

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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TRADITION DICTATES THAT tenth anniversaries be relatively humble affairs. Tin is the suggested gift, the daffodil the suggested flower.

I'm OK with tin. It syncs well with the unassuming materials out of which we all struggle to make art in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Murray State. In the middle of a reading on campus in April of 2011, Belfast poet Ciaran Carson pulled a tin whistle out of his pocket and began playing Irish tunes. I remember how haunting they were in their beauty. It was as if those of us in the audience were suddenly transported, "by dint of polyphonic after-hours negotiation, by hooks and crooks of bendy roads and out-of-kilter crosses, past the two immobilized Shell petrol pumps stationed on the mossy forecourt of a disused garage... to O'Looney's Bar, somewhere in the hinterland of Miltown Malbay," to quote from Carson's collection of essays, *Last Night's Fun: In and Out of Time with Irish Music*.

Lately too, with the help of the Development Office, we have been rattling the program's tin cup, so to speak. We are exceedingly grateful to William "Bill" Hogan '70 and his wife, Janis, for stepping up to underwrite our tenth-anniversary celebration, which will include a banquet, community workshop, alumni readings and workshops, and a regional writers celebration and book fair. An investor and entrepreneur himself, Bill expresses a strong belief that regardless of career path, writing skills are critical to success. The Hogans have also agreed to fund three \$2,500 fellowships for outstanding entering MFA students. We are happy to congratulate Alexis Alexander, Deena Lilygren, and Matt Quin, our new Hogan Scholars. We stand behind our investment as a program in the promotion of good writing skills, and we trust that our MFA alumni will do the Hogans proud though their excellent work teaching writing in local schools, community colleges and universities.

As for daffodils, I don't know that a more telling flower could be associated with a writing program and a journal located in the Four Rivers Region, where engineering projects directed by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have had such a huge impact. The Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area—in many ways the glory of our region, with its 300 miles of natural shoreline and its over 500 miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding—owes its existence to the damming of the Tennessee and Cumberland

Rivers, through which Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley were formed. Unfortunately, these projects also necessitated the forced evacuation of many inhabitants. In early spring, along the roads in LBL, drifts of daffodils appear in former front yards. They remind us perhaps that writers too must continue to serve as witnesses of the disappeared.

As milestones go, a decade is not insignificant, especially for a low-residency program like ours that operates, within the university budget, according to a make-or break financial model much like that of a small business. What is it they say about small businesses? That ninety percent of them fail within the first year? Higher education is a very volatile arena these days, and survival, while lucky, cannot be chalked up entirely to luck. It can just as likely be attributed to the willingness of many people to go above and beyond. I would like to seize the opportunity here to single out some of the people who have been instrumental to our success in the first ten years.

I will start by congratulating Dr. Ted Brown on an excellent run as dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. His support of the MFA program has always been unflagging. Although I will be very sorry to see him step down this summer, I relish the now-not-so-remote possibility of convincing him to teach a genre seminar at one of our residencies. Dr. Staci Stone, who will shortly take over as acting dean, has also proven absolutely essential. It is largely thanks to her supportive and creative administrative presence as chair of the English and Philosophy Department and her skill at troubleshooting an infinitude of problems that we are around to celebrate a tenth anniversary. I am happy to report, too, that Dr. Sue Sroda is proving equally supportive and insightful as the new chair. Dr. Jay Morgan has gone to bat for the MFA program on any number of occasions as provost and as associate provost, and I have very much appreciated his dedication and support. Thanks too to Dr. Robert Pervine, the current associate provost, for his assistance in numerous graduate matters. In short, the MFA program benefits from a superb upper administrative team. In the next decade, I look forward to working directly, too, with Dr. Tim Todd, interim provost, and Dr. Bob Davies, president.

