



Boston Authors Club

January 2018 News & Events

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BAC Featured Author Interview:

Ellen Wittlinger on *Local Girl Swept Away*, plot twists, stage plays, and her latest projects



*BAC selected **Local Girl Swept Away** as a Julia Ward Howe Highly Recommended Young Reader Title this year.*

Q: *Local Girl Swept Away* featured a major plot twist and lots of surprising turns. How did you approach writing this story? Did you have all the plot elements outlined well in advance of writing?

Wittlinger: Not at all! I worked on and off on *Local Girl* for a long time—years. I'd never written a mystery before, and I wasn't even sure if I was writing a mystery, but I knew the book would have certain elements of a mystery, and I was endlessly worried about giving things away too soon. This book was revised many more

times than is my usual. Normally I approach a story in a linear manner—that is, I begin at what I hope is the beginning and let the characters reveal what the story will be. At the beginning I don't have a plot. With this story, I did have something of a plot to begin with—at least I knew what the big reveal would be 2/3 of the way through—but getting there was a lot harder than I imagined. Many of the plot elements (the white jacket, for instance) revealed themselves to me in revision.

Q: Do you have a particular reader in mind while you are writing? How would you describe the audience you wanted to reach with *Local Girl Swept Away*?

Wittlinger: I usually have only myself in mind as the reader for my books. I write the book I'd like to read. But in the case of *Local Girl*, I did think I might attract readers who loved mysteries, which none of my other books have been. And yet, the themes of the book, I thought, would still appeal to readers of my

other books: unrequited love (so painfully sweet,) true friendship, the loyalty and misunderstandings of family, and the ways in which art can save you.

Q: *Saturdays with Hitchcock*, your latest novel, highlights early adolescence in a small town and characters with a shared love of film. What was your inspiration for this book?

Wittlinger: There were several inspirations for *Hitchcock*. I have always been in love with movies, and my son caught the movie/video bug early. He and his friends began making short films at Maisie and Cyrus's age, and it was great to see their excitement. (And, in fact, my son and almost all of those friends now live in Los Angeles and work, in one way or another, in film.)

The other inspiration was that I wanted to write a book that was in some ways an homage to my Uncle Walt, for whom Maisie's uncle is named. He wasn't an actor, but he was a musician who traveled the country in the Fifties playing with Big Bands. I adored him. Like Maisie, I grew up in a small town in Illinois that I longed to escape. Uncle Walt was the only person I knew who had gotten out of that small town, and he did it by passionately pursuing his art. It was a lesson I learned early, and I've always been grateful to him for it.

Q: On your website, you mention writing for stage and screen. From your experience, what skills do you need to write a great screenplay and how do the challenges of writing a screenplay or stage play differ from novel writing?

Wittlinger: I have written a few screenplays, though writing stage plays is of even more interest to me, and I do that too. In both instances, you need to be able to write interesting, realistic dialogue. (Although in a play it can be hyper-realistic.) Writing dialogue has always been the part of writing YA and MG that comes most easily to me—I like the challenge of revealing character through dialogue—so it's not a stretch to write plays and screenplays.

One of the greatest differences is the ways in which you move characters around, either on stage or in their film environments. I have to take into consideration the look of a scene, how the background works for or against it, what else on the set will be helping to tell the story. The decisions are much more visual. And, especially in the case of a play, you don't use any more characters than are absolutely necessary to the plot. For instance, in a book, you might have a character exchange a few words with the mail carrier who delivers an important letter, but in a play you're not going to pay an actor to stand around all night, deliver two lines, and hand someone a letter. There can't be any extraneous lines in a play or screenplay—everything spoken must have meaning. I'm really just scratching the surface here—I learn more with every script I write!

Q: Is there already a new young reader book underway? If so, can you tell us something about it?

Wittlinger: Well, there is another middle grade book ready to be published next September called *Someone Else's Shoes*. There are actually three protagonists in this story, although it's told through the eyes of only one of them, a 12-year-old girl named Izzy. All three of these kids have been abandoned, in one way or another, by one of their parents, and they're dealing with the after effects of that. There's some deep sadness in this book, but a lot of laughs too. In fact, Izzy is a budding comedian. And after that, I'm writing several plays for adults and enjoying the excitement of working in a different genre.

