Jane’s current projects include a collaborative project with photography professor Charlee Brodsky about mental health and illness, and another collaborative project with Brodsky and fellow Creative Writing Program professor Jim Daniels about Homestead. Jane is working independently on a separate project; for about a year she has been gathering information and conducting interviews with an interracial family of two fathers and four sons, each of which were born addicted to drugs. She is actively involved with the non-profit website UncleGramps, which raises money for an orphanage in Mexico. She is also writing fiction, short essays, and book reviews. Jane hopes to teach a new course about the graphic novel, and is refining the course Literature of Mysticism, which she taught last year.

Recently, Hilary Masters read in Kansas City, Missouri, from his latest novel, *Elegy for Sam Emerson*. This novel, set in a pre 9/11 America, is about a man who runs a restaurant in Pittsburgh while trying to come to terms with the death of his mother (estranged from him for much of their lives) and with the pursuit of his much younger lover. Social statement is important to his work, and a little-known fact is that he ran for the New York State Assembly with the support of Bobby Kennedy. Masters still tries to “implicate his stories with civic action of some kind.” In *Elegy for Sam Emerson*, Masters touches upon the 1995 scandal of the murder of Jonny Gammage in a case of police brutality, an issue not integral to the story, but important to its literary tapestry.

I continue to publish short fiction and nonfiction, and I now have three novels — a relatively new form for me — out in review. My newest project incorporates historical scandals with the dullness of cyber-connected contemporary life. I am particularly interested in spouses poisoning spouses with mercury and have spent too much time researching these tragedies, something that worries my husband. “Relax,” I assure him, “mercury is tough to get these days.”

My other interest is in editing and publishing. Until recently, I was the fiction editor at the Carnegie Mellon Press, but am soon to launch my new imprint, Hot Metal Press. Any former students looking for some freelance design work, please don’t hesitate to reconnect.

The interdepartmental movie course *So You Want to Make a Movie* was an enormous success. The class wrote, rewrote, revised, and finally shot and edited two feature-length films, *Grace and The Routes of Wild Flowers*. We are currently in our second year where things are moving along swimmingly. I want to give my warmest congratulations to our creative writing students involved in our first-year project: Matthew Kopel, Deanna Mulye, Allie Kolb, Ben Pelhan, Brian Leahy, and Ryan Coon.
Two of Jim’s latest works have received prizes and accolades, including his book of poems Revolt of the Crash-Test Dummies, and the movie Dumpster. Revolt of the Crash-Test Dummies won the Blue Lynx award; Dumpster, which Jim wrote and produced, won awards at a number of film festivals.

Revolt of the Crash-Test Dummies was published by Eastern Washington University Press in February, and another collection of poems, Now Showing, came out in October from Ahadada Press. Mr. Pleasant, Jim’s most recent collection of short stories, will be published by Michigan State University Press, and In Line for the Exterminator, another book of poems, will be published by Wayne State University Press, both in Fall 2007.

For Jane Bernstein, 2007 is shaping up as the Year of the Rachel. In August, Rachel in the World will be published by the University of Illinois Press along with a new edition of Loving Rachel, her earlier book about her developmentally disabled daughter. Rachel Is, a feature-length documentary produced by Jane and directed by her daughter Charlotte Glynn, is scheduled for completion later in the year.

Beginning this March, Jane and Charlotte will present their work at a variety of venues, among them the Pittsburgh Jewish-Israeli Film Festival and the Pitt Greensburg Writers Conference. Some of their presentations will focus on advocacy issues; others will be about storytelling or craft or their collaboration.

Jane has completed a novel, Knocked Out, and continues to write essays. Her newest piece, “Funny Feet,” will appear in an upcoming issue of Maggid. This summer, she intends to begin a new novel.

After publishing nine books in the Carnegie Mellon Poetry Series, three books in the Classic Contemporary Series, and one book in the Memoir/Poetry Series in 2007 (see list below), Jerry Costanzo took a well-deserved sabbatical this Spring.

Carnegie Mellon Poetry Titles
Trick Pear, Suzanne Cleary
So I Will Till the Ground, Gregory Djanikian
Black Threads, Jeff Friedman
Drift and Pulse, Kathleen Halme
The Playhouse Near Dark, Elizabeth Holmes
On the Vanishing of Large Creatures, Susan Hutton
One Season Behind, Sarah Rosenblatt
Indeed I Was Pleased With the World, Mary Ruefle
The Situation, John Skayles

Classic Contemporary Titles
The Autobiography of a Jukebox, Cornelius Eady
Abacus, Mary Karr
The Incognito Lounge, Denis Johnson

2007 Memoir/Poetry Series
The Years Of Smashing Bricks: An Anecdotal Memoir, Richard Katrovas

To read Terrance Hayes’ writing, see page 15.
Many of your poems seemed to be inspired by images and places. For example, one you read at Carnegie Mellon was inspired by a Georgia O’Keeffe painting, and Phoenix, Arizona. Has this type of inspiration always been part of your process? Is this foundation a good springboard for your imagination? What starts you thinking or working on a poem?

A: Sometimes I’d like to think if I had not chosen writing, I would have been a painter — but of course, I don’t have that talent. All the same, the interest in imagery and visual landscapes has always been part of my work. There are several poems that have used an image as a springboard, but not all of my drafts originate in this way. Most of my ideas come from language—a phrase, a sound, an interesting line that occurs to me, lines by other poets, reading. I tend to write very slowly, so I tend not to write until enough of those fragments have come together. What triggers that moment is unknown to me.

What do you think of Pittsburgh as a place for an emerging writer?

A: For a city of this size, Pittsburgh has many resources in terms of lectures and reading series, the huge collection at the Carnegie Library, and more recently, the presence of literary journals like Caketrain, Paper Street, etc., although as far as funding opportunities and the sheer quantity of events happening are concerned, it wouldn’t be the same as larger cities that are more known for that.

To be honest, though, I’m not sure that all of the above are crucial to me, since venues for publishing can be found in journals nationwide, and I am still concentrating more on the process of writing itself — a solitary act — versus putting the work out there in a local community.

