



MICHIGAN Bar
Journal

SHORT-STORY CONTEST



What do you get when you cross an emancipated walleye with an acrobatic music teacher, a neurocognitively impaired man praying for a miracle (and his money), and a lawyer facing his ultimate client? You'd get this year's four winning stories—perhaps the most diverse group since our inaugural contest in 2007.

But first, a small disclaimer: publication of a fictional story featuring attorney vigilantism should not be construed as endorsing such conduct, however understandable that impulse may be when the machinery of the law seems inadequate to achieve the end of justice. Like Justice John D. Voelker, we believe that “[t]he very slowness of the law, its massive impersonality, its insistence upon proceeding according to settled and ancient rules—all this tends to cool and bank the fires of passion and violence and replace them with order and reason.”¹

As in previous contests, the authors' names were withheld and their stories were evaluated by a panel of five judges (see sidebar) on originality and writing quality in preliminary and finalist rounds. This year's 31 entries were narrowed to 14 finalists (see http://www.michbar.org/publications/bar_journal).

Charles Regan Shaw had a serious case of beginner's luck, earning top honors with his first entry in any writing contest. “A Fish Tale” cleverly analogizes a walleye ensnared on a lure to a troubled youth caught in the criminal justice system. Despite his vivid depiction of a contemplative fishing trip—debunking the old adage that you should write what you know—Shaw says he's never fished. But like his main character, Judge Conner, he's an early riser, finding time to write “before the kids wake up and the rushed chaos begins.” Although he can't pinpoint the specific inspiration for his winning story, “I find it interesting how a judge has to balance being part of the community while serving as judge to that community,” said Shaw.

Jason J. Elmore and Mark C. Rossman were in a dead heat for second place. Elmore's “Cecil—The Music Man” waxes nostalgic for a time before the intrusion of smartphones and social media, when children were taught in one-room schoolhouses. “I saw the opportunity to use the example of how one teacher's service had a lifelong impression on the life of one student in even a small way and then tie it to a lawyer at the midpoint of his life and practice,” said Elmore. “For some of us, we need to be reminded that the value of our lives lies not in the money we make or selfish achievements we gather, rather it is in the impact we have on others.” In addition to practicing law, Elmore is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army JAG Corps. He has been on either active or reserve duty for the last 18 years and was deployed to the Middle East for a year in 2013. He often wrote at night to pass time and has since published stories in the *Cadillac News* and *Michigan Runner*.

Although he's written “thousands of pages of fiction and poetry,” Rossman initially shared it with only a small circle of family and friends. “It is such a personal and challenging endeavor to formulate stories from our own minds and, when we do, it represents in so many ways who we really are.... As such, there is an inherent level of insecurity that must be overcome before publication,” said Rossman. He often draws creative inspiration from local newspapers, in particular the online

comments sections. “I had recently read a story in the paper about a 90-plus-year-old Nazi war criminal who was found somewhere in the metro Detroit area and who was actually collecting public benefits and Social Security,” he said. “In the comments section, a lot of readers were posting that the guy deserved a comeuppance—so I gave it to him in ‘The Last Bullet,’ with an eye-for-an-eye plot line, which I think resonates in the contemplation of the age-old question: what is justice?”

Third-place winner Donnelly Wright Hadden is a seasoned creative writer. Four of his stories, three of them law-related, are available on Kindle and Nook readers, and a novella titled *The Treaty* was published in 2006. “Chatting with a physician friend about psychosomatic diseases, spontaneous remissions, and ‘miracle’ cures, I remembered seeing the pilgrims at the shrine in Mexico City,” said Hadden. Combining these two concepts resulted in his story, “El Milagro de Eduardo.” Like many authors, Hadden acknowledges behind-the-scenes support, thanking his wife, Helen, for her patience, and Antoinette Ruiz Gonzalez and her son Marco Hernandez Ruiz for double-checking his Spanish idioms. ■

ENDNOTE

1. Traver, *Laughing Whitefish* (St. Martin's Press), p 63.