



## First Publications

### from *Post Road* 13

Selected by Don Lee, author of *Wrack and Ruin*, *Country of Origin*, and *Yellow*.

First Publications is *exactly the type of feature that makes Post Road distinctive from your run-of-the-mill literary journal. The magazine publishes the standard fare of fiction, personal essays, and poetry--all of the highest quality--but additional articles like this one give Post Road relevance and pop, making it a vital portal into the lives of working writers. Reading how these authors were first published, a theme emerges--namely, that the road is marked with serendipity, whimsy, appreciation, and pain, but it's a shared journey, one of community and graceful possibilities. – DL.*

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### First Publications

**Jonathan Ames**, author of the novels *Wake Up Sir!* (2004), *The Extra Man* (1998), *I Pass Like Night* (1989), and the novelization of the film *200 Cigarettes* (1999, under the pseudonym Spencer Johns), the essay collections *I Love You More Than You Know* (2006), *My Less Than Secret Life* (2002), and *What's Not To Love?* (2000), and the anthology *Sexual Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Transsexual Memoirs* (2005).

**First Publication:** A sports article appeared in *The Wykcoff News* in 1979.

I was a sophomore in high school and for the whole fall, I covered the exploits of the JV soccer team, which I was on, for the local weekly paper. I had sprained my ankle, but still had to go to the games, and my English teacher said I should write about the team—she had a connection with the paper. After my ankle healed, I still wrote about the team, and I may have made mention, humbly, of my own exploits.

**Julianna Baggott**, author of the novels *Which Brings Me To You* (2006, with Steve Almond), *The Madam* (2003), *The Miss America Family* (2002), *Girl Talk* (2001), the children's novels *The Slippery Map* (2007), *The Nobodies* (2005), *The Anybodies* (2004), and the poetry collections *Compulsions of Silkworms and Bees* (2007), *Lizzie Borden In Love* (2005), and *This Country of Mothers* (2001).

**First Publication:** The story “Tying Down Mr. Bumgardner For The Night” appeared in *Farmer's Market* in 1994.

I'd written a bunch of male coming-of-age stories in grad school; my main goal—subconsciously—was to write like a man. This was my first story from that era written from a girl's perspective. It's about a family who takes in a sleepwalking boarder who hoards his letters instead of mailing them. When they try to tie him down to cure his sleepwalking, the family takes on weird ailments. To cure them all, the father and daughter mail out all of his letters—with strange results. The whole notion of the hoarding and sending of letters became part of the ending of *The Anybodies*, which is part of a series I write under the pen name N.E. Bode.

**Aimee Bender**, author of *Willful Creatures* (2005), *An Invisible Sign of My Own* (2000), and *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt* (1998).

**First Publication:** The story “Dreaming in Polish” appeared in *The Threepenny Review* in 1993.

A teacher encouraged me to send there, and I was thrilled and shocked that they accepted it. I also thought it would be easier to publish other things after that, but it took many years before I published another story.

**Chris Bohjalian**, author of *The Double Bind* (coming in winter 2007), *Before You Know Kindness* (2004), *The Buffalo Soldier* (2002), *Trans-Sister Radio* (2000), *The Law of Similars* (1998), *Midwives* (1997), *Water Witches* (1995), *Past the Bleachers* (1992), *Hangman* (1991), *A Killing in the Real World* (1988), and the essay collection *Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town* (2003).

**First Publication:** “Sparks (A Short Story)” appeared in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1998.

I had amassed over 250 rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and the *Atlantic* and *Harper's* and lots and lots of literary magazines. So I decided to try something completely different, and penned a story with *Cosmopolitan* in mind about a female supermodel, her husband the arbitrage trader, their beach house on Fire Island, and the amount of time they spent, scantily clad, playing beach volleyball. *Cosmopolitan* bought it.

**Lisa Borders**, author of *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (2002).

**First Publication:** The story “The End Of The World As You Know It” appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly* in 1991.