For someone who is figuring out what their project will be, I would think location might not be relevant as much as it might have been before the internet — with ready access to information — including podcasts, recordings, bookstores, poems in other languages, etc. — there’s no shortage. If a person is “hungry” for poetry, they will seek it. I don’t advocate writing into a vacuum, of course, but I do think it is more important to just write and worry about all the rest of it—the feedback from others, the what to “do” with the writing once it is finished — much later. People could and do write anywhere.

Do you recommend the MFA? Why did you pursue your MFA?

A: I would hesitate to recommend or not recommend the MFA. It has to be taken on an individual basis. There are many factors to consider, from whether or not one can afford to leave the workforce temporarily for the sake of devoting anywhere from one to three years at school, to whether there are other opportunities like traveling, and most importantly, whether or not a person has realistic expectations about the whole endeavor. I don’t think the MFA leads to a career in the sense that it will prepare you for a particular profession or launch you into anything — a degree by itself probably won’t do that. Instead, I view the MFA more along the lines of being a conservatory for the writing. That is the value in it: an MFA is basically structured time to focus. Time was the main reason I pursued the MFA. I knew that life, being unpredictable as it is, might change later. There are many people who are capable of juggling grad school with work, family, or other responsibilities simultaneously, but I couldn’t see myself doing that. I wanted to be able to write while I was still relatively free from other commitments. Right after college seemed to be the ideal window.

Her chapbook, Festival Bone, was published by Adastra Press.

Most of my ideas come from language — a phrase, a sound, an interesting line that occurs to me, lines by other poets, reading.

-karen rigby
The 2006 Alumni Speaker Series welcomed accomplished alumni to campus, who gave readings of their most recent works. The following are Q&A’s with the visiting alumni.

How was your experience at Carnegie Mellon?
A: When I enrolled at Carnegie Mellon, in 1976, it was one of the only programs in the country to offer an undergraduate major in creative writing. As such, it was very important to me. I also appreciated my interaction with painters, filmmakers and actors — all the lively arts communities at CMU.

What courses most influenced your writing style?
A: Certainly my work at Gerald Costanzo’s Three Rivers Press. When I reached graduate school, I was really well-versed in contemporary poetry and prose because of the hands-on training with the press.

What was the most beneficial piece of advice you ever received, that you might pass on to other writers, or undergraduates in general?
A: It’s not original advice, but it’s essential: READ. I’m amazed by the number of people who expect to become great writers without troubling themselves to read other writers. I do a lot of reviewing, and I think it’s important to be engaged with the literary life in some way — to read, and appreciate, one’s contemporaries.

How did your interest in writing begin?
A: I’m embarrassed to say that I was much more interested in being published than in writing. My 2nd grade “books” are about ten pages long, with many pages of ads trumpeting their arrival. With a cousin, I used to spend my summers producing Vogue-like magazines where we wrote and illustrated all of the stories, fashion spreads, and ads. All pre-computer, of course!

How did you go about getting your first pieces published?
A: Somewhere I have the first check I got for my first published poem (two dollars, I think). Just sending poems and stories out in the normal way. I began to publish in my second year in grad school. Having worked for the Three Rivers Press gave me a better idea of the process, I think — at least I knew to read the magazines to which I was submitting! My first novel, Customs, was submitted as an unsolicited manuscript to Knopf and accepted. That just doesn’t happen much, so I was really lucky.

What moment in your writing career are you most proud of?
A: Probably my most fun writing experience was writing the long poem “Dementia Collander” (in my collection Pocket Sundial). It’s quite long — over twenty pages in manuscript, I think. I don’t write poetry anymore, alas, but I remember the process of inventing this bizarre historical world for the poem as an especially exciting one.

What has been the hardest obstacle to overcome in your writing career?
A: It’s often difficult to work in multiple genres — making the mental switch from fiction to screenwriting to the personal essay.

How has your latest book’s success affected you?
A: I did have a sense, writing Layover, that I finally trusted what I was doing. It was an exhilarating feeling. Unfortunately, it makes the usual writing experience — where you have to rewrite and rewrite, and are full of the typical self-doubts — a bit harder!

Lisa Zeidner is the author of Customs, Pocket Sundial, and Layover.
Can you talk about your experiences at Carnegie Mellon?

A: Carnegie Mellon was a great launch pad for me. I came to study Creative Writing and ultimately develop the Creative Writing Cultural Studies major with a minor in Playwriting. What I got out of Carnegie Mellon more than anything else was a very open-minded and dynamic faculty that was open to a lot of different things having to do with film and screenwriting. For example, my thesis was a pair of screenplays that I wrote. The faculty was very open to having me define a niche for myself.

Carnegie Mellon is a place where if you are interested in writing, there are so many opportunities to do what you do. In addition to my work in the curriculum, I was also writing plays for Scotch 'n' Soda and writing for Tartan. Intellectually, this school is a huge playground where you can find any number of outlets for whatever your interests are. I was able to find those outlets and exploit them to the fullest. In addition to having been in an English department with a great faculty and a group of people who were very open-minded, there was everything else that this whole school had to offer. I really got the best of all worlds here.

A lot of the English department faculty is still here so I recognize a lot of the professors who were so great to me, and that’s the reason why I’m back here now. I think that screenwriting, as an academic discipline, is a relatively new thing, certainly not one of the canonical disciplines. The fact that Carnegie Mellon is interested in having me here to talk about screenwriting is cool because it means that they’re serious about screenwriting and they’re serious about teaching it to students here. I love this school, and when I was here, I grew to love the work that I was doing and the schooling that I had here and the people I was with. I have nothing but great memories of Carnegie Mellon and Pittsburgh and campus. There’s no downside to coming back. I don’t even feel old.

How did you choose Carnegie Mellon?

A: I had won a National Council of Teachers of English Award when I was in high school, and one of the things that impressed me about this school was that I actually received a letter from Carnegie Mellon offering me a scholarship to be in the English department here based on the NCTE award. ... So I thought, “Well, that’s the place to go.” More than anything, I was impressed that they would actually recruit writing talent.

So, you grew up wanting to be a screenwriter?

