

# Word's Worth

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“Fortunately art is a community effort—a small but select community living in a spiritualized world endeavoring to interpret the wars and the solitudes of the flesh.”

Allen Ginsberg

## An Interview with Visiting Writer Calvin Baker

by Jon Jenkins

As the semester came to a close, I had a chance to interview Calvin Baker about his teaching and writing.

JJ: How has teaching a writing workshop challenged you?

CB: There is a challenge in any workshop environment of maintaining a high, consistent overall standard for the group— with all its differing undergraduate educations and degrees of exposure to literature— while working with each individual student on his or her specific strengths and weaknesses. When it's successful, one is essentially teaching a dozen workshops, with as many arcs of progress.

JJ: What lessons or inspiration do you hope to give your students?

CB: The same ones I was give as a student: a deeper understanding of, and therefore richer appreciation for, the profound pleasure of literature. By demystifying the technical aspects of prose, one is helping to pry open a window on its stranger mysteries. A large measure of this rests in forming disciplined habits of thought and practice that will sustain a serious engagement— both as a reader and writer— long after the classroom experience is in the rearview mirror. Sometimes it's as simple as affirming that this is a valid thing to do with



one's life. But, the real gifts of a good classroom experience come years later, when you realize you learned things you were not aware of, or did not appreciate, at the time.

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## Documenting Community Art: an MFA Road Trip

by John Casquarelli

This spring, seven of Long Island University's MFA Creative Writing students journeyed throughout the state of New York to document artistic communities. From March 14<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup>, Eric Alter, Kyle

DeOcera, Gülay Işık, Micah Savaglio, Sarah Wallen, Joe Infante, and John Casquarelli traveled and filmed readings with a plan to complete a documentary about their experience. The mornings consisted of

long drives in a twelve-seat van and day old bagels, while the evenings were full of poetry, music (Joey taking the role of DJ), and Scotch Ale.

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## New Poetry Collection a True LIU Artifact

by Jessica Wedge

As anyone who has sat in front of a blank page knows, writing can be a solitary and sometimes lonely task. One of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of attending a program such as the MFA program at LIU is the opportunity to connect with others sharing the same passion for writing.

On Thursday, April 24, as Jamey Jones read at LIU from his new publication, *Blue Rain Morning*, the real significance of these connections became brilliantly clear.

As an introduction to his work, Jamey relayed the story of meeting Gary Parrish during his first MFA class and sensing an artistic connection right away. "I trusted Gary's poetic sensibility. I trusted his criticism," Jones said.

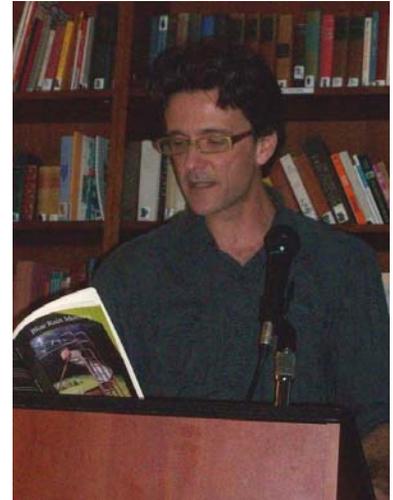
This spring, Parrish's press, Fafalla Press, published Jamey's collection. *Blue Rain Morning* is a collection about New York, about Brooklyn, about acclimating, and about writing. The joining of two alumni members in its publica-

tion is a testament to the program and the people involved with it.

The Spector Lounge was packed for the book party with professors, students, and alumni eager to celebrate with Jamey at his official book launch. Since graduating, Jamey has been living in his native Florida, but thought it appropriate that his book make its debut in Brooklyn. "It's an LIU story," he said.

Jamey read several pieces from his new collection as well as a piece entitled "Flatbush" that was recently published in the LIU-originated *By the Overpass*. He ended the reading with several new pieces, including a poem dedicated to frequent LIU visiting writer Akilah Oliver, who passed away this spring.

With his parting words, Jamey reminded his audience to focus on their writing and keep the passion alive despite the clutter that life throws as them. "You're here to make your work happen," he said as eager fans waited for book signings and photos, "just write".



## Writing Across the Curriculum Program Integrates Content, Writing, and Technology

by Rachel Smucker

The goal of the Writing Across the Curriculum program is to facilitate the writing experience in the classroom, regardless of discipline. The program focuses particularly on achieving this aim in Writing-Intensive (WI) courses, which concentrate heavily on integrating the writing experience into their coursework.

This spring, I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. William Burgos, director of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. Unlike the Writing

Center, which works directly with students, the WAC program does the majority of its work with professors and other educators within the university.

My graduate assistantship under Dr. Burgos has centered primarily on administrative and digital-related tasks. I worked on advertising for the program throughout the semester, and have recently begun compiling information for an analysis of the Digication platform (also known as ePortfolios).

Specifically, I am looking at survey re-

sults related to student use of ePortfolios and working with LIU's Instructional Designer, Norm Sutaria, to create a relevant analysis of these results that will help us better understand how we can improve and enhance ePortfolio usage throughout the university.