After sending short stories out to literary magazines for nearly three years, in 1990 I received two acceptances in the same week. “The End of the World As You Know It” was the first of those two stories to make it into print. I was a huge R.E.M. fan at the time, and the story features a fictional band whose lead singer bears a bit of a resemblance (purely coincidental!) to R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe. When the magazine came out, I sent a copy to the band's fan mail address at a friend's urging; I was young and naive enough to be surprised that I didn't hear anything back.

**Kate Braverman**, author of the novels *The Incantation of Frida K* (2001), *Wonders of the West* (1993), *Palm Latitudes* (1988), *Lithium for Medea* (1979), the story collections *Small Craft Warnings* (1997) and *Squandering the Blue* (1990), the poetry collections *Postcard From August* (1990), *Hurricane Warnings* (1987), *Lullaby for Sinners* (1980),

*Milk Run* (1977), and the forthcoming *New and Selected Poems and New and Selected Short Stories*.

**First Publication:** The poem “Classified Ad” appeared in the *Paris Review* in 1977.

As I’m putting together my collected poems and short stories of the last 35 years now, I’ve been thinking a lot about this. I was a founding member of the Venice Poetry Workshop and to be publishing nationally from L.A. was quite a big deal in those days. But the essential DNA, metaphorically, of who I am as a writer was all there, in the first pieces. To take a known form, like a classified ad, and turn it into a poem was already showing the experimental, improvisational, push-the-genre boundaries of everything that would follow. It was there immediately, in the way that DNA determines so much about who we are, eventually and ultimately. I take the poem “Classified Ad” in 1973, a poem that was included in the *Paris Review Anthology* but one I dropped from my first chapbook as being too weak, is not so different from the imaginary Q&As in my current Graywolf Prize *Frantic Transmissions* to and from *Los Angeles: An Accidental Memoir*.

**Michael Chabon**, author of the novels *The Final Solution* (2004), *Summerland* (2002), *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000), *Wonder Boys* (1995), *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), and the forthcoming *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* (2007), the story collections *Werewolves in Their Youth* (1999) and *A Model World* (1991).

**First Publication:** The story “Blumenthal on the Air” appeared in *Mademoiselle* in 1987.

My first publication was a short story in *Mademoiselle*, back when *Mademoiselle* still published fiction. It was called “Blumenthal on the Air” and it won their short story prize back in 1987. I think the thing was rigged, though.

**Brock Clarke**, author of *Carrying the Torch* (2005), *What We Won’t Do* (2002), *The Ordinary White Boy* (2001), and the forthcoming *An Arsonist’s Guide To Writer’s Homes In New England* (2007).

**First Publication:** The story “The Reasons” appeared in *American Fiction* in 1996.

I don’t know how it got there—I wasn’t in a graduate program in creative writing, and so was somewhat clueless about how things worked. I’m guessing that I saw an ad for *American Fiction*, and knew that I was an American and knew that I wrote—or wanted to write—fiction, and so I sent it there.

**T Cooper**, author of *Lipschitz Six, or Four Angry Blondes* (2006), *Some of The Parts* (2002), and editor of *A Fictional History of The United States With Huge Chunks Missing* (2006).

**First Publication:** The profile “Fudge Ripple” appeared in *Tribe* magazine in 1996.

While there were a few college publications and internships at small-town newspapers before this, “Fudge Ripple” feels like the first time an editor “gave me a shot” and accepted one of my pitches. When I lived in New Orleans, I used to frequent the now-obsolete Lion’s Den—across from central lock-up—where Irma Thomas (the “Soul Queen of New Orleans”) performed (and sometimes cooked red beans and rice) every other Thursday night with her band, the Professionals. I eventually befriended the keyboardist, and one time when we were playing Nerf football in the neutral-ground on Carrollton in Uptown New Orleans, he mentioned to me that Irma was a really good bowler and played in a league. So I pitched an interview with her and her bowling team—which SHE deemed “fudge ripple” because the two other ladies on the team were white, and Irma called herself the “fudge ripple” in the middle of—I guess—the vanilla on either side. I was so proud to hang out with Irma for the day; a real, professional photographer came along, and Irma signed one of the Polaroids for me, and I thought for certain my journalism career had officially been launched. *Tribe* magazine, of course, folded not long after my Irma Thomas profile appeared.