A: I knew I wanted to be a screenwriter for a long time, before I even came to Carnegie Mellon. It’s not something that I discovered; it kind of discovered me. I saw Star Wars and it changed my life, and I thought, “That’s what I want to do for the rest of my life.” How it was going to happen and in what form was something that was open, because obviously I didn’t become a movie writer or a movie director. I became a TV writer and producer, but that was the inspiration for me.

I applied to grad school during of my senior year at Carnegie Mellon. I knew that I wanted to go to film school, and I knew that George Lucas had gone to USC so that was where I wanted to go. If you know what you want to do in life, you’ll go to the place where it’s happening, and LA was where it was happening, so there I went. LA is really the only place you can live if you’re in TV — maybe New York, but all of the production is in LA or based out of LA, so you have to be there to be living and breathing the industry.

Where does your inspiration come from?

A: I think it’s deceptive to ask that because inspiration doesn’t come from any one place. It comes from necessity, it comes from a genuine idea, it comes from something as simple as saying, “I think I want to write a script in which X happens.” Or it can come from everyone in a room sitting together and figuring out what an episode’s going to look like. There are all kinds of inspiration and the trick is not knowing where your inspiration comes from, the trick is being open to inspiration in whatever form it may arrive. The worst thing that can happen to you as a writer is to not recognize inspiration because it’s not as pretty as you’d like it to be.

I think that’s the deceptiveness of the question because it implies that you can go somewhere and sit down and watch the landscape and a story idea will come to you and it really isn’t like that. It’s about having your eyes open to the world and if something shows up that could be a story, grabbing it before it gets away. That’s where inspiration comes from; it’s not from any one process or any one source.

What would you do if you weren’t a screenwriter?

A: This is what I would be doing. There’s no option. If I weren’t writing for TV, I’d be trying to write for TV. Maybe in another life, I wouldn’t have been as lucky to have gotten some of the jobs that I have or the opportunities that I have, and I’d still be banging my head against it. There’s no fall back. There’s no other place to go. This is what I do. This is who I am.

Grillo-Marxuach’s writing credits include Lost, Medium, and Charmed.
Do you have any strong feelings about what poetry is or should be about?

A: Not to use a workshop phrase here, but I think there should be something at stake, emotionally speaking, in every poem. A good poem, for me, must have a number of things working for it. As much as I’m a sucker for imagery, a poem can’t be merely descriptive — that’s what photography’s for. As much as I focus on the rhythm of my poems, that can’t be everything either — because if poetry were only music, what chance would it have against the real thing? But that’s more in terms of poetic elements. To go back to your question, I don’t think poetry needs to be about anything in particular, as long as it’s about something, as long as there is some sort of emotional complexity to it, and as long as it’s not afraid to take risks. Unfortunately, there seem to be quite a few poems out there that don’t seem to be about anything, or that are lacking in terms of emotion, or that are afraid to take risks.

Why did you pursue both of your MFAs? What advice would you give to a CMU student about approaching an MFA?

A: Well, I went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison right after graduating from CMU. The main reason I pursued that MFA, really, is that I wanted to keep writing and studying poetry. I also wanted to try my hand at teaching, to see if it was something I would want to do for the rest of my life. Overall, it was a good experience. I got to teach Creative Writing, and I had a lot of time to write. Though I wish I’d written more than I actually did, by the time I was done, I was very close to completing the final draft of my poetry manuscript. At the time, Iowa was more of a back-up plan, to be honest. As I was graduating from UW-Madison, I applied for several post-graduate fellowships in poetry, and I didn’t get any of them. I had taken a couple of fiction workshops at Wisconsin, and one of my teachers, who had studied at Iowa, suggested that I apply to the Workshop. I guess part of the reason why I went to Iowa has to do with all the student loans I took as an undergrad at CMU. As long as you’re still in school, you can keep deferring those loans. I’m not in any kind of hurry to pay them just yet.

Many people have different reasons for choosing an MFA program. It depends what you’re looking for. Some people might choose a school because they want to study with a specific writer who they admire. I think that makes sense. You may want to go to a school where you can study more than one genre. Some programs encourage that, and some frown upon it. Some programs take two years to complete, and some take three. So it also depends on how much time you want. The size of the program may be an important factor, too. For me, although I spent two of the best years of my life in Madison, I often wished the program had been larger. After being in workshop with the same people for so many semesters, things became somewhat static, somewhat predictable. At Iowa, you get to be in workshop with different people every semester, so you get to read new voices and hear fresh opinions on your own work. The size of the program also plays a role socially, of course. The larger the program the more people you’re bound to click with.

How have you gone about getting published?

A: In terms of publishing in magazines, Jim Daniels is the one who got me started. I took a beginning poetry workshop with Jim, and at the end of the semester, he showed the class how to submit poems to magazines, and suggested several magazines for us to try. So that’s what I did. It’s as simple as putting your work in an envelope and sending it off. Other than the cost of postage, there’s really nothing to lose. I never took rejection letters personally, so when my work got rejected somewhere, I’d just send it somewhere else. Every once in a while I’d have a poem accepted, which encouraged me to keep writing. But it’s important not to get discouraged. Even Pulitzer-Prize winners get their poems rejected from magazines. It’s not a big deal.

In all honesty, I don’t think having an agent matters that much until you have a book to sell. I’m currently working on a novel, which is not nearly close to being finished, so an agent can’t really do much for me at this point. An agent can sell your short stories to magazines, but that’s also something you can do yourself. On the other hand, even if you don’t have an agent, once you’ve written a good novel, you shouldn’t have much trouble finding one. It’s a matter of writing to literary agencies and showing them samples.

Kevin González’s chapbook, The Night Tito Trinidad KO’ed Ricardo Mayorga, was published in 2007.

There are all kinds of inspiration and the trick is not knowing where your inspiration comes from, the trick is being open to inspiration in whatever form it may arrive.

-javier grillo-marxuach
On January 31, Sue Stauffacher, children's author and Carnegie Mellon alum, visited the Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center for a brief talk about where life as taken her so far, what it takes to be the author of award-winning popular books, and what it means to write for yourself, and to write for others.

