



*Boston Authors Club*

## September 2020 Newsletter

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### Debut Novelist -- Lisa Braxton



Lisa Braxton's debut novel, *The Talking Drum* (Inanna Publications, 2020) was recently named the winner of the 2020 Outstanding Literary Award from the National Association of Black Journalists. In this interview, BAC member Lisa Braxton talks about the real-life inspiration for her novel's background of urban development and community disruption, her experience of writing in multiple genres, and the experience of launching a new book in the midst of a global pandemic. For more about Lisa and her work, visit

<https://lisabraxton.com/>

*Q: **The Talking Drum** weaves the experience of your parent's store being razed for urban development into a compelling, character-driven story of intersecting motivations and lives in the fictional community of Bellport. Can you talk about your trajectory in writing the novel – how long did it take you to move from the original book idea to the final draft? How did you balance your family's lived experience with fictional elements of the plot?*

**A:** When I began writing *The Talking Drum* in 2008, I had a 7-page scene between a man and woman in a bookstore. The woman finds out his daily routine of coming into the bookstore's café for coffee and she deliberately runs into him, hoping to rekindle their old romance. Pretty soon I realized that the scene wasn't going anywhere and that I needed to open the plot and add more characters. It evolved into a story about a newlywed couple who open a bookstore in fictional Bellport, a dying factory city with urban redevelopment on the horizon. As I began reading over my manuscript pages, I realized that my subconscious had tapped into the memories of my parents' first years operating a business in my hometown Bridgeport, Connecticut. Their experiences served as inspiration for my fictional story but I had to give the real story a light touch in the novel. For example, some of the friction points my parents experienced with each other while maintaining a marriage and running a business would have caused the story to lose focus; my parents store was broken into several times; they had employees who shoplifted. These real events wouldn't have served the purposes of my novel. I completed my final draft and it was accepted for publication in 2017.

*Q: You published a number of short stories and essays before *The Talking Drum*, and you have a Master's degree in Journalism as well as an MFA in Creative Writing. What do you enjoy most, and what do you find challenging, about the different genres you write in?*

A: I love writing personal essays. I find them cathartic. I'm able to express myself in an intimate way that I don't during interactions with family and friends. This might sound weird but my sister, who I consider myself to be close to, has told me she's learned so much about me from my essays! Also, I feel satisfaction from my essays when readers tell me that they felt something from my writing; my essays made them feel certain emotions, or they felt that they were right there with me on my journey as they read my story. I feel much the same way about fiction writing as I do about my essays. I enjoy journalism as well. But I found journalism to be a grind because I worked in daily journalism, having to crank out at least one story a day under deadline. I didn't like the pressure and sometimes I didn't like the topics that were chosen for me. Perhaps if I had gone into magazine journalism, I would have enjoyed that field more.

Q: Is there a second novel in your future? If yes, are you reached a stage of planning or writing it that you can share with BAC readers?

A: I am about 100 pages into the draft of a second novel, a historical novel taking place in Boston in the mid-1800s. I'm enjoying the research and going back in time. I hope to have a first draft finished by the end of the year.

Q: Congratulations on winning the Outstanding Literary Award for *The Talking Drum*! In the midst of the pandemic, how are you promoting the book? Do you have any book talks or other programs coming up in the fall?

A: When the pandemic shut things down in March, I was a couple of months away from publication. I already had some bookstores confirmed for in-person events. Those had to be canceled. I thought I'd have to put away my dreams of an author tour, but through technology and the outpouring of support from the writing community, I've probably reached more readers than I would have pre-COVID. A number of groups reached out to us authors and especially debut authors and formed book chats and book groups and hosted us on the various social media platforms. At least one bookstore that had planned to host me in person, hosted me via a video conferencing platform. Instead of reaching readers who would decide to attend one of my in-person events, I was able to reach people all over the country virtually. I am so grateful for community. I have a virtual book talk scheduled for Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup> sponsored by GBS NCNW, a nonprofit organization.