**Quinn Dalton**, author of the novel *High Strung* (2003), and the story collection *Bulletproof Girl* (2005).

**First Publication:** The story “Holding Out For Blue Sky” appeared in *The Best of Writers At Work* in 1994.

I wrote the story while a student in UNC Greensboro’s MFA Writing Program. It was about a town, and a family, whose landscape is forever changed by a flood. My teacher, the wonderful poet and novelist Fred Chappell, said to me in workshop, “I think this story needs more rain.” After mulling this over for a few days, I realized (guessed?) he meant I needed to move beyond the family dynamics and show more of flood’s effect on the town. I worked some more on it, and was thrilled that it was published later that year.

**Merrill Feitell**, author of *Here Beneath Low Flying Planes* (2004).

**First Publication:** The story “Small and Nameless Things” appeared in *The Sonora Review* in 1997.

It was a 2nd-person saga about the junkie who stole my heart in college. I probably spent \$10,000 bucks in postage submitting it everywhere.

Much later the editor sent a check for \$20—which I photocopied to hang on my wall before depositing it. In 2004, I met a total stranger who had actually read and loved the story. (I hugged him.)

**Maria Flook**, author of the novels *Lux* (2004), *Open Water* (1995), and *Family Night* (1992), the story collection *You Have The Wrong Man* (1996), the poetry collections *Reckless Wedding* (1982) and *Sea Room* (1990), and the nonfiction *Invisible Eden* (2003) and *My Sister Life* (1998).

**First Publication:** The story “Clean” appeared in *Playgirl* magazine in 1981.

I wrote this story during my residency at the Fine Arts Work Center, and Ray Carver had a meeting with me about it and gave me some advice. He actually named the story “Clean” after saying that my original title was too long (he should talk), but the original title was “The Effects of Bathing while Listening to Talk Radio.” “Clean” was a better title. *Playgirl* paid me \$500.00 back then. I returned to this story for a major revision called “You Are Here” which appeared in my later story collection.

**Emily Franklin**, author of *The Principles of Love* series (2006), *BEFORE: Pregnancy Stories From Our Top Writers* (2006), *AFTER: Stories of Parenting From Our Top Writers* (2006), and the forthcoming *The Girls Almanac* (2006) and *It's A Wonderful Lie: 26 Truths About Life In Your Twenties* (2007).

**First Publication:** The poem “Gar” appeared in *The Boston Globe* in 1989.

I was a high school junior and won a poetry contest. I received a check (my first for writing) and did a reading with Donald Hall at the Boston Public Library. The experience was life-altering for me, though it set my expectations for literary life quite high.

**Myla Goldberg**, author of the novels *Wickett's Remedy* (2005), *Bee Season* (2000), and the nonfiction *Time's Magpie* (2004).

**First Publication:** The story “Comprehension Test” appeared in *Virgin Fiction* in 1998.

“Comprehension Test” was a short story I entered in a contest I saw advertised in *The Village Voice* for short stories written by unpublished writers under the age of 35. The 20 winners were published in a paperback anthology with the original and tasteful title of *Virgin Fiction*, a book bearing the even more original and tasteful cover of a cherry on a white background. A second edition was published before the entire publishing imprint collapsed under the weight of its own originality, but tactless book design aside, it was an exciting way to make it into print for the first time.

**Michael Griffith**, author of *Bibliophilia* (2003) and *Spikes* (2001).

**First Publication:** The poem “The Ballad of the Bonhomme Richard and the Serapis” appeared in *The Pierian* in the late 1970s.

As I recall, my first publication was a bit of epic hokum in verse, titled something like “The Ballad of the Bonhomme Richard and the Serapis.” It would have appeared in the late 1970s, when I was in sixth grade or so, in our school’s literary magazine, which—like school litmags everywhere—ore a lofty name that was supposed to inspire us to feats of ambition but actually inspired us, since we didn’t know anything, to feats of goofy pomposity. Ours was called *The Pierian*. There’s an irony there, since the best-known invocation of the Muses’ sacred spring comes from Alexander Pope: “Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.” I loved that line at the time because of its snobbish promise: Taste NOT, you shallow-drinking lot! We are the deep-drinkers. But it’s the second half of a couplet, and the more famous first half (though I had no idea of it at the time) reads, “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.”