Stauffacher began by describing her humble beginnings. She struggled for some time after college, but seemed to be undeterred by disappointment. Then things started going her way. Through a contest, Stauffacher met Judy Blume, the author of many iconic children's books. Blume recommended her own agent to Sue, but that agent referred her instead to a junior agent, Wendy Schmalz. Stauffacher described Schmalz as "a good egg." She must be, because they have been working together for fourteen years. It was through Schmalz that Stauffacher published *Donuthead*, a book about a boy with the same unfortunate misnomer. As Stauffacher said, almost not believing her own luck, "the book had legs." Soon there were offers for movie rights, and Nickelodeon wanted to create a TV show based on the novel. Stauffacher became, in her own words, a "20-year overnight success."

The success of *Donuthead* and its sequel, *Donutheart*, has given Stauffacher the opportunity to devote her talent, time, and money to a new project, one that holds personal significance to her. Stauffacher is working on creating her own publishing company so that she can produce and distribute comic books. Her comic books, or, more appropriately, graphic novels, are geared toward children who have a hard time reading, or may not be able to read at all.

*The Wireman* series features African American characters, who have long been underrepresented in the comic book world, in a high-concept graphic novel with sophisticated art and straightforward language. The look of the novel is designed to excite readers, who can see themselves reflected in print and art. But, Sue emphatically stated, "illiteracy is beyond color lines." Clearly this is more than just a job for her. This project is a way to use her skills to try to create significant change. Her graphic novels will be distributed to literacy groups. Sue will take no royalties on *The Wireman* series; this is a project motivated by passion, not profits.
How was your experience at Carnegie Mellon?
A: Truly, my experience there was terrific. I think I was just one of those people who was destined to discover that he liked school only in college, but I also tend to doubt I could have been quite as happy anywhere else. The creative writing program was very strong then, too (although we didn't have the great facilities you have now), and appealingly cohesive yet various as well (workshops with different professors really felt like different experiences).

Also, I was surprised to find how much I liked what the core curriculum forced me into: terrific courses in history, film studies, even economics and a weirdly fascinating statistics-for-poets (as it was called by the students in the real stats classes). I liked having as many friends majoring in engineering or architecture or computer science as in English, too. It's not that we ever really talked about our disciplines, but I think in subtle and unmistakable ways we were different people with different sorts of brains and that somehow funded those friendships. Oh, and intramural sports — don't know if it's still true, but CMU was great at those back then, and I think flag football and basketball saved my sanity some semesters.

What courses most influenced your writing style? Your life?
A: Well, the advanced workshops I took there — with Jim Daniels, Gerry Costanzo, Hilary Masters, and a writer who has moved on named Margot Livesey — provided me with a model that I think I'm still teaching from. I didn't realize how lucky I was in those courses until I went to a couple of graduate programs and discovered how much less valuable workshops could be. And of course they taught me a great deal about my writing, and about reading like a writer. But I also took a Chaucer course with Professor Knapp and a Joyce course with Professor Steinberg that were fantastic. Oh, and then there were independent studies I took as a senior with Professors Masters, Livesey, and Steinberg, all of which were wonderful, and now I recognize and appreciate how much extra work they were each taking on to do that with me.

What was the most beneficial piece of advice you ever received that you might pass on to other writers, or undergraduates in general?
A: I think the most important “skill” I learned (if that term is appropriate) was to better place myself in the minds and circumstances of others, and of others whom experience was more and more distant from my own. While I certainly learned that from my literature courses — from reading books more skillfully and expanding my readerly tastes — it came most of all from my creative writing classes. I still feel that’s the most valuable thing those courses can offer, and it’s equally valuable whether one goes on to write fiction or poetry all one’s life or never does it again. It also seems to me the most essential value of literature.

We just had the fantastic Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, this year’s Nobel Prize winner, visiting my university, and one of the things he said while he was here was “Great literature rises not from our powers of judgment but from our ability to put ourselves in another’s place.”

How did you go about getting your first pieces published?
A: With the specific help of Hilary Masters, and I’ll be forever grateful to him for this (though it’s the least of what I’m grateful to him for). A literary magazine called Ploughshares happened to be doing an issue called “Discoveries” during my senior year — it was something they used to do every five or ten years; I don’t know if they still do. They asked a bunch of established writers around the country to submit a single story or poem from someone they consider a “discovery” — a promising, as yet unpublished (or barely published) writer they knew. Hilary asked if he could submit a story I had just written for his workshop, and helped me to revise it in important ways, and we were lucky enough to have them include it in the issue. He also wrote an introduction to it (all the established writers did this) which was very kind and generous. There were a few “discoveries” from that issue who have gone on to publish books I admire, including Christopher Tighman and David Wong Louie, so I remain proud to have been in their company.

How do you outline characters (and plot lines) in your stories?
A: Well, as I mentioned, I’m an organic writer rather than an architectural one, so I’ve found that I’m not really able to “outline” in advance very much or very well since my best fiction grows out of itself, if that makes sense. And when I know where I’m headed too far in advance, the territory will have turned strangely gray and lifeless by the time I arrive there. Of course, this means I’ve had to shift most of my emphasis as a writer to revision, since I certainly don’t write strong or well-shaped first drafts working that way. And when I revise I do begin to outline things, or to think in terms of principles of narrative architecture and form.

What has been the hardest obstacle to overcome in writing/your writing career?
A: I think it’s been just the steady persistence one must have in the face of rejections and indifference. I’m lucky to have a very supportive family, so that hasn’t been a problem, as I know it is for some writers. But you know, even after having published about twenty stories now, a new story of mine will still, unless it’s very fortunate, be rejected by eight or ten or twelve magazines before it finds a home (which is better than the fifteen or twenty it often was when I began). It can be hard not to let all that rejection overwhelm the bits of acceptance, but Professor Daniels taught us to ignore the rejection slips (and expect them), have the next envelope addressed and ready, and get the story or poem back in the mail the same day — to just move on in that way. It’s great advice that I still try to live by.

His novel, The Cottagers, was published in 2006.
There’s nothing like immediate gratification. For those who can’t wait to see their work published, the Internet is abundant in opportunities to achieve that immediate gratification. Blogs have become some of the most prominent outlets for a wide variety of purposes — some are simple diaries, some are complex and informational, some are independent, some are groups of people, some are sponsored by bigger organizations.

