

# MFA AT EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

## Creative Writing Program

Newsletter...October...2019.....



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October is full of exciting activities: Faculty Book Release, Canada Trip, and lots more in this Newsletter!

### Welcome MFA Class of 2019-2021 !!

Patrick Jeffries was born in Bend, Oregon, yet his peripatetic life includes stays in New York, Maine, and New Hampshire. His writing has been published in Bates College's literary magazine *Seed* and online at *The Glen Brook Journal*. He has worked as an outdoor educator and thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2019. A graduate of Bates College, he now attends the MFA in Creative Writing at Eastern Washington University.



Mackenzie M. Badger is a fiction writer from New Iberia, Louisiana. She is a graduate of University of Louisiana at Lafayette and has been published in their in-house publication the *Southwestern Review*.

Heather Tillery is a poet living in Spokane, Washington with her husband and three daughters. She is an avid reader, lover of nature, biking, improv comedy and quality friendships. She graduated in 2005 from Whitworth University with a B.A. in Creative Writing, manages an Airbnb rental from the basement of her family's home, but is now shifting her focus to her interior decorating business, and deep love of literature and writing. For as long as she can remember, she has surrounded herself with the nourishment and company that comes from words, and knows the bittersweet feeling of finishing a masterfully written book all too well.



Amy Seymour is a Presbyterian minister recently relocated to Spokane from the California Bay Area. She loves to travel and explore with her family, knit, bake, and listen to people's stories. She connects with her southern roots by eating grits as often as she can.

Haley Ward is currently working towards her MFA in poetry. She grew up in Florida, but made her way out West to teach high school in Phoenix, AZ before packing up her car again and driving to Spokane. She is very excited for this new opportunity, though she is not excited for the Winter.

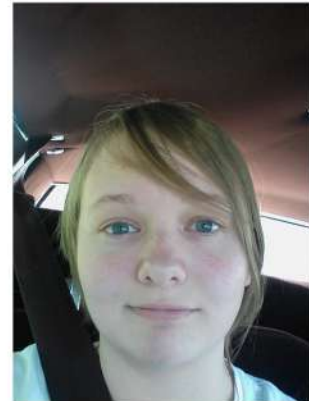




Emmett Jones was born and raised in Sandpoint, ID and received his Bachelor's degree from Gonzaga University. Before making the decision to pursue an MFA, he worked in college admissions in the Seattle area. This summer, he walked 2,653 miles from Mexico to Canada and still isn't sure why. When he's not reading and writing, he also enjoys playing guitar and harmonica, running, hiking, and playing video games.

**Alexandra Dixon:**

I grew up in Spokane and did undergrad at Whitworth. Sometimes I golf, but mostly I read. My favorite book is *Fahrenheit 451*, but Anthony Marra's *The Tsar of Love and Techno* is a close second. I probably won't talk much unless someone talks to me first or I'm prompted (nothing personal, I'm just kind of awkward, I promise). Also, most of my pictures have someone else in them, so enjoy the awkward car selfie taken for this bio.



Claire Walla comes to Eastern Washington from, most recently, Topanga, CA where she taught middle and high school English. Her past lives include producing news segments for The Huffington Post, reporting on small-town happenings for a newspaper on the East End of Long Island, writing freelance articles about cinematography and trail running, as well as living in the Hamptons with an elderly painter and her senile pooch, Augie (an actual job). Claire earned her B.A. in Modern English Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz and is thrilled to be in Spokane to pursue her MFA at EWU.

Benjamin J Smith grew up in Santa Clarita, California, and holds a BA in creative writing from the University of California, Riverside, where he spearheaded the *Mosaic Art & Literary Journal* for two years. Currently, he writes educational materials for California real estate agents. He has a deep and abiding love for '70s funk music, and is also a drummer, guitarist, and pianist, in that order.



Cori Jaeger has followed a slightly irregular path to her MFA – from managing a children's toy store, to an M. Ed in Elementary Education, to running a summer camp for LGBTQ youth and youth of LGBTQ families, wholesaling scarves to boutiques, and then back to teaching. All the while reading a lot of young adult literature, often fantastical, and squeezing in a few writing classes, as student or teacher. In addition she has been community organizing for racial justice for the last 6 years in Seattle and hopes to continue in Spokane.