Interview by Mary J Cronin

## 2020 Discovery Award Winners

### Congratulations to:

**First Place ~~ Mona Baloch  
for *Inaya and the Moon***

**Second Place ~~ Cathy  
Stenquist for *I Wish I Were***

**Third Place ~~ Amy Benoit  
and Sue Lovejoy for *Perfect  
Pirates***

**Honorable Mention ~~ Mary  
E. Cronin for *Like a Mother  
Bear:*  
*Jeanne Manford Stands Up  
for Gay Kids***

**Honorable Mention ~~ Gayle  
Stern for *Kite's Unexpected  
Flight***





We are delighted to announce the winners and honored authors in BAC's first Discovery Award competition, listed above with photos in clockwise order. More about these authors and their stories will be featured in future BAC newsletters!

## Bookstore Spotlight

**brookline  
booksmith**

*Next year will mark the sixtieth anniversary of Brookline Booksmith, which has been located in Coolidge Corner at 279 Harvard St. in Brookline since 1961. To carry out its mission—"Dedicated to the fine art of browsing"—the store was one of the first to display books by category rather than by publisher and to organize books alphabetically by author. While the pandemic has made browsing a challenge, the store continues to draw customers with creative strategies that meet readers' and authors' needs. In this interview, bookstore co-owner/manager Lisa Gozashti talks about her 20-year involvement with Brookline Booksmith and today's challenges.*

### Five Questions for Brookline Booksmith

*How has the pandemic affected your operations? Have you found creative ways to meet readers' needs and to keep your business lively during these times of closures and uncertainty?*

It's affected us intensely. We've had to restrict hours, lay folks off, work much harder with fewer resources, pivot and pivot again, and stretch to learn new skills. We *have* found creative ways to meet our readers. We launched a membership program, redesigned our website, and established an online Ask-a-Bookseller chat-space. We also organized an efficient online and phone order curbside pickup process and have reconfigured our award winning events series into a fabulous virtual offering. We've got lots of lovely things planned for the annual upcoming IBD (indie bookstore day), as well.

*How did you become involved in Brookline Booksmith? You've been with the store for quite some time! What do you love about being an indie?*

I joined the team in 1999. Being a lifetime lover of literature, I began at Booksmith while also pursuing training for a career in publishing. I loved the store so much and was drawn so swiftly in by its charms that I soon abandoned all other career aspirations. There are many wonderful and inspiring aspects of the

indie book biz, mostly it's being part of a family, part of a community. It's tending what feels like a garden, or a temple, or a silk road, protecting and cherishing voices, traditions, pathways, possibilities, and all else that flows through the written word.

***What would you like your customers to know about the independent bookstore business?***

It's a tough, exacting business, despite the calm we aim to project, and the sanctuary we hope we provide. There are millions and millions of large and small efforts involved, daily! It's not very remunerative financially, so it's a labor of love. It's also a joyful, collaborative business, rich in meaning and rewards.

***Can you share a story about how you've helped one of your customers, either recently or during more normal times?***

Most recently, a longtime customer asked me to learn a poem, and recite it aloud next time they're in. So far I've memorized the first line:

*In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,*

I always receive as much from helping our customers as they do. My covid saturated days are insanely busy and I'm often overwhelmed; seeing this poem on my desk, calling out to me every morning to pause, has been a genuine gift.

***What are your favorite reads for the fall?***

*Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson

*Breath* by James Nestor

*Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi

*Just Us* by Claudia Rankine

*What are You Going Through* by Sigrid Nunez

*Homeland Elegies* by Ayad Akhtar

**Visit Brookline Booksmith at [brooklinebooksmith.com](http://brooklinebooksmith.com)**

Interview by Cynthia Levinson

## BAC President's Note

I've been thinking a lot about biography lately. I think about this partly because that's what I've written and what I'm currently working on, but also I've been thinking about biography because of the times. How many of us, I wonder, have found it important, or helpful, or somehow cathartic, to chronicle some of our own lives during these moments of historic pandemic and racial reckoning? Has the enforced separation, the work from home directives, the isolation, the violence splayed out on the news and in social media caused many of us to feel a need for writing about our lives? Is it, perhaps, still something of a sense of disbelief about the state of our towns, our state, our country, our world that's driven us to reflect?