A few Creative Writing alumni have taken part in the growing Internet sector of blogging, a typically free literary underground that connects the creatively-adept through common forums and in discussions that harken back to those coffee-house days of our first literary critics.

Blogs are a new genre of writing, and may have the power to create new standards in reading and writing. Of the positive and negative sides of blogging, Les Kay said:

“On the negative side, I think that the immediacy of blogging makes sloppiness easier in one’s writing. For example, in my haste to get a post up for the day, I once wrote that ‘my house had exploded,’ when I’d meant to write ‘my house had not exploded.’ ...Quite a typo, and I suspect that I take more care in the grammar and punctuation than the majority of folks who blog.

On the other hand, blogs offer a variety of amazing potentials. Working collaboratively with other writers is far easier. More, there’s an opportunity to build and maintain a community around a particular blog.”

Jonathan Barnes wrote that blogging opens up a new world of friends and influences though, too. Blogging helps to get your name out there, and is not an outlet to be forgotten.
Alumni are busy setting the pace in the creative writing world. What follows are stories tracking some of the most recent trends, including creative writing in blogging, music, and graphic novels.

David Koehn

**Blog:** The Great American Pin-up
**Site:** greatamericanpinup.blogspot.com

David Koehn’s The Great American Pin-up is a team blog that attracts over five hundred readers a week from all over the world. Some comments come from people who are written about in the blog, like Frank Bidart, a poet, and Christopher Dickey, a political activist. “We cover art, poetry, translation, music, naturalism, and other topics as the team sees fit,” wrote Koehn. Many of Koehn’s posts have turned into articles appearing in The New Hampshire Review, Jacket, and New York Quarterly, among others.

His chapbook, *Coil*, was re-issued in 2006.

Les Kay

**Blog:** Notes from a Brooding Poet
**Site:** broodingpoet.blogspot.com

Les Kay looks at his blog as a challenge: instead of writing a series of reflections with each entry, Kay tries to create a cumulative effect. His aim is to educate while creating a memoir-like series of writings; he hopes to educate young poets by reflecting on forms of poetry. “Sometimes, the plan works. Sometimes it doesn’t,” wrote Kay of his blog’s concept.

Whether or not these main goals are being accomplished, the blog is helping Kay to discover how he thinks about poetry. “More,” wrote Kay, “It’s a nice forum for me to practice my craft, nearly every day, without the kind of pressure I would put on myself if it was a poem, a novel, or business. I get, on occasion, immediate feedback from a handful of friends and strangers, and it’s gratifying when someone finds a post enjoyable, touching, or useful.”

Kay is a poet, and editor of the online journal Ward 6.

Jonathan Barnes

**Blog:** Barnstormin
**Site:** barnstormin.blogspot.com

Jonathan Barnes’ blog fills in the gaps that journalism leaves behind. He sees his blog as an opportunity to post writing that wasn’t being published, but uses it more to comment on stories that newspapers might not have covered, or might not have covered in a way that would interest audiences, through essays he writes. “I think blogs are changing writing, namely journalism, by bringing more of a first-person feel to the writing. Bloggers don’t feel the need of the ‘old’ media to try to be objective. ... People want to read the unvarnished opinions of good writers—they don’t want some pie-in-the-sky attempt to be objective and above it all,” Barnes wrote.

Barnes noted that writing a blog will put yourself at more risk of undue criticism, because it is out there for anyone to read and comment on. He wrote, “The blogosphere sometimes seems like the world where The Geeks Have Inherited The Earth, and some of them are out to settle old scores, especially against the jocks and the popular people. Beware.”

His blog has been mentioned in numerous papers, including Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh City Paper, Allentown Morning Call, as well as on New York Daily News writer Derek Rose’s blog.

Barnes is a freelance journalist.

Jonathan Barnes’ team blogging resonates in what Kay sees as an intriguing power behind blogs. “To me, it’s interesting to think about how such group publications could function cumulatively,” wrote Kay.

Kay is a poet, and editor of the online journal Ward 6.
I spent a long time writing instrumental music because I lacked the confidence to sing, but now that I’m writing “pop” songs, I’ve finally managed to meld my creative writing with my music. It’s very, very gratifying. Though my poems are still different than my songs, poetry classes helped me learn to say more with less. You don’t need to be fancy to say real things.

The only other thing that I’d say to anyone is “don’t stop.” If you’re an artist (which writers are a flavor of), then you can live your life in one of two ways. You can struggle to be an artist and endure the pains and pleasures of that. Or you can give up and become a blocked artist, which is all pain. So really, it’s a very simple choice: pain and pleasure, or just pain. If you’re creative enough to have chosen creative writing as your major, you simply have to find a way to be creative in your life after school.

My music is my writing and vice versa. Instead of writing bits of material to be read, I now write for the air and ear. Songs are poems with wings, poems that are permitted to light on different branches from time to time. If poetry is clay that gets baked in a kiln, songs are more like foam. At least mine are. My work is malleable in that way - oft littered with little nuggets of truth (or styrofoam), held together by a brightly-colored glob of notes, up for grabs and infinitely interpretable.

I suppose I mainly depend on my Creative Writing degree to excuse vague or controversial lyrics. A fan questions my use of adjectives like “lion-y” (like a lion) or “soldierated” (made to be like a soldier)? Well, I have a license in bending the English language. Or so I wield my degree. Otherwise, CMU just gave me a lot of freedom to explore and be, which has helped me wade through much of the BS that the music industry exudes.

My work is malleable in that way - oft littered with little nuggets of truth (or styrofoam), held together by a brightly-colored glob of notes, up for grabs and infinitely interpretable.

I came to Carnegie Mellon as psychology/biology major. I took an introductory creative writing class as a sophomore, and was hooked. I had been writing since I was a kid, but no one had even encouraged me or told me I had talent before CMU.

poetry classes helped me learn to say more with less. You don’t need to be fancy to say real things.

-jesse kates
As the adage goes, “Write what you know,” and *Street Angel* basically wrote itself.

-brian maruca

Brian Maruca (’99), a graduate of the creative writing program, collaborated with noted Pittsburgh artist Jim Rugg on *Street Angel: The Princess of Poverty*, a book that combines issues 2-5 of the *Street Angel* comic book series. *Street Angel*, written by Maruca, is about a homeless teenage girl who fights crime.