Well, A-fucking-men, Alex, if my poem is any indicator. It was an account of John Paul Jones written in relentless singsong. I remember very little except that—my first foray into fiction?—I kept having to rewrite or falsify lines of dialogue to fit, which I did shamelessly, most often in an orgy of inversions that seemed to me “poetic”: “Said John Paul Jones to everyone, / To fight I have not yet begun.”

**Gwendolen Gross**, author of *Field Guide* (2001), and the forthcoming *Getting Out* (2007).

**First Publication:** The poem “Blueprinting” appeared in *The Southern Humanities Review* in 1996.

For a few years after I started writing again in earnest, I eschewed the urge to be published, but then I made it a Big Weekend Project. I read as many literary journals as I could get my hands on and sent them my poems and stories, keeping a fat inky binder of submissions and rejection slips and buffering my ego with plans to send each item to at least five places. This poem hit on the first try (an anomaly, of course), and I was so proud I bought copies for my parents and grandparents. The editor (Dan Latimer) suggested changing the title, because the original title stole the few last lines (“the techniques/of building and decay”) and gave away the goods. My first real editor! He was entirely right.

**Alyson Hagy**, author of *Kenneland* (2000), *Graveyard of the Atlantic* (2000), *Hardware River* (1991), *Madonna On Her Back* (1986), and the forthcoming *Snow, Ashes* (2007).

**First Publication:** The story “Naval Air Station” appeared in *The Amherst Review* in 1980.

Here’s what I remember: When I was an undergraduate at Williams College, I began writing fiction. I worked on the staff of our college magazine, but one day I noticed an ad for the literary magazine at Amherst College—*The Amherst Review*. The editors were looking for fiction from beyond their campus. I submitted a piece, and it was (to my utter shock and delight) accepted for publication. I think the piece was a strange story called “Naval Air Station.” It was inspired by memories of drives by the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia. Jets would crash and boom overhead (this was during the Vietnam War, and Oceana was a training center for Navy pilots). All around the base, there were fields of vegetables (broccoli, beans), and these fields were worked by migrant pickers. I wrote about a girl who lived on base and “stole” her baby brother and tried to give him to a migrant family because she thought they were gypsies. I think this was about 1980. Is my memory correct? Well, I know I wrote that story, and I know I published something in the *Amherst Review*. This inspired some ribbing among my friends since Amherst and Williams were (and are) rather fierce rivals. And, no, I never stole either of my brothers.

**Jennifer Haigh**, author of *Baker Towers* (2005) and *Mrs. Kimble* (2003).

**First Publication:** The story “Bud Speaks Up” appeared in *Global City Review* in 2000.

I’d submitted stories before, but I wrote them too fast, submitted too soon, and revised too little; my rejections were richly deserved. My first acceptance came in a hand-written letter, which I still have.

**Richard Hoffman**, author of the poetry collection *Without Paradise* (2002) and the memoir *Half of The House* (1995).

**First Publication:** A poem in *The American Review* (#17) sometime in the mid seventies.

The poem, chosen by Richard Howard, was a meditation on the word “Yet” and it is the only poem from that time that appears in my collection *Without Paradise*. I recall a friend of mine introducing me at a party: “You gotta meet this cat, man, he’s far-out! He writes poems about conjunctions!” I thought I was really going places! In fact, it was a long time before I published anything else.

**Virginia Holman**, author of *Rescuing Patty Hearst* (2003).

**First Publication:** Poem in *The Educator*, 1983.

I suppose the first thing I ever published was a poem about an elderly neighbor named Miss Ruth that appeared in my high school literary magazine, *The Educator*, in 1983 or 1984. (Our school mascot, alas, at that time was a Rebel Soldier and our school flag the confederate flag—even into the late 80s, the South was determined to rise again.) Miss Ruth was featured in my first book, a memoir of my mother's schizophrenia called *Rescuing Patty Hearst* that came out twenty years after the poem, in 2003.

**Molly Jong-Fast**, author of *Girl [Maladjusted]: True Stories from a Semi-Celebrity Childhood* (2005) and *Normal Girl* (2000).

