

## A CONVERSATION WITH LAURA PURDIE SALAS

### What inspired you to write *BookSpeak!*?

I was invited to submit poems about books for an anthology. I became totally consumed with the topic, since books and poems are two of my favorite things! When none of my poems were accepted for the anthology, my agent submitted them to Clarion Books, who decided to publish them. I went from devastated to elated!

I stink at love poems. But I think this book turned out to be a pretty good love poem to books. Writing these poems made me reflect deeply about what books have meant in my life.

### What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing your award-winning book?

Because the topic was narrow, I wanted to include many moods in the poems. Books are versatile, and I wanted the poems to reflect that versatility, that variety. So...rhymed poems and free verse poems, happy poems and melancholy poems, chirpy poems and sarcastic poems. I hope the joy of books comes through in every poem.

### What do you hope your readers take away from *BookSpeak!*?

I want them to look at books with new eyes, to wonder what their own books' covers would say, what part of a book they like best, or what part of a book they are most like. I just hope it makes them love books even more!

### What do you like most about the book?

I stink at love poems. But I think this book turned out to be a pretty good love poem to books. Writing these poems made me reflect deeply about what books have meant in my life. I also adore the whimsical art by Josée Bisailon!

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I didn't discover writing as a career option until college. Then I spent a number of years as an editor and a freelance writer. But after teaching 8th grade English for two years and starting my own family, I realized that I wanted to write for kids. I began publishing in children's magazines and with educational publishers. I submitted picture book manuscripts for many years before Clarion published my first poetry collection (*Stampede! Poems to Celebrate the Wild Side of School*).

### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

The writing and book-loving community in Minnesota is so active! Readings, classes, conferences, conventions—there are constant opportunities to talk with writers, editors, teachers, publishers, and librarians. The contact always fills me with energy. I have never felt isolated as a writer here in Minnesota! The other impact is that Minnesota's beauty, particularly the North Shore and northern Minnesota, is a constant inspiration. And I love to write up there whenever I get the chance.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota  
Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

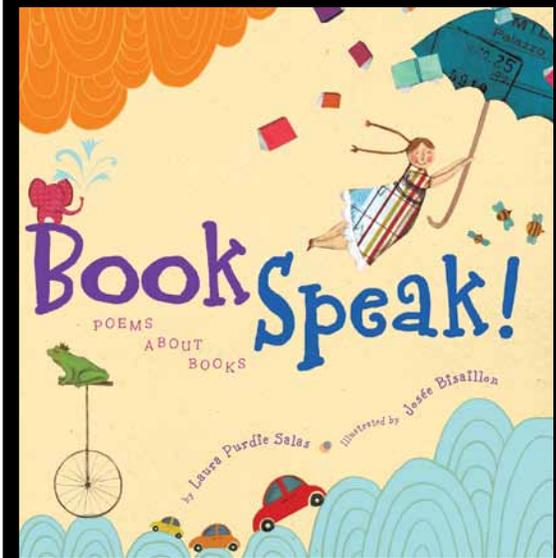
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

**Children's Literature Winner**

*Category sponsored by Books For Africa*

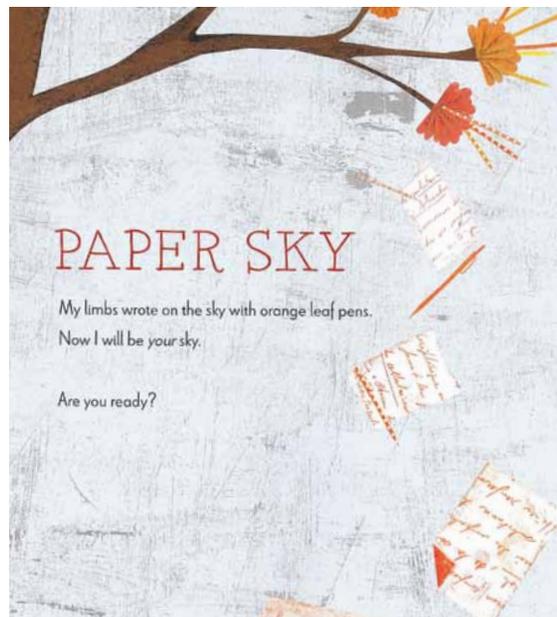


***BookSpeak! Poems About Books***

by Laura Purdie Salas  
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon

CLARION BOOKS/HOUGHTON MIFFLIN  
HARCOURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

# BookSpeak!



## SUMMARY

This book is a collection of wild and weird, wacky and winsome poems about all the magic to be found on a bookshelf. Each book gives voice to those who seldom get heard – the books themselves. Characters plead for sequels, book jackets strut, and readers get a sneak peek at the raucous parties in the aisles when all the lights go out at the bookstore!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you could be any part of a book, what part would you be? Why?
2. If you were the cover of your favorite book, what would you say to a person walking by?
3. What is your favorite book, and why?
4. Why does the index think he's so cool? What can he do that no other part of the book does?
5. If the stories on your shelves could tiptoe out of the house, where do you think they would go? What kinds of adventures would they have?
6. The book in "Hydrophobic" says its biggest fear is water. What other things might a book be afraid of?
7. In "The Middle's Lament," the three parts of the book have different personalities. Which part do you think you're most like? Why?
8. Did you know that so many different people are involved in getting a book to the shelf? And "This Is the Book" doesn't even include all of them! What is something you do that a lot of other people actually help with?
9. The author wrote the book in a style that's called poetry. What is poetry?
10. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?