The book received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly*, which described it as “One of the oddest and most original works to surface in quite a while.” The book was also mentioned in a recent *New York Times* article, “For Graphic Novels, a New Frontier: Teenage Girls.”

“I started writing comics… with Street Angel,” Maruca said. “As the adage goes, ‘Write What You Know,’ and *Street Angel* basically wrote itself. The homeless teenage skateboarding epidemic on campus being what it is, I’m shocked there aren’t more books choking out the *Showdown at Gucci Gulches* and the Descartes stuff on the campus bookshelves.

Jim (co-creator of *Street Angel*) and I work together, and he kept hassling me because he was pretty insecure about writing. … We screwed around with a few different ideas to amuse ourselves and finally settled on making a mini comic that would, we figured, be a really enthusiastic bad super hero comic (like reading someone’s Buffy fan-fiction, but intentionally cringe-inducing)… instead, we got *Street Angel*.

Maruca discussed his experiences at Carnegie Mellon, noting that “CMU’s writing program was pretty helpful in exposing me to lots of different styles, temperaments, and some pretty simple, yet useful concepts (writing is really only the way to get better at writing… revision, never get too married to an idea… no one is really interested in your first kiss… that kind of thing).”

Recalling the history of the series, Maruca noted that the experience with each issue was different. “I don’t really have any recollection how long the book took. Issue 5 I think I pounded out in a half hour during lunch… and it survived more or less intact through our usually endless revision sessions. Issue 1 was a lot more collaborative (with Jim) where we floated ideas back and forth before one of us bothered to write it down (I think it was maybe two years ago that we wrote issue 1).

“Comics are pretty much the perfect venue for me,” Maruca concluded. “Just about long enough for my attention span. It’s just too bad I can’t draw. … Jim and I have a couple of ideas for future stuff… but, I’m not at liberty to discuss them (not because anything is top secret, I just don’t want to jinx myself).”

*Street Angel* is available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), and through the *Street Angel* website, [streetangelcomics.com](http://streetangelcomics.com).
Hank Aaron's Daughter
(from chapter 3)
Shannon Gibney

There was the matter of the tapes. Grainy, chopped up tapes of Hank Aaron talking about hitting more than 20 home runs for 20 straight seasons; tapes of him in the early sixties, discussing removal of segregation signs and policies at the Milwaukee Braves’ spring training facility in Sarasota Springs; footage of their contest against the Dodgers in Atlanta on April 8, 1974, where he hit his 715th home run in front of 54,000 people and broke Babe Ruth’s record.

It happened in the fourth inning, with two outs and a man on first base. Though I knew exactly when it happened, I would never fast-forward; somehow, that seemed like cheating. Dad always said that it was a whole game, a whole season and ultimately an entire career that led up to an unforgettable moment, that there was no way you could cut corners and get there, and that Hank Aaron’s story exemplified this fact perfectly. So I felt that I absolutely needed to watch the whole game, see the way he played Downing, the veteran pitcher, and take notes on his patience, which was something I always needed to work on.

The record-breaking game was by far my favorite tape, though another one that Dad had of Hank explaining the spate of hate letters he received from people around the country who didn’t want him to break the record just because he was black, who, like Hank, could say the word “nigger” to the screen and never flinch.

“Dear Nigger Henry,” Hank Aaron read to the camera, enunciating each word. “It has come to our attention that you are going to break this record established by the great Babe Ruth if I can help it. Getting back to your blackness, I don’t think any coon should ever play baseball. Whites are far more superior than jungle bunnies. I will be going to the rest of your games and if you hit more than one home run it will be your last. My gun is watching your every black move. This is no joke.”

Jason would slowly back out of the room whenever this footage came on, but I would just start laughing. I laughed because Hank Aaron had done it anyway; people were threatening to kill him every time he went up to bat, just because he was so good that he was going to break a record that a white man had happened to set. I was sure I could see it each time he stepped up to his plate, the laughter, which was also my laughter, settling into the contours of his face. Though I had never faced what he had, I felt like I knew something about how he felt up there, how he just had to play, even though he himself might never know why.

I studied those tapes. I began waiting for Jason to leave the room even before he joined me to start watching them. He didn’t know, he didn’t understand. It was as if Hank Aaron scared him. That’s when I decided that baseball was only for those of us who weren’t scared, who, like Hank, could say the word “nigger” to the screen.

When I was eight, I began watching those tapes with my nose inches from the screen, trying to see every detail of his batting stance, every snap of his wrist. That was when I decided I would be just like Hank Aaron whenever I went on the field. Whenever I felt alone, I would think of him. That was when I began dreaming I was Hank Aaron’s daughter. As I peered at the flickering screen, I was sure I could see in his eyes the same decision to leave all the questions, all the fear behind when he stepped up to the plate.
from Terrance Hayes

Sometimes just after two writers meet and sometimes just before they separate the question, “What are you reading?” enters the conversation. In my imaginary city all people greet and depart in this way.

Trying to make you fall in love in 5-6 lines…

* Speaking indifferently to him, who had driven out the cold and polished my good shoes as well. What did I know, what did I know of love austere and lonely offices?

You best know this one, but if you’re just learning to read: Robert Hayden’s “Those Winter Sundays.”

* I love this body, this solo & ragtime jubilee behind the left nipple, because I know I was born to wear out at least one hundred angels.

From Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Anodyne.” Let it burn a trail across your scalp.

* I can’t say I’m surprised to find my little horse breathing a dent for himself in the snow. Nor that the dent looks strangely like a baby Jesus. A baby Jesus on his back, sinking into the snow.

From Michael Earl Craig’s “In The Januaried Mountains” (From Yes, Master)

* Love is a word, another kind of open. As the diamond comes into a knot of flame I am Black because I come from the earth’s inside now take my word for jewel in the open light.

From Audre Lorde’s “Coal.” Four lines, but what more do you need?

* I want the water to go on without its bed. And the wind to go on without its mountain passes.

I want the night to go on without its eyes and my heart without its golden petals;

if the oxen could only talk with the big leaves

From Lorca’s “Ghazal of the Terrifying Presence.” Its lesson: Mystery is not ambiguity.