Our campus NPR station, WKMS, represents an asset the MFA program could not live without. Kate Lochte is justly famous among

our visiting writers for her astute questions about creative work. Her comprehensive interviews help to advertise our events, but they also function as literary components in their own right. I very much appreciate the help Kate and the rest of the WKMS broadcast team give us in getting out the word on MFA program events.

Donna Witherspoon in the university bookstore is another campus treasure. It wouldn't be an official MFA reading if Donna weren't sitting and smiling at the book table in the Clara Eagle Gallery. I appreciate her great kindness, as well as her unstinting commitment to selling books for our MFA faculty and for our visiting writers.

Many staff members in many administrative offices contribute to the welfare of MFA students, but none more so than Kathy Garrison, director of Graduate Admissions and Records, and Kristi Jackson, associate registrar. Kathy fields more than her share of admissions inquiries from our students. Furthermore, she is always in touch at the first sign of bureaucratic trouble ahead. Kristi gets the "extreme patience" award. More than anyone else involved with the MFA program, she knows that our faculty and students, largely off-campus, need extra assistance in negotiating the usual myGate loop. Kristi has definitely earned her place in late-registration heaven.

Thanks to Tina Bernot in the Development Office for working with us so vivaciously to expand the program's financial horizons. In addition to thanking Bill and Janis Hogan for their generosity in the context of our tenth anniversary, we would like to thank Mick and Marilyn Denington for their significant planned gift. Their vote of confidence in our future is much appreciated.

Our own MFA mentors are pretty terrific too. Here's a shout out to Nickole Brown, Blas Falconer, Riley Hanick, Tommy Hays, Gary Jackson, Karen McElmurray, Elena Passarello, Dale Ray Phillips, Lynn Pruett, Jeffrey Skinner, and Julia Watts for working so tirelessly and generously on behalf of our students. I thank my lucky stars every day, too, for Carrie Jerrell, our associate director, and Nita King, our program assistant. Their contributions to the success of our first ten years are truly beyond measure. Jacque Day is another program stalwart. Without her, there would be no *New Madrid* journal. It's as simple as that.

Of course, there would be no MFA program without students, and we couldn't ask for a more talented, more dedicated or more spirited bunch. I will zero in on a few 2014 graduates to illustrate the degree to which our students are already capitalizing on their potential for success. Jayne Moore Waldrop was awarded an Honorable Mention in the AWP Intro Awards for her story "Across the Creek." Charles Booth won second place in *Playboy's* College Fiction Contest for his story "Boom Boom." Whitney Jones received The Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award for her poem "The Dollar Value of Fingers," which was the first-prize winner in the Illinois Emerging Writers Contest. On another note, Mary Hayes, one of our new students, was recently named MSU's Jesse Stuart Fellow for 2015–16. It is revealing, too, that she is the *seventh* MFA student in a row to be so honored. Alas, space limitations mean that I can only brag on a few students here. Many, many others have met with equal success.

Our resolution for the program's future is to keep getting better. We are working right now, for example, to start up a literature option in Ireland. April 2016 marks the centenary of the rebellion immortalized by William Butler Yeats in his poem, "Easter, 1916," and our plan is to take advantage of the many exhibits and events the government of Ireland has planned in commemoration. Our first study-abroad course, to be offered in June of 2016, will use the Easter Rising as a lens through which to examine the entanglement of literature, history and politics. This course will be open to alumni as well as to current students.

As for that gift of tin, let's think in terms of festoons of tin cans strung to the fenders of a sleek black limousine. The hood of the limousine is so glossy, in fact, that we can see pages and pages of great poetry, fiction and nonfiction writing reflected in it. We all get inside and pour ourselves some champagne. We can't help spilling a little bubbly as we accelerate into our second decade, sparks from those tin cans flying. As for the gift of daffodils, let's think Wordsworth, who calls daffodils "jocund company." Alluding to "Daffodils" is my way of thanking you—MSU staff, MFA faculty and MFA students—for being such "jocund company" over the last ten years. I fervently hope the MFA program can count on having you along for the next ten as well!