



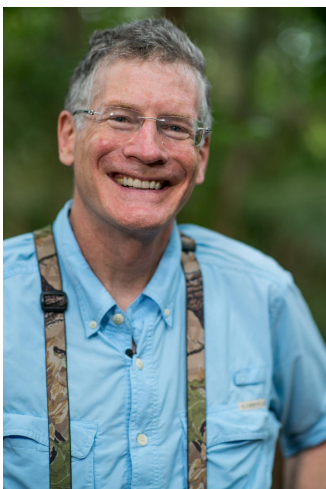
Boston Authors Club

May 2021 Newsletter

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CURRENTLY READING: Interview with Jonathan Losos



Jonathan Losos is a distinguished evolutionary biologist known for his research on how lizards rapidly evolve to adapt to changing environments. Dr. Losos was professor of biology at Harvard and Curator in Herpetology at the university's Museum of Comparative Zoology when he wrote the JWH award-winning book ***Improbable Destinies: Fate, Chance, and the Future of Evolution***. He is now the founding Director of the Living Earth Collaborative, a partnership between Washington University, the Saint Louis Zoo and the Missouri Botanical Garden. Losos is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and the recipient of many scientific and research awards.

1) What are you reading right now?

I'm in flux! I just finished reading ***Driven by Nature: A Personal Journey from Shanghai to Botany and Global Sustainability***. Peter Raven is one of the biodiversity heroes of our times—named a “Hero of the Planet” by *Time Magazine*—and his autobiography charts his work as a leading 20th century evolutionary biologist, followed by his transformation to a global force in the environmental movement.

Along the way, he took the Missouri Botanical Garden, which he directed for 35 years, from being a backwater to a premier international institution. **Five stars!**

2) And what new book reading is still in progress?

What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating and Singing—What Birds are Doing and Why by David Sibley. You might wonder why a herpetologist is reading a book on birds. No, it's not because birds are really reptiles in an evolutionary sense, having descended from dinosaurs. Rather, it's because I've been asked to interview Sibley for the Saint Louis County Library Author's series. The book is quirky, but delightful. Quirky, because it's a great introduction to the life of birds, jam-packed with information, but instead of delivering it in chapters titled “Reproduction,” “Flight,” “Growth,” and so on, the info comes in vignettes of nearly 100 species, each species description making a broader point about how birds live and what they do—that is, what it's like to be a bird! Each account is also accompanied by one of Sibley's signature illustrations.

3) What's next?

At the top of the queue of books on my reading list is ***Classical Cats: The Rise and Fall of the Sacred***

Cat, by Donald Engels. My next book (to write, not read) is about scientific research on domestic cats. The backstory is that a few years ago, I realized that so much fabulous research is being done on our four-legged friends, studying the ecology, behavior, and evolution of cats in just the same way that my colleagues and I research elephants, lions and lizards. Radio-tracking, genome analysis, predator-prey observations and many other approaches. I thought it would be fun to write a book about this research, focusing on cats, but at the same time illustrating how modern science studies biodiversity. What I didn't fully appreciate is the breadth of the scientific literature on *Felis catus*. I won't say I bit off too much, but reading through this plenitude of papers is keeping me busy! Still, my book is three-quarters written and I hope to finish by the end of the year. One of the joys of the research is delving into topics about which I previously knew so little. A sneak peak at **Classical Cats** tells me that I have much to learn about how the Greeks, in particular, played a role in distributing cats around the Mediterranean, and thence to their conquest of the world, as well as how cats were portrayed in Greek and Roman art.

Interview by Kate Farrell

Second Annual Discovery Award Competition Opens June 1

While 2020 was a trying year in numerous ways, a few newfound joys may have emerged in the midst of it all. Perhaps you discovered the art of hiking? Or maybe you dusted off that old manuscript that had been hidden in a drawer for years?

A 2020 milestone for BAC was our first Discovery Award: Picture Book Contest. After a successful debut, we are excited to announce that the 2021 Discovery Award contest opens on June 1, with submissions due by June 30.

The Boston Authors Club
Discovery Award:
Picture Book Contest



We are thrilled to welcome our new Discovery Award judges: [Lisa Rogers](#), [Josh Funk](#), and [Janet Costa Bates](#) and grateful to confirm that our returning judges Ammi-Joan Paquette (Erin Murphy Literary Agency) and Peter H. Reynolds will again provide an ms critique as one of the prizes for the first and second place winners. To learn more about all the competition prizes, process, contest rules, and submission guidelines head to the BAC website at <https://bostonauthorsclub.org/bac-discovery-award>

Advice from the 2020 Discovery Honorees



We asked the 2020 Discovery honorees to reflect on what impact the award competition had on their writing in the past year, and to share their advice for this year's entrants. Here are their responses:

Amy Benoit & Sue Lovejoy

Entering the BAC Discovery Award competition was another step forward in the world of submission for us. Taking a step forward in any industry requires bravery and belief. Bravery, because it takes gumption to put your work out there and belief because you've just got to hope there's someone out there who will love your stuff the way you do. We love PERFECT PIRATES and knowing that the judges enjoyed it too is fuel for us to keep submitting. Hopefully,

there'll be a "right fit" for this story soon! We submitted more works to agents and editors in 2020 than in years past. Runner-up was a nice addition to our biographies.

ADVICE: "Throw spaghetti against the wall and see what sticks," is a great motto that comes to mind when submitting to a contest, an agent, or an editor...so take a chance, and seize the opportunity. Entering also is another way to put yourself "out there" and meet others in the writing community. You never know...something good could be waiting for you just around the corner.