**First Publication:** An essay appeared in *Mode Magazine* in 1997.

I was busy drinking myself to death and failing out of college but somehow I persuaded these poor people to let me write a piece for them about how everything in life was my parent's fault. I was actually at the lovely rehab Hazleton when it came out.

**Daphne Kalotay**, author of *Calamity and Other Stories* (2005).

**First Publication:** The story "Alabaster Doesn't Count" appeared in *Bellowing Ark* in 1996.

I was living on the west coast at the time, which must be how I even knew about this periodical in the first place. I sent them some other story first, which was apparently declined but described as "pleasingly competent"; the acceptance letter for my next submission (which I still have) refers to some comment I must have made about that phrase, explaining that it was "intended as a compliment."

**Trudy Lewis**, author of *The Bones of Garbo* (2003) and *Private Correspondences* (1994).

**First Publication:** The story "Vincristine" appeared in *The Greensboro Review* in 1986.

This was the first story I workshopped at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. My teacher, Lee Zacharias, kindly suggested that I should submit "Vincristine" to the *Greensboro Review* and it was published shortly thereafter. Little did I know that publishing wouldn't always be this easy!

**Alice Mattison**, author of the novels *The Wedding Of The Two-Headed Woman* (2004), *The Book Borrower* (1999), *Hilda and Pearl* (1995), and *Field of Stars* (1992), the story collections *In Case We're Separated* (2005), *Men Giving Money, Women Yelling* (1997), *The Flight of Andy Burns* (1993), and *Great Wits* (1988), and the poetry collection *Animals* (1980).

**First Publication:** The poem “The Landlady’s Complaint” appeared in *The New American Review* in 1972.

I’d just begun submitting work for publication, and when this poem was accepted I figured it would be easy to publish. Then it took three years and a million rejection slips before my next acceptance.

**Shara McCallum**, author of *Song of Thieves* (2003) and *The Water Between Us* (1999).

**First Publication:** The poems “Apple,” “Persephone Sets The Record Straight,” and “In The Garden of Banana and Coconut Trees” appeared in *The Iowa Review* in 1996.

When he accepted the poems, David Hamilton sent me a typed note with suggestions for changes to two of them. His edits were right on the mark and I took them gladly. I remember this experience not only because it was my first interaction with a journal editor but also because it meant a great deal to me that he took the time to care that much about my poems. Having submitted work to many literary journals for over the past ten years, I know as well now what a rare experience that was to have had.

**Risa Miller**, author of *Welcome to Heavenly Heights* (2003).

**First Publication:** An essay appeared in *The Pikesville Pipeline*.

I think my first published piece was a raging commentary on—something?!—in *The Pikesville Pipeline*, the newspaper for my high school in northwest Baltimore. The article or maybe the rage catapulted me to page one editor, which I was until the end of high school. If you can believe it, in those days (late '60s) girls could not be editors-in-chief because the editors had to run copy in the middle of the night to downtown Baltimore. Because of my passion for whatever this thing was I wrote about, I was then asked to write a “youth” column for *The Northwest Star*, a community newspaper. That assignment lasted a year or two.

**Ander Monson**, author of the novel *Other Electricities* (2005), the poetry collection *Vacationland* (2005), and the forthcoming collection of essays *Neck Deep* (2007).

**First Publication:** The story “Constellations,” appeared in *Pleiades* in 1997. There’s not a real good story involved in it, though, except that it was published when I was an undergraduate, so it was a particular stroke of luck.

**Thisbe Nissen**, author of *Osprey Island* (2004), *The Good People of New York* (2001), *Out of the Girls Room and Into the Night* (1999), and *The Ex-Boyfriend Cookbook* (with Erin Ergenbright, 2002).

**First Publication:** The story “Accidental Love” appeared in *Seventeen* magazine in 1996.

When I was a senior in college I placed 3rd in *Seventeen*’s annual fiction contest, and though they didn’t publish that piece (well, not until seven years later, but that’s another story entirely. . .) they asked if I had anything else about teenage girls and I said, “Everything I’ve ever written is about teenage girls!”