The historian in me wonders how future historians will evaluate these autobiographical musings, or the biographies that come out of these times. What books will be published? What other forms might these reflections take?

And what will be the sources that future historians will use – Zoom recordings? Social media posts? Amazon orders?

BAC members, let us know if these turbulent times have affected your writing and how. Send us a paragraph at [Bostonauthorsclub2@gmail.com](mailto:Bostonauthorsclub2@gmail.com). We'll excerpt your responses and share them in future newsletters!

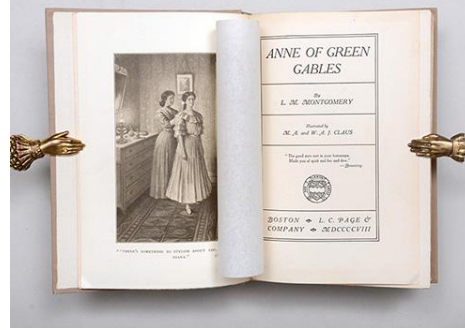
**Julie Dobrow  
BAC President**

## Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery Boston Authors Enthroned

***Notable Boston Authors (1965) and its sequel,***



**Boston Authors Now and Then (1966)**, both by stalwart Boston Authors Club member Mildred Buchanan Flagg, Litt. D., L.H.D. have been the starting point for many Yesteryear stories about Boston's literary scene and the Club's history. The biosketches in both of these books are for the most part lightly edited obituaries that appeared in Boston newspapers and thus conclude with "members were saddened by his passing" or some variant thereof. Full stop takes on a whole new meaning.



*Literary Boston of Today* by Helen Maria Winslow published by L.C. Page at the dawn of the Boston Authors Club in 1902 (according to the copyright page) or 1903 (according to the title page) is much more upbeat. There are many more direct quotes undoubtedly due to the fact that the subjects are still alive. The frontispiece is the canonical picture of Julia Ward Howe who, according to the author, "is now eighty-three years 'young,'...but still a power and an inspiration."

The book introduces the reader to seventy-nine Boston Authors. There are photographs of twenty-six of these worthies in addition to pictures of three of their homes (Ward in Newton Centre and East Gloucester, Trowbridge in

Arlington, and White in Brookline) and three interiors (Field's library, Moulton's drawing-room, and Deland's Jonquil sale).

Louis Coues Page (above) bought the Boston publisher Joseph Knight in 1896 and obviously renamed it after himself. L.C. Page's best seller was likely *Ann of Green Gables* published in 1908. A first edition is on offer for \$34,000 (plus \$18 shipping!) on AbeBooks. Lucy Montgomery's manuscript had been rejected by four publishers before being accepted by L.C. Page. Montgomery wrote in her diary at the time:

*"I don't know what kind of a publisher I've got. I know absolutely nothing of the Page Co. They have given me a royalty of ten percent on the wholesale price, which is not generous even for a new writer, and they have bound me to give them all my books on the same terms for five years. I don't altogether like this but I was afraid to protest, lest they might not take the book, and I am so anxious to get it before the public. It will be a start, even if it is no great success."*

*Ann of Green Gables* was indeed a great success, selling between 800,000 and 900,000 copies by 1947 and earning Montgomery over \$22,000. The full story of the stormy business relationship between Montgomery and Page is told in *'Dragged at Anne's Chariot Wheels': L.M. Montgomery and the sequels to Anne of Green Gables* by Carole Gerson which appeared in volume 35 of the **Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada**.

Winslow ends her paean to Boston authors some poetic advice from "Mrs. Browning":

*Sit still upon your thrones,  
O ye poetic ones:  
And if, sooth, the world decry you,  
Let it pass unnoticed by you,  
Ye to yourselves suffice,  
Without its flatteries.*

If you're looking for me, I'll be in the throne room.

**authors!**  
**AUTHORS!**

***The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month, except during the summer. Please send news about fall your activities and new books (along with related pictures) to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by September 28 for publication in the OCTOBER BAC newsletter.***

***Full membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. If you renew or join any time before the end of this year, you will be a paid up member through December 2020. 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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