

MICHIGAN Bar Journal short-story contest

When we first tossed around the idea of the *Bar Journal* sponsoring a creative-writing contest for Michigan attorneys, we didn't know how many Turow or Grisham wannabes lurked among you—or just how much fun the contest would prove to be.

After the March 1, 2007, deadline, we found ourselves with 42 short stories to read. Our five contest judges (see sidebar) were up to the task! Here's how the judging process unfolded. We had a preliminary and a finalist round of judging. Both rounds were anonymous, meaning the authors' names were removed from the stories before the judges received their copies. In the preliminary round, the judges formed five panels of three judges; each judge was assigned to three panels. Each panel read eight or nine stories, and judges were asked to rank the stories numerically. The two stories receiving the highest number of points in each panel advanced to the finalist round. Additionally, judges were allowed to nominate to the finalist round one or two stories that didn't rank among the top stories.

Sixteen stories made the final cut and were read by the full panel of judges. Again, judges were asked to rank the stories numerically. When the dust settled, we had a first- and second-place winner, a tie for third place, and three honorable mentions.

Our first-place winner, Hon. William C. Whitbeck, received the highest number of points in both the preliminary and finalist rounds for his story, "In the Market." His story is an excerpt from a novel he has written, currently titled *A Portion for Foxes*, which, says Whitbeck, "is very loosely based on an actual event in Michigan history, the killing of State Senator Warren Hooper shortly after the end of World War II." Whitbeck and his literary agent planned to begin showing the book to publishers in July. So how does the chief judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals find time to write fiction? "I write in the evening and on weekends," said Whitbeck. "My wife, Stephanie, has made this possible by assuming almost all of the tasks that I might otherwise have to take care of. Acknowledgements in books often include a phrase about the 'invaluable assistance' of someone, but in my case it is quite literally true: I could not have written *A Portion for Foxes*, including the excerpt, without Stephanie's help." Whitbeck is hard at work on a second novel, as yet untitled, about the murder of a chief judge of a trial court.

Randy Judd earned second place with his story, "Nobody's Fool." Although he's never submitted anything to a magazine or publisher, Judd has "been noodling around with writing ideas for years." Judd says, "To be a good attorney requires each of us to be trained observers and judges of people. We are lie detectors looking for the liar's needs. Writing about it is finding the humanity in the character." And, Judd notes, "It helps to like your creations."

Jeffrey Caminsky's "Crapshoot" earned third place. Caminsky has also written a three-volume science-fiction adventure series, the first novel of which, *The Star Dancers*, is scheduled

Our short-story contest judges:

for publication in 2008. He got the idea for his short story from his experiences as a young prosecutor. “Prosecutors have a unique perspective on the law. We’re charged with more than simply trying to win our cases; we’re charged with trying to see that justice is done. ‘Crapshoot’ is an attempt to convey some of the conflicts in our job, as well as some of the contradictions in the courtroom.”

Tying for third place was Robert B. Nelson’s “A Little Collateral Damage.” No creative-writing novice, Nelson finished third in the annual Hemingway parody contest, sponsored by United Airlines, for his story, “The Old Man and the Sea of Reporters,” published in 2002 in *Hemispheres Magazine*. “I got the idea for ‘A Little Collateral Damage’ after reading about the National Security Agency’s domestic eavesdropping program, and began to imagine how what some view to be a little encroachment of our civil liberties could lead to catastrophic consequences,” said Nelson.

Honorable mentions went to the following authors, in order of total points received: Brian D. Wassom for “The More Things Change,” David E. Eason for “Front Page News,” and Lance C. Hendrickson for “Answering Dorothy.”

You’ll find our four winning stories on the following pages. All 16 finalist stories are available online at http://www.michbar.org/publications/bar_journal.cfm. We hope you enjoy reading the stories as much as we did.

To our judges, we extend a heartfelt thank-you for the countless hours you devoted to judging the contest and for ensuring its integrity. To all of the attorneys who submitted stories, we thank you for helping make this contest so fun and exciting. To the rest of you, we say sharpen your pencils—we may just do this again in a year or two!

Rosemarie Aquilina, chief judge of the 55th District Court, is the author of *Feel No Evil*, a fictional suspense novel published in 2004. Former owner of Aquilina Law Firm PLC, she hosted “Ask The Family Lawyer,” syndicated on Michigan Talk Radio Network. The first female JAG Officer in the Michigan Army National Guard history, she retired after 20 years of honorable service. An adjunct professor at Thomas M. Cooley Law School and mother of three, Judge Aquilina is currently working on her next two novels.

Elizabeth Baergen’s main qualification for judging this contest is a half-century of reading and enjoying fiction. Fiction is a great antidote to mortgages, leases, wills, trusts, and the trials and tribulations of the law and life in general. She has served on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee for years, and has enjoyed editing a variety of theme issues of the *Michigan Bar Journal*, including computer law, real property law, corporate counsel, intellectual property, and taxation.

Frederick Baker, Jr., a Supreme Court commissioner, has served 23 years on the Publications and Website Advisory Committee, the past 20 as its chair. He taught legal writing at Wayne State University and Thomas M. Cooley Law Schools, received the Urban Law Annual Writing Award and two Cooley Law Review Distinguished Brief Awards, has published 12 law-related articles and one work of fiction, and has edited hundreds of articles. He also judges the annual Robert Traver Fly Fishing Fiction Award competition.

Francine Cullari is a member of the State Bar Board of Commissioners and serves as vice chairperson of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee, responsible for the *Michigan Bar Journal*. She has edited for a daily newspaper, a local bar magazine, and three novels. She has authored numerous articles, served on Law Review at Michigan State University College of Law, and teaches business law at the University of Michigan, Flint campus.

John O. Juroszek is a legal editor for the Michigan Supreme Court Reporter of Decisions and a member of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee. Among other things, he has been a judicial law clerk, an associate in private practice, and a legislative drafter. After a steady diet of legal stuff all day long, he relaxes by reading way too many detective stories and spy novels and dreaming about the mountains of Wyoming.