**Tim Parrish**, author of *Red Stick Men* (2000).

**First Publication:** The story “Moonkiss” appeared in *New Delta Review* in 1988.

I had taken my second year off from the 'Bama MFA program to try and get my Baton Rouge band, The Lower Chakras, on the road, and I met the editor of *NDR*, Buck Downs, at one of our gigs. We started talking about writing, I went to a reading of his, he threw a painting across the gallery room where the reading was because his sister had just died, we traded work, he liked my story, and published it. Later we co-wrote a rockabilly song called “Phosgene Baby” about my job at the chemical plant that year I was away from school. The band recorded an album and an EP but never did really get on the road outside a four-state region.

**Susan Perabo**, author of *The Broken Places* (2001) and *Who I Was Supposed to Be* (1999).

**First Publication:** The story “Explaining Death to the Dog” appeared in *The Missouri Review* in 1991.

I was four weeks into my MFA at the University of Arkansas when my mother called and read me the acceptance letter over the phone. . .it had gone to their house, because I’d sent it in the summer, before I knew what my new address would be. I lived in a graduate dorm, but no other writers lived there, so after I hung up with my mom I did my usual Pomfret Hall

dinner, by myself at a table for eight. I sat there dazed among the chatter of strangers and the clatter of plates, my heart still hammering, thinking that nothing would ever be the same. I was right.

**Tom Perrotta**, author of *Little Children* (2004), *Joe College* (2000), *Election* (1998), *The Wishbones* (1997), and *Bad Haircut* (1994).

**First Publication:** The story “The Weiner Man” appeared in *Columbia* magazine in 1988.

It’s the story of a cub scout who meets a man in a foam hot dog suit and learns something surprising about his own mother. Around the same time, Thomas Beller published a story about warring hot dog vendors in another literary magazine, and ever since we’ve bonded over our shared literary interest in frankfurters.

**Peter Rock**, author of *The Unsettling* (2006), *The Bewildered* (2005), *The Ambidextrist* (2002), *Carnival Wolves* (1998), and *This is the Place* (1997).

**First Publication:** The story “Witching” appeared in *Farmer’s Market*, and the story “Thirty Feet Above The Ground” appeared in *Another Chicago Magazine*, both in 1992.

These are really bad stories, and I can’t remember writing them very well—I clearly wanted to write about water witching and Kaspar Hauser, two topics I was certain no writer had ever mentioned, and then I obviously wanted to write about a naked woman in a tree unnecessarily reciting some Yeats. I do remember working on the ranch in Montana, and walking down the long road with the dogs, to the mailbox, where I’d send out these stories, receive rejection letters, and trudge dejectedly back. I don’t know which acceptance came first, but I remember marching back up the hill, the dogs running ahead as I watched the clouds and the cows up on the mountain and thought, “The literary editors agree! I’m a genius.” Then, the next day, more rejection.

**Heidi Jon Schmidt**, author of *The Bride of Catastrophe* (2003), *Darling?* (2001), and *The Rose Thieves* (1990).

**First Publication:** The story “In The Zoot Car” appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1981.

The first short story I ever dared to send out was accepted by *The Atlantic Monthly* in May of 1981. I remember it vividly of course. I was 24, living in Iowa City and studying at the Writers Workshop. Everyone there was more sophisticated and experienced than I was—I felt like a mouse among them. I’d written a story about a young woman who realizes that she’s been dragged into her mother’s adulterous affair, and sent it to *The*

*New Yorker*, where it was rejected (even this seemed exciting) and then to *The Atlantic*. On that day in May I'd had a conference with a professor who kindly and painstakingly explained to me how the story had failed—it was really about a car chase—but he thought I could make something of it if I kept working. I was very earnest and impressionable and I scuffed back to my apartment considering revisions, but when I opened my mailbox a check—enough to cover the semester's tuition—fell into my hands – *The Atlantic* was buying the story. Of course there were many rejections and mortifications ahead, but that was a very good day.