Go for it!

Mary E. Cronin

It was a thrill to receive an Honorable Mention from the Boston Authors Club Discovery Award picture book contest in 2020. My project was a picture book biography, so the feedback I received from Heather Lang was incredibly meaningful to me. She's such an experienced picture book biography author!

Heather's advice led me to tighten the focus on the words and experience of my subject and to rethink the ending of my story. In addition, Heather's words of wisdom helped me to "buckle up" for the ups and downs of this particular corner of children's publishing; picture book biography is a very specific category, and Heather's advice was invaluable to me.

ADVICE: I'd encourage any writer to submit to the Discovery Award. In winning an Honorable Mention, I felt as if I had been invited into a very warm and welcoming group of experienced authors who were willing to offer advice and cheer on upcoming and emerging writers. I was also able to mention this honor in my query letter to an agent, which may have played a role in my signing with that agent. My picture book biography is now out on submission to several publishers. Fingers crossed!

Gayle Stern

Entering the contest and receiving feedback have encouraged me to revise for submission, rather than perfection. What a difference! Thank you.

ADVICE: Send your inner critic on a socially distanced hike. Then hurry up and press "Submit."

authors!
AUTHORS!

**For inclusion in the June
Newsletter, send your events,
news, and publications by 5/30/21
to
bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com
THANKS!**

President's Note

May Musings

One of the things I've been reading the past few weeks is David Blight's monumental biography, *Frederick Douglass, Prophet of Freedom*. This is a book I've been meaning to read for some time, and I've finally had the time to read it. I started reading it as the Derrick Chauvin trial was going on in Minnesota, and the nation waited anxiously to hear the verdict. It was a coincidence that I started reading this book when I did, but the confluence of these two events has been very meaningful for me.

One aspect of Douglass' life that Blight brings to life for 21st century readers is the way that this former slave brilliantly used his early-in-life experiences to vividly explain to anyone who would listen to him – and many people did – about how the indignities and injustices to which he was subjected as a boy profoundly shaped the man he became. Blight situates Douglass within the larger context of the abolition movement, the politics and economics leading up to the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws and more; I learned many things from this biography about the systemic evil of slavery that I'd never been taught in any American history class.

And to be reading this at the same time as I was listening to nightly recaps of the Chauvin trial somehow made each more intense. It's been an eye-opening, real-time demonstration of how the layers of history inform the present.

Wishing you all good reading and a good month, as life starts to open up again.

Julie Dobrow
BAC President



Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery: Inventing a New Genre While Having a #12 Day

With the distinction of being born on the same day as Julia Ward Howe, as well as having published popular works in many genres, John Kendrick Bangs joined the Boston Authors Club in 1907. He was a humorist and the inventor of an eponymous subgenre of science fiction known as Bangsian fantasy. However, Bangs must have crossed our busybody BAC historian, Mildred Buchanan

Flagg, somewhere along the line. Her biographical write up dismisses him as follows "...he was no Mark Twain...or George Ade or Ring Lardner ... he was not even very funny as a humorist in a dreamy era of comic writing..."

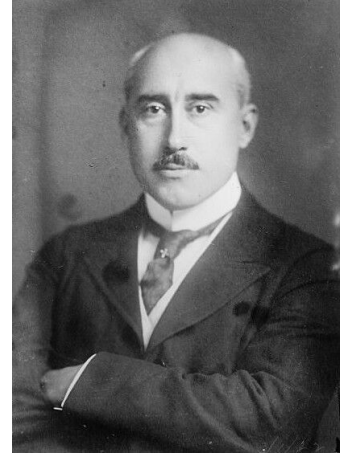
Hmm...Perhaps Bangs was funny as a clarinet player? But enough of Mildred's opinions.

In a Bangsian fantasy, historical personalities meet in the afterlife and pursue a thin plot line accompanied by much humorous banter. Bangs is at times credited with being the literary precursor of Philip Farmer's *Riverworld* series. Bangs' *A House-Boat on the Styx* and *The Enchanted Type-Writer* are examples of Bangs in the Bangsian style.

John Kendrick Bangs was educated in law Columbia. Apparently concluding that the law lacked a sense of humor, he skipped the bar exams and took a job at *Life* magazine. Four years later he moved to an editorship at *Harper's Monthly* where he stayed for eleven years. His true calling, however, seems to have been the lecture circuit. Mildred reports that in the summer of 1916 he presented talks for forty-seven days in succession (Sundays included, Mildred notes) in forty different states.

Bangs' literary contributions were by no means limited to editing, books, and public speaking. He also wrote poetry, plays, and two musicals, "Lady Teazle" and "Tommorrowland." Not least, he invented a way of swearing without being profane. According to an article in the May 13, 1907, of *The Boston Herald* reporting on Bangs' decision to move from Yonkers to Boston, he tabulated all the cuss words in the English language that he could find and gave each one a number from 1 to 27. (That's how many he found after consulting Kipling.) Rather than uttering some socially unacceptable expletive when you fizzle a golf shot or get elbowed away from the punch bowl you can simply mutter out loud "Well, 12 and 7."

Bangs died on January 21, 1922, but his popularity persisted for at least a while. The November 3, 1922, edition of *The Boston Globe* reports on a meeting that month of the Thursday Fortnightly Club under the direction of Mrs. Medora Thacher to consider the life of John Kendrick Bangs. Mrs. Thacher read Bangs' biography and Miss Mabel E. Trask sang. Tea was served. I bet Bangs would have enjoyed being there.



Become a member for 2021!

Membership dues are \$50 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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