Getting to know Dr. Burgos and the writing consultants has been a pleasure, and I look forward to continuing my assistantship with the WAC program.

## Student and Alumni News

**Tony Iantosca**, Graduate Assistant, has launched the official MFA blog. [www.liumfa.blogspot.com](http://www.liumfa.blogspot.com). He also edits *Sun Skeleton*, a poetry journal: [www.sunskeleton.com](http://www.sunskeleton.com).

**Willie Perdomo** recently published a young adult short story entitled "Mira Mira" in the anthology *Pick Up Game: A Full Day of Full Court*.

**Jessica Rogers** ('09) is currently a Lecturer at Queensborough Community College. A chapbook of her poetry, *Hot Water*, has been released by Cy Gist Press, and her story, "Gerontophobia", can be read in the May issue of *The Brooklyn Rail*.

**Stephanie Gray** ('10) showed her super 8 films and read poems live at several venues in NYC this spring, including at the inaugural reading of the Queens Poet Lore series. Her poems have also been published in *Sentence* and *Aufgabe*.

## Graduate Assistantships Prepare Students for Academic Life

by Christine Grausso

In addition to teaching, advising, and helping students to find their own paths, the professors at LIU are also engaged in their own vibrant pursuits. The graduate assistant program gives these professors the assistance they need to balance their work loads and gives graduate students the opportunity to take part in this amazing work. Currently, Professor Patricia Stephens endeavors to create an oral history of the teachers and students who experienced the desegregation of schools in her East Texas hometown in the 1960-70's. The task is monumental, and as her

research assistant, I aspire to give her a comprehensive background of the legal and political climate during the early days of desegregation. While I am principally engaged in researching pupil placement and so-called "freedom of choice" plans, I also look for institutions that provide opportunities for funding. I became involved with this project primarily because I am interested in examining legislation that addresses inequality in education, the rhetoric of system-wide policies that reinforce unfair practices, and the way that the movement for

desegregation sparked and fizzled like a dud firecracker. On a broader level, I am invested in the research process because it is emphasized in academia and is so often the factor which determines scholarly prestige. As many of us in the Graduate program pursue degrees in teaching, we should also begin to hone our research skills and develop ideas for future projects. By working closely with professors who are exploring their own research interests, we are afforded an opportunity to do just that.

## Documenting Community Art: An MFA Road Trip

*Cont'd*

The readings took place in cities such as Rochester, Troy, and Albany (an open mike reading), as well as impromptu locations on the highways of New York and in front of a used book and record store. The trip also included a visit to the home of Bernadette Mayer, who was kind enough to answer questions and read from her own work.

The documentary is scheduled to be completed early in the fall.



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A note from the editor:

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of Word's Worth. To send story ideas, news or announcements, to find out how you can write for Word's Worth, or for information about the programs offered in the English department at Long Island University, contact Marilyn Boutwell, Advisor and Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, at Marilyn.Boutwell@liu.edu.

Have a wonderful semester!

Jessica Wedge



## An Interview with Visiting Writer Calvin Baker

*Cont'd*

Then there is a larger element that has to do with being a writer. MFA programs are academic constructs unique to America. They are also relatively new phenomena, and part of the singular brilliance of American writers is that we managed to convince universities to give us jobs doing the things we've been doing for thousands of years for free, and to give degrees for the same activities that used to get us kicked out of school. But one has to be aware of the dangers, foremost of which is losing awareness of the more ancient traditions of the calling. Your first allegiance is always serving well this other thing that has little to do with anything but itself; that engulfs you, as it engulfs those who taught you, and those you teach.

JJ: You have stated, "Good writers are many writers," throughout their careers. What do you mean by this, and how has it been impacted by recent trends in the publishing world?

CB: The range of available styles, experiences, and material only grows for the curious maker. This holds true throughout the arts, from Picasso's moving from Cubism to sculpture to classicism to myth, to Baldwin's moving from his autobiographical early fiction to the cosmopolitan wisdom of his greatest essays and the plays whose main concern is the creative life itself, and so a variation on his original form. It's this willingness to press forth into the unknown and ask questions and make new connections and be awed by things you were not interested in, or did not know existed the day before yesterday, that marks the best artists. Not that I make any claim for myself, but I think that for students, the reason you must submit to such a rigorous regime in the beginning is because it takes a long time to make those connections that become books. You need the core to contain, and give up in time, and be strong enough to withstand all the

metamorphoses you will undergo. This includes the natural resistance and doubt so many of us have in the face of change and differing points of view. In terms of the larger culture of books, only history can weigh that accurately. Superficially, one notices a greater range of voices, of people trusting prose to tell their stories, which ultimately affirms the novel and the story. There also seems to have been a stylistic or formal leavening. I don't think they're related; it's simply the good and bad of any undertaking.

JJ: Your last novel, *Dominion*, received great reviews. What are your thoughts on criticism, and what is your next project?

CB: Thoughtful criticism performs an obviously important function. It unpacks and helps reveal art to a wider audience. But it's also obviously foolish to believe your own press, or to discuss too much what's not yet made.