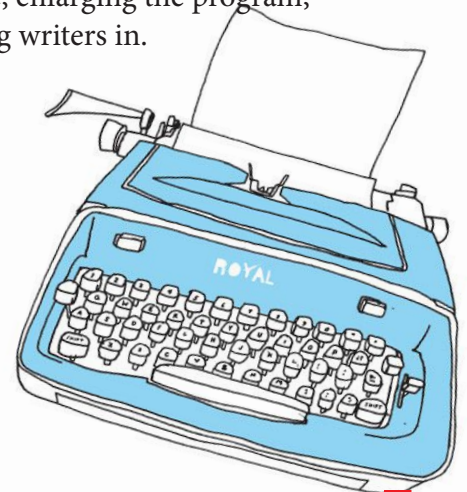
See you in the fall!

*Kerry*

## How We Got Here

John Keeble explains how the MFA program at EWU began:

Having seen that we had about 5 or so outstanding students at the beginning of my working here in 1972 (one of whom, Chris Jacox, went on to win the Yale Younger Poet's Award), and that they were expected to do all their work in a one-year M.A. Program, which wasn't tenable, particularly for those working in prose, I decided to write up a proposal for a two-year, terminal program, including the expected coursework, thesis work, etc. My cohort at the time was James J. McAuley, a poet. He supported the proposal but was involved only up to a point. The fact that we had good students suggested there was a need for the program. Approval had to be sought everywhere, bureaucracy being what it is, including the administration at EWU, the President, the English Dept., and what was then the Council for Higher Education (I think that's the right name) for Washington, and the other Washington state universities had to write their approval. The main argument for the degree at the time turned out to be that it would be the only MFA Program in the state. Indeed, the only competition in the greater region then were the MFA at the University of Montana, and one, very weak program at the University of Oregon. Drafting the proposal (it turned out to be a tome) and going through the approval process took a good two years. I think it was finally approved in 1977 or 1978. Then we went on from there, enlarging the program, seeking financial aid for our students, enlarging the staff, and having visiting writers in.



# Save the Date

Friday, June 14th will be the MFA Graduation Reading Event

Start time will be 7pm.  
No host bar. Location TBD



Join our new hosts, Jack Davis and Ben Werner,  
for the last VoiceOver of the year,

Saturday, May 11th at 7:00 pm at Lindamans!!  
Faculty Reader is Greg Spatz and the  
rest of the lineup will be announced soon!

