



MICHIGAN Bar
Journal

SHORT-STORY CONTEST

The saying goes that crime doesn't pay. But murder—be it wrongly accused, a ghostly deed, or a serial killer's pastime—proved profitable for three authors and was a common thread among this year's winning stories.

As in previous contests, the authors' names were removed and stories were judged on originality and writing quality in preliminary and finalist rounds. This year's 40 entries were split into five panels of eight stories in the first round, and each judge read three panels. The two highest-scoring stories in each panel advanced to the finalist round, and judges could nominate one or two additional stories. When the scores were tallied, 13 stories vied for the winner's circle and were read by all judges (see http://www.michbar.org/publications/bar_journal.cfm).

Persistence paid off for James C. Herrinton, who earned top honors with "*The People v Sangamon Railsplitter*"—his first published work of fiction. He previously received an honorable mention in our 2011 contest for "A Story About the Tyrrhenian Sea Pirate Pellerito" and was a finalist in 2009. Herrinton and his wife of 60 years, Lois (also an emeritus SBM member), have a son, two daughters, ten grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Retired since 1998, he greatly misses the practice of law and still finds it necessary to make time for writing. Herrinton said his story sprang from reflecting back to the 1950s following his service in the Army, when he and his wife moved to northern Michigan—a time when "there was one woman and no African-American attorneys in any law office north of Grand Rapids." He recalled how he and his wife met a "super whiz-bang" black assistant attorney general at a prosecuting attorneys' convention on Mackinac Island, but were unable to persuade him to move his family north from Detroit to establish a law partnership because of fear of racial prejudice. "It is not happenstance that in '*The People v Sangamon Railsplitter*,' Rowena Anderson, a woman who is black, provides her expertise and aid to Abraham Lincoln's namesake, Sangamon Railsplitter, a man who is white," said Herrinton. "Someone once said that sometimes fiction is the best way to relate the truth."

Fans of the *Bar Journal's* Plain Language column will recognize our second-place winner, Mark Cooney (his "A Legal-Writing Carol" has become a seasonal favorite; see <http://www.michbar.org/generalinfo/plainenglish/home.cfm>). After reading Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" every October, and envious of Irving for writing the perfect "spooky yet fun" tale, Cooney sat down and wrote his own—"The Manistee River Incident." "I tried my best to remain in character while I wrote, so it should sound like something written by a lawyer about a century ago," said Cooney. "I love Michigan's history and its wonderful natural resources, so I tried to sneak in some of my

favorite Michigan places and things, like the mighty Manistee River, the town of Grayling, some Michigan logging history, a quick reference to trout fishing, and, of course, a ghost.”

Our third-place winner, Jehan Yousry Farrag, is new to the *Bar Journal's* contests and the practice of law. Admitted to the Bar in 2011, Farrag had never entered a writing contest. Her winning story is the uniquely titled “Nuisance, Serial Murder, and Sweet Lemonade in Summer.” Writing is something Farrag has enjoyed since she was a young girl. “When I got into law school, I became so used to legal writing. I really want to get back to creative writing,” said Farrag. “My dad, who is my biggest supporter in everything I do, has always encouraged me to write. ‘Write anything,’ he says. ‘Just write.’” An avid reader, Farrag is amazed by the number of lawyers-turned-writers she encounters. “It reminds me that writing doesn’t have to be a far-fetched dream. I’m not suggesting that everyone abandon their legal careers to become best-selling authors. But if writing is something you enjoy and have a passion for, you should make room for it in your life somehow.”

The judges deemed five additional stories worthy of special recognition and awarded honorable mentions to:

- Jonathan J. David, “Why Not Me”
- Robert B. Nelson, “Faded Red Dress”
- Ronald F. Sharp, “Pre-Existing Condition”
- Anthony Targan, “The Bridge”
- Geoffrey S. Weed, “The Hands of the Clock”

Particularly noteworthy is Robert Nelson, who has impressively placed in all four of our contests—tying for third place in 2007, placing second in 2009, and earning an honorable mention in 2011. Anthony Targan also received an honorable mention in 2007.

Special thanks go to the Amway Grand Plaza, Grand Rapids; the Detroit Symphony Orchestra; the Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island; and Mainstreet Ventures Restaurants, Ann Arbor for generously donating contest prizes.

Thanks also to our venerable judges (see sidebar) for the many hours spent reading and ranking the stories and ensuring the continued success and integrity of our contests.

And finally, thanks to the 40 attorneys who found the time—and the courage—to let their imaginations run wild. As contest judge Hon. Rose Aquilina observed, while many people say they want to write, these people actually did it. What held *you* back? Perhaps the stories on the following pages will inspire you for our 2015 contest. ■

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 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,” a syndicated show 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.

Frederick Baker Jr., a recently retired Supreme Court commissioner, is now of counsel to Willingham & Coté. He served 28 years on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee, including 24 as its chair. He taught legal writing at Wayne State University Law School and Thomas M. Cooley Law School; received Washington University’s Urban Law Annual Writing Award and two Cooley Law Review Distinguished Brief Awards; has published 13 law-related articles, several essays, several book reviews, and one short work of fiction; and has edited hundreds of articles for the *Bar Journal* and one book. He also helps to judge 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 is chairperson of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee and has edited several theme issues of the *Michigan Bar Journal*. She is the author of the “Citizen Lawyer” series for the *Bar 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 in addition to a private law practice.

John O. Juroszek works for the Michigan Supreme Court and is a longtime member of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee. As a child, he couldn’t decide whether to be a paleontologist or a spy when he grew up. How he landed in the law remains something of a mystery, but along the way he never lost his childhood love for reading and writing. Since the rules won’t let him enter, he figures judging the short-story contest is the next best thing.

John R. Runyan is managing director of the Detroit law firm Sachs Waldman. He has also served for 35 years on the adjunct faculty at the Wayne State University Law School. He is on the SBM Labor and Employment Law Section Council and is vice chair of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee. He also serves on the Board of Governors of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers and helps judge the annual student writing competition cosponsored by the college and the ABA Section of Labor and Employment Law. Over the course of 40 years as an SBM member, he has written numerous articles and book reviews for the *Michigan Bar Journal* and edited several theme issues. He also enjoys telling bedtime stories to his granddaughter, Anneliese.