

MICHIGAN Bar
Journal



SHORT-STORY CONTEST

Many attorneys may be accustomed to churning out 20-page briefs, but creating compelling characters, realistic dialogue, and a succinct plot using no more than 3,000 words is another story entirely (pun intended). Forty-three attorneys accepted our challenge and amazed us with their ingenuity: the grim reaper, talking urns, betrayal and redemption, the case of the dog and the tuba, a story about the Tyrrhenian sea pirate Pellerito...and those were just some of the *titles*.

The judging process remained the same as in our previous contests, with preliminary and finalist rounds. The authors' names were removed from the stories before judging. Judges read three groups of eight or nine stories each in the preliminary round, ranking them numerically on originality and writing quality. The two stories in each group with the highest scores advanced to the finalist round, and judges could nominate one or two additional stories. With the creative talent running high, a record 19 stories made it through to the finalist round (see <http://www.michbar.org/journal/pdf/pdf4article1878.pdf>) and were read by all judges.

Our first-place winner, Eli D. Greenbaum, almost didn't enter the contest this year but was excited, appreciative, and (temporarily) speechless upon learning he'd won top honors with his story "Leo's Dilemma." Much like his fictional lawyer, Mendel "Moody" Jones, Greenbaum grew up listening to the stories of his parents' friends and extended family who were all immigrants, most arriving here from Eastern Europe after World War II. "Many were Holocaust survivors," said Greenbaum. "Leo Bernstein is an amplified, fictional composite of several people who were frequent visitors and, in some cases, became clients." Greenbaum has been writing fiction for his own pleasure since high school. "I don't have a set time or routine," he said. "I carry a notebook with me and constantly write down ideas, dialogues, situations, character names, and descriptions—anything that could be used in a story." Greenbaum entered our contest in 2009 and won an honorable mention for his story "Frantic Fire." He has also done ghostwriting and is currently working on a nonfiction project that should be completed by the end of the year. "I won't be quitting my day job just yet," said Greenbaum. "But I'd like to."

Contest newcomer Todd B. Adams hit it big on his first try, earning second place for his story "As the Law is Written." Although he has published law-review articles, this is Adams' first published piece of fiction. His story about a young couple hoping to qualify to purchase a dilapidated, abandoned home in Detroit for \$100 may resonate with those who live or work in the city or are taking part in revitalization efforts. "The idea

for this story came to me because I worked as an associate for a Jewish law firm in Detroit that was very committed to the city and African Americans,” said Adams. “I also wanted to celebrate the lawyers who came before me for their civil-rights efforts.” Perhaps to the envy of many, Adams is retiring as a lawyer. “My time is free to write when I want to write,” he said.

Jill Koney Daly, a finalist in our 2009 contest, claimed the third spot in our winners’ circle and publication of her first piece of fiction. “Dorothy’s Home,” written entirely as a series of letters, was inspired by a real Oakland County Probate Court file (Daly is a probate registrar). “The main character is an amalgamation of many strong women who have shown me the way—my mother (a teacher extraordinaire!), my strong-willed grandmother and ‘Babcia,’ my dignified mother-in-law, and my Aunt Bernice, who at 91 continues to foil potential scam artists,” said Daly. She considers herself lucky because her job allows her access to some incredible stories. “I jot down these stories, infuse them with my life experiences, wait for the right creative burst, then the writing just flows, usually late into the night.” Adds Daly, “My father, an attorney and judge, never read fiction. He always said that the law had more drama than you could ever dream up—so I guess he was partially right.”

Four stories were close on the heels of our three winners. The judges awarded honorable mentions to the following authors, listed in alphabetical order:

- Charisse L. Heath, “SOL”
- James C. Herrinton, “A Story About the Tyrrenian Sea Pirate Pellerito”
- Thomas C. Kates, “Holding Court at Sunrise”
- Robert B. Nelson, “Honor Killing”

Our three winning stories begin on the following page. To read all 19 finalist stories, visit http://www.michbar.org/publications/bar_journal.cfm. We’re sure you’ll enjoy reading the stories as much as we did.

Special thanks to the Amway Grand Plaza, Grand Rapids; the Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island; and The Inn at St. John’s, Plymouth for generously donating contest prizes.

Thanks to our esteemed judges (see sidebar) who readily agreed to a third stint at judging, devoting countless hours to reading and ranking the stories and ensuring the integrity of our contest.

And finally, thanks to all our contestants for allowing us to showcase the creative talents of Michigan’s lawyers and for keeping this fun and exciting tradition going every two years. We’re hoping for a record number of submissions in 2013! ■

Our short-story contest judges:

Rosemarie Aquilina, 30th Circuit Court judge, is the author of *Feel No Evil*, a fictional suspense novel. Judge Aquilina is awaiting publication of her second novel and is currently working on her fourth novel. The first female JAG officer in Michigan Army National Guard history, she retired with 20 years’ honorable service. Former owner of Aquilina Law Firm PLC, she hosted “Ask the Family Lawyer,” syndicated on Michigan Talk Radio Network. Judge Aquilina is an adjunct professor at Michigan State University College of Law and Thomas M. Cooley Law School and a mother of five.

Elizabeth Baergen has served on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee for more than 20 years, and has enjoyed editing a variety of theme issues for the *Michigan Bar Journal*, including computer law, real property law, corporate counsel, intellectual property, and taxation. She finds mysteries, science fiction, and other fiction to be a great antidote to mortgages, leases, wills, trusts, and the daily trials and tribulations of the law and life in general. She salutes those who, like the authors of these short stories, create the works that pique our imaginations, challenge our thinking, and expand our horizons.

Frederick Baker Jr., a Supreme Court commissioner, has served 28 years on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee, the past 24 as its chair. He taught legal writing at Wayne State University Law School and Thomas M. Cooley Law School, received the Urban Law Annual Writing Award and two Cooley Law Review Distinguished Brief Awards, has published 13 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 former member of the State Bar Board of Commissioners and past president of the Genesee County Bar Association. She serves as vice chairperson of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee, responsible for the *Michigan Bar Journal*, and has edited several theme issues. She is the author of the “Citizen Lawyer” series for the *Journal*. She has edited and written for a daily newspaper and a local bar magazine, and has edited three novels. She has authored numerous professional articles, served on Law Review at Michigan State University College of Law, and teaches business law and international business law at the University of Michigan, Flint campus, in addition to a private law practice.

John O. Juroszek is the reporter of decisions for the Michigan Supreme Court and a member of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee. He is an avid (almost rabid) reader of mysteries, spy stories, and science fiction, a hobby that being an editor sometimes ruins as he mentally corrects the grammar of famous writers. His dream is to move to the mountains Out West somewhere and be one of those famous writers, and he might actually get around to doing something about it someday.