Interview by Mary J Cronin

Still Time to Submit 2017 Books for Julia Ward Howe Awards

Publishers and authors with 2017 titles meeting the BAC Awards Criteria are encouraged to submit their books to be considered for Julia Ward Howe prizes. To enter the competition, publishers must submit two copies of each eligible title, along with a fee of \$35 dollars per title. Checks should be made out to the Boston Authors Club. Eligible authors may also submit their books directly, with the same fee.

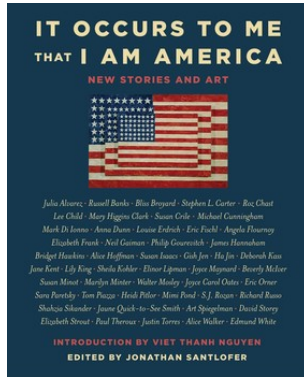
The submission deadline for eligible books published in 2017 is January 31, 2018. Please send your books and your checks to: Boston Authors Club, Attn: Mary Cronin, 2400 Beacon Street, Unit 208, Chestnut Hill, MA. 02467

Criteria for Julia Ward Howe award eligibility include:

- The books must be published the year prior to the award being given.
- Authors must live or work within 100 miles of Boston the year their books are published.
- Books published in print are eligible unless otherwise noted in the criteria. Edited books, textbooks and reference books are not eligible. Self-published and digital-only books are not eligible.

Outstanding books that are not selected as category winners may be recognized as Finalists at the Awards program in Fall 2018, with no monetary prizes attached.

The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by January 27 for publication in the February 2018 newsletter.



AUTHOR PANEL AT THE BPL

Monday, January 22 | 6 – 7:30 p.m.

It Occurs to Me That I Am America

*With authors Heidi Pitlor, Ha Jin, and Alice Hoffman
Moderated by Jonathan Santlofer*

It Occurs to Me That I Am America features original short stories from acclaimed authors—including panelists Alice Hoffman, Ha Jin, and Heidi Pitlor—that consider the fundamental ideals of a free, just, and compassionate democracy.

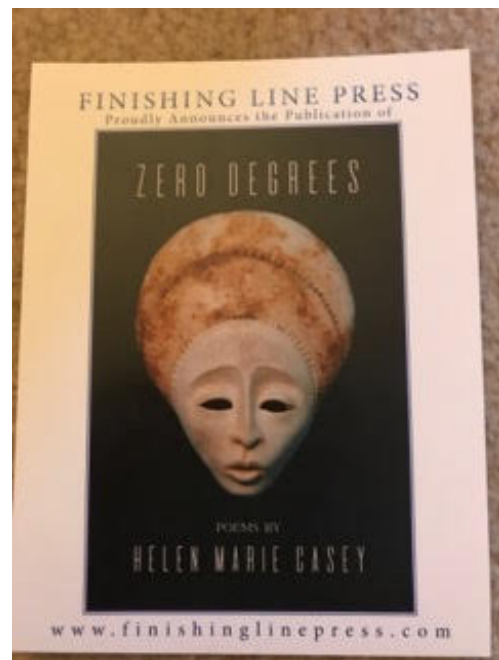
Hoffman is the New York Times bestselling author of thirty novels, including *Faithful*, *The Marriage of Opposites* (Winner of the 2016 Julia Ward Howe Prize), and *The Dovekeepers*, which Toni Morrison called “a major contribution to twenty-first century literature.” Her newest novel, *The Rules of Magic*, is the prequel to her cult-classic *Practical Magic*.

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Helen Marie Casey's new poetry chapbook, "Zero Degrees," will ship on February 23, 2018.. The chapbook can be pre-ordered from www.finishinglinepress.com

Dr. Jack B. Bedell, Professor of English, Editor of Louisiana Literature, and Director of Louisiana Literature Press, has written of this book:

These days, it's easy to be overwhelmed by stories of violence and terror occurring all over the globe, to feel powerless, or worse hopeless, in the face of hatred. Poetry can be an escape for sure, or place of solitude, but it's rare to find poems that go beyond providing a haven, poems that seek to conquer terror with clarity, detail, and beauty. Page by page, the poems in Helen Marie Casey's Zero Degrees offer such resistance to the violent tragedies infecting our world. Casey's lines give necessary voice to victims of terror, foreign and domestic, male and female, young and old. Her poems pay tribute and empower through memory those whose lives are often avalanched under the news cycle as it rolls on.



PLEASE Renew Your BAC Membership THIS MONTH

The BAC is planning more programs and more book awards for 2018 . We hope you will join us! Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the

calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:

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