* The beekeeper’s daughter. With a sack full of bees. She’ll come in, quiet, from the orchards, figs in her shawl and gather the bees from their white boxes.

And Professor Garcia, the music instructor. With bare hands. In his empty house, he’ll play his piano and each note will be one of my fingers in a jar.

From Joshua Poteat’s “People Who’d Kill Me (Spain, 1939)” (from Ornithologies).

* You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

From “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver.

* Five non poetry books:

–Oreo by Fran Ross (she was one of Richard Pryor’s writers)
–So Long, See you Tomorrow by William Maxwell
–In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition by Fred Moten
–Condition Of The Spirit: The Life And Work Of Larry Levis edited by Christopher Buckley and Alexander Long
–The Grand Hotels (Of Joseph Cornell) by Robert Coover. A slim imaginary book you should read once a week for at least a year.
This fall, thirteen Carnegie Mellon undergrads and recent alumni had the privilege of attending the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival in Stanhope, New Jersey, thanks to the generous support of the Jenifer and Marshall Gile Creative Writing Fund. The Festival, billed as “the largest poetry event in North America,” welcomed over 17,000 visitors the weekend of September 29. The 11th biennial celebration focused on the diversity of poetic traditions in America and around the world.

Over sixty poets, including living legends like Robert Bly and Lucille Clifton, gave readings and performances of their work in the Dodge Festival’s signature white tents alongside a Rumi-inspired dance troupe, a trio of Ecuadorian folk musicians, and a variety of other performers. The Festival also welcomed well-known poets from around the world, including Palestine’s Taha Muhammad Ali, Ko Un of South Korea, and Andrew Motion, the poet laureate of England. Jim Daniels and Terrance Hayes, professors in the Creative Writing Program, were also among this year’s Festival poets.

The sheer variety of voices at Dodge was a major attraction for students and faculty alike, as was the strong sense of community. “It was terrifically uplifting,” said Fifth Year Scholar Michael Szczerban, “to be a part of the huge crowd of people who had given their weekend to poetry, to be among so many people who cared about what I cared about.” Students were perhaps most excited, however, about the chance to experience “new” poets. After hearing the work of Matthea Harvey, a first-time Dodge participant, many of the Carnegie Mellon contingent hurried to the on-site Borders tent to pick up signed copies of her books. Enthusiasm for Harvey’s intricate, sophisticated verse soon spread to the classroom, where students elected to use Harvey’s first book, *Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form*, as a workshop text.

Anne Marie Rooney, a senior creative writing major, had this to say: “I’m always excited to find new poets, and Matthea’s zippy deployment of language and the line wooed me instantly. I’m grateful that Dodge introduced me to such a neat voice.”

Clockwise from top left: Professor Terrance Hayes performs at the Dodge Poetry Festival; alumnus Matthew Kopel and student Alayna Frankenberry pose during the festival; students and professors pose for a group shot after the festival.
Current students and professors are busy with academics, but also get to supplement their time at school with events like the Dodge Poetry Festival, or with watching Hollywood stars occupy Baker Hall.

Carnegie Mellon and “smart people” go together like bread and butter. *Smart People* is the first major motion picture to use both Carnegie Mellon’s setting and name. Although the script was originally written for screenwriter Mark Poirier’s alma mater, Georgetown, director Noam Murro preferred the eclectic look of Carnegie Mellon’s campus. “The independent film culture of *Smart People* aligns with our university mantra and sense of community; it’s a perfect match,” says Sophie Nassif, Smart People University liaison.

Dennis Quaid stars as a widowed Carnegie Mellon English professor who falls in love with his former student, played by Sarah Jessica Parker. Thomas Haden Church acts as the professor’s adopted brother and Ashton Holmes plays a Carnegie Mellon student.

Filming took place November 6th-15th and one day early in December in Baker Hall, Doherty Hall, Hamburg Hall, Donner Hall and Hunt Library. Also, there were exterior shots on the mall between Wean and Porter Hall, and in the parking lot behind Wean and Porter Hall. Carnegie Mellon students were involved in the production as extras, production-assistant and location-manager support, and interns. Drama professor Don Wadsworth has a speaking role in the film.

Assistant Vice President of Marketing Communications Marilyn Kail and Nassif conducted an extensive review of the screenplay to ensure that Carnegie Mellon’s name and likeness would be used appropriately.

“Will the movie attract more students from across the country? Will it trigger a rise in applications and admissions? Could it spur alumni to make bigger gifts? Maybe and hopefully, but more importantly, it was an opportunity we couldn’t pass up given that Carnegie Mellon is the official setting of the film, and producer Michael London has been very successful with his recent films, including *Sideways* and *The Illusionist*. The chance to “brand” Carnegie Mellon is so valuable being that it’s the first time our name and locations were used in a feature film. Carnegie Mellon did not look at this partnership as a revenue-generating project, only a valuable opportunity for building university awareness and offering our campus community various educational opportunities.” said Nassif.

Other Hollywood hits that have filmed at Carnegie Mellon but not used Carnegie Mellon’s name include *Wonder Boys*, *The Mothman Prophecies*, *Dogma*, and *Flashdance*.

*Smart People*: Dennis Quaid stars in *Smart People*, a movie recently filmed in Baker Hall about a fictional Carnegie Mellon professor. *This photo courtesy of The Tartan.*
**Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Scholarship Winners for 2007**

Congratulations to undergraduates Zachary Harris and Sally Mao, co-winners of the 2007 Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Scholarship.

**Allan Topol Award**

This award was presented for the first time at the 2006 Adamson Awards. Topol is the best selling author of *Dark Ambition* and two other spy novels, *Spy Dance* and *Conspiracy* — books that are among the best in the genre, with themes of political deception and characters that drive plots. He graduated from Carnegie Tech, where he started in chemistry, switched to engineering, and took many writing and liberal arts electives. He wrote for *The Tartan* on geopolitical affairs and convinced Gladys Schmitt to tutor him in creative writing. He continued his education at Yale, and believes the years he spent studying law and working as an international environmental lawyer for a Washington, D.C. firm helped develop his dream of becoming a fiction writer. “If you’re going to write fiction you benefit from doing something else. Meet people, have experiences. Write about what you’re working and living.” He is an avid wine connoisseur, a travel enthusiast, and interested in helping young writers realize their writing dreams. The Topol Award is given to a junior fiction writer to aid in the completion of a writing project during his or her senior year. The award was given to Michelle Bova.