Kerry-Anne Loughman was born and raised in Northern California, and she writes mostly about herself (and sometimes about other people, places, and things). She is a graduate of Saint Mary's College of California with a BA in English/Creative Writing and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. Her interests include finding the perfect iced latte and figuring out exactly who she is supposed to be in this big, bad world. She lives in Spokane.



Jennifer Jussel is a creative nonfiction MFA student from Austin, Texas. She graduated from Trinity University in May of 2019 with a Bachelor's in English and a minor in Creative Writing. When she isn't writing, she enjoys hiking, video games, and finding new places to eat in the city. She is looking forward to starting a new adventure in Spokane! Her cat, Kiwi, is still coming around to the idea.

This is Mirium Arteaga. She comes from California. The morning she left for Spokane, her dog distracted her and made her forget her favorite butterfly shirt. In undergrad, she was amazed by Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" and hopes to one day write her own epic poem. She enjoys playing video games with her cousin, reading in loud places, and really spicy, spicy foods.



Matt Andrews was born and raised in Sacramento, CA. He is excited to live in Spokane. He previously has lived in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Ann Arbor. He has a background in social science research but now writes fiction. His stories have appeared in *Amarillo Bay*, *Forum*, and *Sweet Tree Review*. Other than reading and writing, Matt enjoys film, theater, live music, and maximizing his Netflix and Amazon Prime subscriptions.



Jodi Miller-Hunter lives in Spokane with her husband and kids and various other creatures. She's graduated from EWU once already with a BA in English with a creative writing focus. Since then, she's been a newspaper reporter, barista, graphic designer, and editor but mostly a mom. Her kids are slightly cooler than most

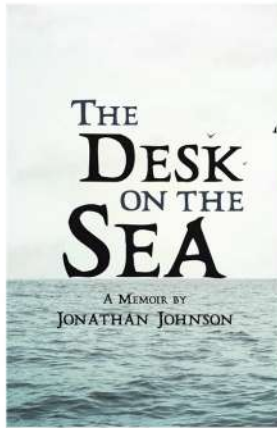


Emalee Gillis is a community development professional with both international and local experience. She has also worked as a freelance writer and has been published in numerous regional publications. Her memoir entitled *The Other Side of Madness: Adventures on the Path to Living Well with a Mental Illness* is available on Amazon.



My name is Sarah Haman and I am an MFA student with a focus in poetry. I am from Coeur d' Alene, ID and received my undergraduate degree in English with minors in Political Science and Editing & Publishing from Whitworth University.





# The Desk On The Sea

## A Memoir by Jonathan Johnson

“Johnson writes with an urgent tenderness born of grief. His quest for meaning after the too-soon death of his beloved mother takes him back to her ancestral land, where, as a husband and a father, he struggles to embrace her instruction to ‘look, notice, love.’ A broken-hearted lament that grows toward celebration, *The Desk on the Sea* is a poignant and moving story of endurance and hope—a map for how we might all find our way home.”

~Kim Barnes author of *In the Wilderness: Coming of Age in Unknown Country* 2019-02-18



Several years ago, before starting the MFA Program at EWU, I decided to sample some of the books published by the program professors. One of those books was *Hannah and the Mountain*, a memoir of life, loss, and hope, by Jonathan Johnson. It was very urgent, moving, and hard to put down. Since then I’ve had several classes with Jonathan and enjoyed his books of poetry. This summer I read *The Desk On the Sea*, his new memoir, in preparation for this feature article. In his new book Johnson is older, wiser, and more introspective. The pace is slower and more thoughtful than his first memoir. It’s written not only to remember the past and his mother, but also as a journey to search for meaning in a future that is being created moment by moment. As I read it, I jotted down four questions, all of which Johnson graciously and thoughtfully answered. ~ K. Rutherford

### A Conversation/Interview with Jonathan Johnson

#### Rutherford:

I am assuming that most of this book was written while you were in Scotland in 2009, living and writing for the year. Now, ten years later, I am reading the bottom of page 39 where you write:

*“... like memory, the past waits to take today into itself. And to carry today too, through time, in the elsewhere that is, each new moment, all around us... The past will carry us off, too, one day. One day, we will also be a part of the nothing, the elsewhere in this place’s new present moment... I confess I don’t yet know how to make the most of that knowledge. How to use the awareness of our own mortality. How to use the fear, the terror that sometimes robs me of peace for days, that washes through me like icy water even now, that makes my hand tremble perceptibly as I write that my family and I are—like my mother was, like everyone—temporary.”*

In the last ten years, since your year in Scotland, how has your experience of living with the knowledge of mortality evolved or changed? Is your mother still part of that equation?