**Rene Steinke**, author of *Holy Skirts* (2005) and *The Fires* (1999).

**First Publication:** The poem “Matisse’s Studio at the Tate” appeared in *The Christian Century* in 1986.

I'd sent a group of poems to Martin Marty, a well-known writer on church matters and a scholar of church history, who is a friend of my family (my father is a Lutheran minister). I'd been corresponding with Marty for over ten years about my ambitions to become a writer, and he was always generous and encouraging with his comments on my work. It was a thrill to get a letter from him. In my senior year of college, I walked into the building of the honors college, and saw my published poem pinned to the bulletin board! I hadn't known that Marty sent my poems to the poetry editor of *The Christian Century*, and she had selected this one. The poem was very short and inspired by the Matisse painting I'd seen in London. This was my first “professional” publication, and I was so excited. The next week I found out I'd been accepted to the MFA program at the University of Virginia. If I read the poem now, I probably wouldn't like it, but it nonetheless marked the beginning of things.

I've fallen out of touch with Marty in the last decade or so, but coincidentally, he was at a conference with my father when the news came out about *Holy Skirts* being nominated for the National Book Award. My father told me that Marty went around all day, saying, “Have you heard the news about my friend, Rene Steinke?” It made me remember how important those early mentors are.

**Amanda Eyre Ward**, author of *How to Be Lost* (2004), *Sleep toward Heaven* (2003), and the forthcoming *Forgive Me* (2007).

**First Publication:** “Miss Montana’s Wedding Day” won Third Place in the *Austin Chronicle* Fiction Contest in 1999.

I worked on this story during my MFA, and had sent it all over. When I won third place in the contest, I was answering phones at a computer company. I was so excited, and told all my computer colleagues. One said, “Hey, Dan! Did ya hear Amanda wrote a story for the PENNYSAVER?” I sighed.

**Anthony Weller**, author of the novels *The Siege of Salt Cove* (2004), *The Polish Lover* (1998), *The Garden of the Peacocks* (1996), the travel memoir *Days and Nights on the Grand Trunk Road* (1997), he is also the editor of the forthcoming *First Into Nagasaki: The Censored Eyewitness Dispatches of Post-Atomic Japan and Its Prisoners of War*.

**First Publication:** The poem “Antiquity: A Meditation” appeared in *Infinity 3*, a science fiction anthology edited by Robert Hoskins, 1972.

I was, at age 12, an enthusiastic science fiction buff, and sent a few stories and the poem to the editor at a paperback house called Lancer Books. He very generously sent me a book on story construction, and encouraged me in my fiction while explaining that I did not yet understand what a story was, but offered to publish the poem I’d included—thus making me the youngest professionally published science fiction writer (I was 13 when it appeared)—a record which still holds, I believe. Though I lost touch with science fiction some years ago, it’s a very fond memory, as those books one reads in late childhood remain very vivid.

**Xu Xi**, author of the novels *The Unwalled City* (2001), *Hong Kong Rose* (1997), and *Chinese Walls* (1994), and the collections *Overleaf Hong Kong* (2004), *History’s Fiction* (2001), and *Daughters of Hui* (1996).

**First Publication:** The story “The Sea Islands” appeared in *Imprint* in 1979.

You’ll laugh, but the first piece I published was an essay when I was 11 (AND I got paid! Things went downhill after that) in the children’s section of the leading daily in Hong Kong, the *South China Morning Post*. It was titled “Hong Kong by Night” because I woke up at 4 A.M., looked at the harbor and Hong Kong Island which was the view from our family’s apartment back in the 60s, and sat down and wrote a piece describing the quiet and the lights on the hills as a lady’s dress. That literally started my “career” as a writer, and for years while I was still working full time (a good 18 years or so), I would get up early in the morning to write fiction (I’m primarily a fiction writer). So that’s it.

However, if you want the adult publication, that would be a short story “The Sea Islands” in 1979, in *Imprint*, a now-defunct literary journal published by the University of Hong Kong. A young girl on board a plane that crashes goes to her death happily. This was my “children dying happy” phase because my second story was a young boy leaping to his death in Hong Kong’s then new subway, again, quite cheerfully, and that was broadcast on the BBC World Service (1981) and subsequently published in the U.S. in *Short Story International* (1981). I stopped killing kids after that, thus ending my career as an author-murderer most foul. ✧