**Adamson Award Winners for 2006**

Non-fiction for Academic/Scholarly Journals — Judge: Tim Haggerty

**Honorable Mention:** “The Snake Pit of Davies’s House of Mirth,” Deanna Mulye

3rd: “Big, Black, Strong and Sexy: Ironies of Seduction in Blaxploitation Films,” Maya Mei-Tal


Non-fiction for Popular Journals — Judge: Mackenzie Carpenter

**Honorable Mention:** “The Cure for the Common Snob,” Alexandra Orgera

3rd: “PH level 7,” Sally (Wen Wen) Mao

2nd: “White Lies,” Anne Marie Rooney

1st: “Requiem for a Clean,” Britanny McCandless

Screenwriting — Judge: Geoff Barbanell

3rd: “The Defenders,” Wendy Scott

2nd: “Grace,” Alie Kolb, Matthew Kopel, Ben Pelhan

1st: “Wisteria Lane,” Deanna Mulye

Fiction — Judge: Ben Percy

**CMU Press Prize in Fiction:** Erin Danehy

**Honorable Mention:** “Love, Symbiotic,” Allison Pottern; “Quick It Went,” Ryan Coon


2nd: “Magpies from Heaven,” Sally (Wen Wen) Mao

1st: “Barrio,” Ruben Quintero

Poetry — Judge: Kevin Prufer

**CMU Press Prize:** “The Law of Conservation,” Alayna Frankenberry

**Academy of American Poetry Award**

**Honorable Mentions:** “My Mom Drank a Lot of Scotch,” Christian D’Andrea; “It Ain’t Over Till It’s Over,” Michael Szczerban

1st: “Campfire,” Michael J. Hartwell

**Honorable Mention:** “Half Metal Man in the Moon,” Christa Romanosky; “Spring in the Arctic,” Allison Pottern; “This Is My Serious Face,” Ruben F. Quintero

3rd: “Dead Red Waves,” Anne Marie Rooney

2nd: “Mercurial,” Rachael Y. Brown

1st: “Why I Want to Be an Accordion Player,” Zachary Harris; “In the Flooded Garden,” Lillian Bertram

**Donna Grear Parker Memorial Award:** Benjamin Pelhan

**Film Internships**

Three students were selected as recipients of the Family Friendly Programming Forum Scholarships. Each was awarded a $5000 scholarship, which enabled them to accept an internship at a major studio. Congratulations to Ryan Coon, Deanna Mulye, and Alie Kolb.
Please email your updates to jd6s@andrew.cmu.edu.

Candice Amich (’98) was awarded a Jacob Javits Fellowship at Rutgers University, where she is pursuing her PhD.

David Koehn’s (’90) debut chapbook, Coil, winner of the 1998 Midnight Sun Chapbook Contest, has been re-issued in a second edition available on amazon.com.

Sarah Cypher’s (’02) story, “Hamsa,” was published in the Crab Orchard Review.

Jesse Kates’ (’00) band, theSexy Accident, released their CD, Tourism.

Lillian Bertram (’06) won the Elizabeth Jones award for Humanities/Arts at the Meeting of the Minds Undergraduate Research Symposium in Spring 2006. She was recently published in Callaloo, and has work forthcoming in the Georgetown Review.

Kristin Kovacic’s (’85) won a Pushcart Prize for her essay “Breathing Lessons” that originally appeared in The Journal, Ohio State’s literary magazine.

Justine Dymond’s (’92) story, “Cherubs,” which appeared last fall in The Massachusetts Review, has been chosen for The O. Henry Prize Stories 2007.

Alex Lewin’s (’93) one-act play, Water Street, was performed at the Baldwin New Play Festival in San Diego.


Kevin González’s (’03) chapbook, The Night Tito Trinidad KO’ed Ricardo Mayorga was published by Momotombo Press.

Christopher Leone (’93) and Laura Harkcom (’93) wrote and produced The Lost Room, a miniseries shown on the Sci Fi Channel, and a short film called K-7 that’s won several awards on the festival circuit, including first place at HBO’s Comedy Festival in Aspen; it continues to screen at many prestigious festivals such as the Tribeca Film Festival, The Austin Film Festival, and others.

Karen Rigby (’01) received a 2007 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship in poetry.

Jennifer Schuapp (’03) and Laura Lind (’90) are both members of the Amish Monkeys, an improv comedy troupe that performs regularly at the Gemini Theatre in Pittsburgh. www.amishmonkeys.com.

Sue Stauffacher’s (’83) latest novel, Donutheart, was published by Knopf in 2006.

John Reoli’s (’92) first book of poems, Naked Prayers, was published by Six Gallery Press. Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company performed his play, Same Time Tomorrow.

Susan Henderson’s (’89) debut novel will be published by St. Martin’s Press in Spring 2008.

Special thanks to the following alumni who donated to the Gladys Schmitt Student Enhancement Fund in 2006:

Candice Amich  
Rudy Ash  
Claire Bauerle  
Amy Berger  
Eliza Bishop  
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Laura Harkcom  
Tracy Hayes  
Susan Henderson  
Michael Kaniecki  
Marshall Klimasewiski  
Sean Kracklauer  
Alex Lewin  
Greg Marcks  
Brian Maruca  
Leslie Anne McIlroy  
Lorraine Miller  
Sean Mintus  
Vijay Palaparty  
Nancy Pekar  
David Reineohl  
Mark Ristaino  
Jack Silbert  
Thomas Sweterlitsch  
Fiona J. Tranquada  
Sarah (Dunn) Valentine  
William Vandermark  
Catherine Stroud Vodrey  
Mary Wall

Alumni gathering: The Pittsburgh alumni workshop meets in the Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center.
Student readings: Seniors Anna Vogelzang and Adam Jaffe read a selection of their works during a February 21st student reading. Student readings were held regularly throughout the year in the Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center, in Baker Hall. These photos courtesy of The Tartan.