#### Johnson:

Wow, smart question. And hard one. You’re right about the book being composed during the year we lived in Scotland. It’s a kind of chronicle—in the mode of Thoreau’s *Walden* or Rick Bass’ *Winter*. But it also spins memoir from that dailiness and makes a weave of the two. As for the evolution of my mortal awareness in the decade since, I’ve lost more people in that time. Friends older than myself whom I loved as mentors. Friends who understood and valued me. In whose company and consideration I felt known. It seems that I am passing a kind of horizon these days, in which I must begin to look to those coming after me to feel most connected to the world. When you’re young, if you’re lucky, you are the object of others’ emotional and spiritual investment. Then at some point, if you are going to stay part of the ongoing fiber of humanity beyond yourself, you’re going to have to be the one who primarily invests in others. In the world’s new young people. That’s a tough transition, to be sure. Easy enough and obvious to say, but often baffling and sad. Who doesn’t want to remain the bright, young source of others’ joy, optimism and meaning? Being a parent has been infinitely helpful though. Part of living with mortal awareness as you get “no-longer-young” is getting over yourself. As I’ve lost more of those older than me and through whom I learned and became who I am, being my kid’s dad has taught me the grace and comfort of valuing others more than being valued. Don’t get me wrong, my daughter loves me wildly, just as I loved my mom and older friends and mentors I’ve lost. But for me the center of reality has increasingly become, as it should be, my daughter and the rest of this world’s new people. The arrival of that more selfless love has made my own losses and mortal awareness something more like bearable and given the world back its joy and a deeper meaning. *(continued next page)*

**Book Release Event at Aunties: Friday, October 11th, 7:00 pm**

*Desk On the Sea*, Interview, continued:

**Rutherford:**

On page 120 you describe the “very ordinary, small act of courage,” of your mother protecting the gulls from humans. You muse about why you are recalling and sharing it. You say it’s not “actually to preserve what my mother did or who she was. Her soul and acts go on, as do all of ours.” You say that “Nobody needs a record keeper for her soul to go on.” It is simply remembering, you tell us, “remembering and passing on that memory to others she loved, and maybe here and there to someone she never knew but in whose own capacity for kindness and decency and small acts of courage she would have believed.” Having read some Proust earlier this year, and currently reading Knausgaard’s *My Struggle*, the “remembrance of things past” holds a power and fascination for many of us, when those remembrances evoke universal truths about the human condition and the human heart. How much of your life experience resonates with Remembrance VS the possibilities of the Future?

**Johnson:**

So quickly this becomes a ghost-saturated world, doesn’t it? When I was young, Wallace Stegner’s short novel *Recapitulation* showed me more than anything I’d read before or have read since what it means to grow old. How as the years add up a person becomes a kind of ghost oneself inside one’s own life. And in his last book of poems, *Dead Man’s Float*, Jim Harrison— among those friends and mentors I’ve lost in recent years—writes, “no one gets over anything.” I’m not old yet, but already it’s clear to me that love never stops casting itself backwards. Like Proust, we conjure the past in language to feel it close again. Its joys and its pains. To feel a continuity about our existence, to hold back the baffling foreign present in which we find ourselves. This is true even for young writers. But now that I have moved into my not-young-writer territory, I am also pleasantly surprised to find myself writing just as much to make myself at home in the present. To occupy these moments. I’m sitting outside in the garden at our Cheney place as I write this for example. Clouds are trading places with sunshine the first afternoon of fall. The roses are done for the year. Breeze. The smell of the petunias hanging on. A little white moth or butterfly wanders around. A ladybug climbs my sweatshirt sleeve. These words put me more here. I’d say the future is less a subject in my writing than a kind of helpful, disciplining force. I hope to grow more graceful, more compassionate, more aware and deeply inhabiting of my existence. Writing is one way I trust to help get me there.

**Rutherford:**

*The Desk on the Sea* gives the reader insight into the influence your mother had on you, by sharing her love of both Keats and Wordsworth. How has she informed your literary life as both a child and as an adult?

**Johnson:**

Beyond measure. Truly. She gave me poetry as the means of making my way in the world. My mom died fifteen years ago now, but her gifts keep coming. Finding me through time. Recently, I spoke with the retired chair of the English Department where I did my PhD. She is a Romanic poetry scholar, someone I consider one of the most formidable intellects on the topic I’d ever known. She told me about hearing my mom deliver a paper at a conference many years ago, how my mom’s paper taught her to read Wordsworth. And she said that in the paper my mom had written about me. I—the childhood me—had been the example my mom had used to talk about *The Prelude*. For crying out loud. To call me a lucky poet to have had such a mom seems absurdly inadequate. Her declining health stopped her from becoming an academic force like my former Department Chair. But infinitely more importantly, poetry gave my mom a way to know and love her existence, including me. When I teach, it is my greatest goal to live up to such an extravagant legacy, to give my students some of what she gave me—poetry as a means to make their way in the world.

**Rutherford:**

I recently learned a new word: apophenia. One definition says it is the “perception of or belief in connectedness among unrelated phenomena.” Some psychologists think it is a “condition” but many of us have experienced (and like to believe in) serendipity, magic, grace, etc. Your book seems to give plenty of examples from finding a place that matches Anya’s drawing, to finding the home of your ancestors/descendants and meeting the Harry Potter actor...and lots more. Those of us who have read your recent poetry book know the “rest of the story” about your current relatives in Scotland that you found. Can you muse a bit about the role of serendipity or apophenia in your life then and now?

**Johnson:**

The older I get the more belief seems a choice. Do I believe the discovery of my ancestral Scottish glen and my relatives there who have become such an important part of my life are posthumous gifts from my mother? Absolutely. The metaphysical/philosophical foundations of beliefs like that mattered to me when I was younger, but they don’t much anymore. Instead, I just do my best to live fully in them. In much the same way, I live a few days a year in the remote old shepherd’s cottage at the head of the glen. No electricity. No running water. The path I took to get there barely visible in the long grass. No road or other building in sight. Just the vast, sweeping moorland and mountains all around. A peat fire. A lot like the days and nights my great grandfather spent as a shepherd up there more than a hundred years ago. The improbability of my having found the place, the mystery, only deepens my experience of being there. So belief has become about gratitude for the gifts, about living them, and not about whatever logic or magic brought those gifts to me. The same goes for the losses. It’s become enough to live—and from time to time write—the griefs and wonders without trying to solve them.

**Listen to Jonathan read *The Desk On the Sea* on KPBX’s The Bookshelf:**

<https://www.spokanepublicradio.org/post/desk-sea-part-1>

# Cheers Kudos & Events

## Cassandra Bruner

Congratulations Cassandra, class of 2018! Cassandra had three poems published in *Anomalous Press/ANMLY* in their latest issue. Also her chapbook, *The Wishbone Dress*, is coming out in late January and is available for preorder here: <https://bullcitypress.com>

## Caroline Woodwell

Congratulations Caroline, current MFA student! Caroline had her essay, "Beautiful Memories from an Ugly Chair," published by *The Boston Globe*.

## Matt Greene

Congratulations Matt, class of 2018! Matt's essay, "Long Live the King," was featured in the *Inlander* in September 2019,

## Dereck Annis

Congratulations Derek, class of 2016! Derek's poem, *The Debt*, has been published in the *Crab Creek Review*.

## Sarah Coomber

Congratulations Sarah, class of 2004! Sarah's memoir, *The Same Moon*, has been published by *TouchPoint Press* this year.

## October MFA Events

Jonathan Johnson book release event @ Aunties Bookstore, October 11th 7pm

EWU/UI MFA Crossover 4pm, October 18th, Moscow Idaho

Stone's Throw, Nelson/Castlegar BC trip, October 26th

## Book Release Event:

**Jonathan Johnson reads from his new book, *The Desk On The Sea***

**October 11, 2019 7:00 PM  
Aunties Bookstore**

## Aunties Events

**Wednesday Oct. 2 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
Kelly Milner Halls: *Cryptid Creatures*

**Saturday Oct 5 - 7:30 - 8:30 p.m.**  
Glenda Burgess: *So Long As We're Together*

**Friday Oct 11 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
Jonathan Johnson: *The Desk on the Sea*

**Wednesday Oct 16 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
Shepherd Siegel: *Disruptive Play*

**Tuesday Oct 22 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
Julie Kibler: *Home for Erring and Outcast Girls*



## Letter from the Editor

Dear MFA People!

Here we are again, after a mostly smoke-free summer in Spokane. It seems like we are going straight from summer to winter. but what the heck, gives us something to write about. I do hope it warms up a bit and we get a beautiful fall.

A warm welcome to all the new first year students. For those who were in the midst of traveling and/or moving into a new apartment and didn't have the time or energy (or inclination) to send a picture or bio, we will get to know you soon enough because one of the best things about this program is the small and welcoming community.

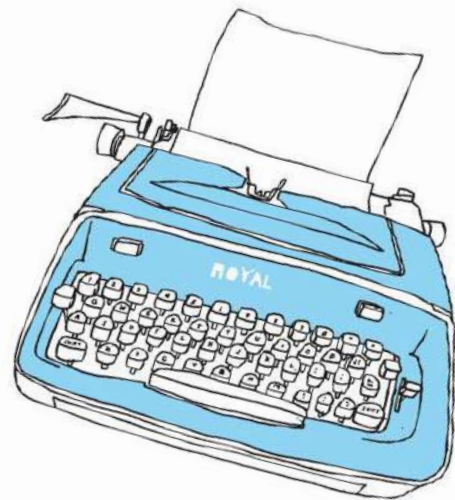
Just ask any second year in your class and they'll tell you their favorite coffee shops, water holes, open mics, natural food stores, and everthing else that Spokane has to offer.

I've really enjoyed putting together this newsletter over the past year and a half but I'm ready to retire and so November will be my last offering, with an interview with Christopher Howell about his new book and his November book release and reading. In November I'll also be introducing you all to our new editor who will take the helm for the January issue!

See you on the second floor!

Kerry Rutherford

PS: Please email me with any award or publishing information @ [kerryrutherford6@gmail.com](mailto:kerryrutherford6@gmail.com)



# Submission Opportunities

## **Aperçus**

Deadline: December 1, 2019

Fee= free or \$5 for expedited

An online literary and visual arts magazine, *Aperçus* prides itself on small, powerful, aesthetically pleasing issues. Send poetry, essays, flash fiction, and micro-memoir.

<http://www.apercuslitmag.com>

## **Ellipsis**

Deadline: November 1, 2019

No fee

*Ellipsis*, a nationally and internationally recognized journal published by the students of Westminster College accepts submissions in poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, drama, and art. Submit poems in one document, please. Submission period is August 1 through November 1 for poetry, short fiction, drama, and creative non-fiction. Accepts art submissions from August 1 through January 31.

<https://www.westminstercollege.edu/campus-life/publications/ellipsis>

## **Reed Magazine**

Deadline: November 1, 2019

No fee except contests

*Reed* is California's oldest literary journal. Tracing its heritage to 1867, the journal started as a mere pamphlet published by students of the California State Normal School, the precursor of San José State University. Today, *Reed* publishes fiction, poetry, essays, profiles, and art from around the world.

Complete Guidelines at: <https://www.reedmag.org/submission-guidelines>

## **The Georgia Review**

Deadline: Submissions open September – May 14

Fee: none by mail, \$3 online submissions

*The Georgia Review* seeks to create a lasting environment for literature by supporting writers at every stage of their careers. Committed to the art of editorial practice, *The Georgia Review* collaborates with authors of essays, stories, poems, and reviews in pursuit of works of enduring appeal that engage with the evolving concerns and interests of readers from around the world. Our aim in curating content is not only to elevate literature, publishing, and the arts, but also to promote diversity and to help facilitate socially conscious partnerships in our surrounding communities.

Guidelines at: <https://www.thegeorgiareview.com/submit/>

## **Copper Nickel**

Deadline: September 1–December 15, January 15–March 1.

Fee: none – pays authors

*Copper Nickel* is housed at the University of Colorado Denver and was founded by poet Jake Adam York in 2002. When York died in 2012, the journal went on hiatus until its re-launch in 2014. *Copper Nickel* publishes a broad range of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and writing in translation, with a particular—but by no means exclusive—interest in work that considers sociohistorical context.

Guidelines: <http://copper-nickel.org/submit/>