## ABOUT LAURA PURDIE SALAS



*Laura Purdie Salas writes poetry and nonfiction books for children. Her first poetry book, Stamped! Poems to Celebrate the Wild Side of School, was a Minnesota Book Award finalist. Laura would like to say she is fluent in many languages, but she isn't. She can order twisty pasta in Italian, can name one fabulous illustrator in French – Josée Bisaillon, and can read street signs in Spanish. Laura lives with her family in Minneapolis.*

Learn more about the author and her work at [www.laurasalas.com](http://www.laurasalas.com)



Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH ED BOK LEE

### What inspired you to write *Whorled*?

In Korean, there's a word, "maum," which means mind/heart (as one unified concept). When working on poems, I'm just trying to cultivate as wild and rich a life of the maum as I can.

I was raised in and by a family of Confucians, Christians, Buddhists and a grandmother who practiced shamanic animism. For a while now, I've been struggling with something the Dali Lama said on religion:

"People from different traditions should keep their own, rather than change. . . . In the United States [people] take something Hindu, something Buddhist, something, something . . . That is not healthy. For individual practitioners, having one truth, one religion, is very important. Several truths, several religions, is contradictory."

In retrospect, at its core, the book seems to be exploring this, and other obsessions surrounding globalization, psychic and spiritual displacement, loss and gain, etc. I think it's my effort to depict artfully and explore these and many other things that confuse me on a daily basis.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning collection?

Every poem requires research, but mainly inward stuff. Poems can and must get at that substratum of being.

However, in "If in America," a poem about an actual Hmong-American hunter in Wisconsin, who shot and killed six white hunters, I did a lot of research because I wanted to get things both factually correct and emotionally true. He's still alive, and has a voice of his own. So I wrote a kind of inverted persona poem.

### What do you like most about *Whorled*?

*Whorled* is maybe like a drunk person going on about the world, who sometimes can't even stand up, but hopefully can carry some interesting tunes.

### What do you hope your readers take away from the book?

Jacques Lacan wrote, "The reason we go to poetry is not for wisdom, but for the dismantling of wisdom." As I've commented elsewhere, to riff off of that, one reason I think I write poetry is not for memory, but to dismantle it utterly and follow where the ani-

ating spirits go from there. And, lately, as in the final, (title) poem in *Whorled*, that's been leading me into the future where, for example, 90% of the world's languages are scheduled to go extinct by 2050.

---

*Whorled* is maybe like a drunk person going on about the world, who sometimes can't even stand up, but hopefully can carry some interesting tunes.

---

### What was your journey to becoming a published poet?

My mother once told me that I wrote a poem about God when I was in kindergarten. The teacher had given it to her, but by the time she'd told me this in passing one day when I was an adult, she'd lost it. I don't remember the poem at all, so I can't say much about its impact. But I wish I had it, maybe as a guidepost. It's a lot harder as an adult to fully embrace what is incomprehensible to you.

Read everything, and eventually you'll find yourself craving a kind of poem or story that you can't find anywhere. Write it. Then share it with the world, however you can, no holds barred.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

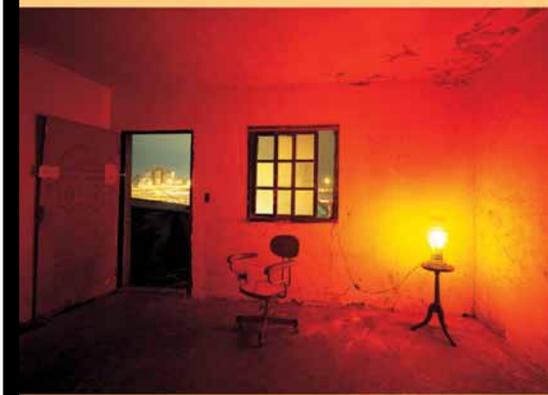
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## Poetry Winner

Category sponsored by  
*Wellington Management, Inc.*

## Whorled



POEMS

Ed Bok Lee

### *Whorled*

by Ed Bok Lee

COFFEE HOUSE PRESS



# Whorled



## SUMMARY

What does it mean to be a global citizen in an era of constant war, rampant industrialization, and ever-advancing technology? *Whorled* confronts and celebrates the many complications of globalism through meditations on war, migration and culture.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the collection's main themes?
2. What pros and cons surround the fact that by 2050 many linguists predict that 90% of world languages spoken today will have become extinct?

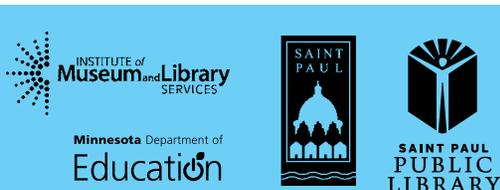
3. Did you read the poems in *Whorled* in order or randomly? How might your experience of the collection been different if you had read the poems in another order?
4. What were you reminded of from your own life while reading the poems "Whorled" and "If in America?"
5. What would the book have gained and/or lost if the themes in *Whorled* had been articulated in all prose stories or essays?
6. What does this statement mean, and do you agree with it, "The reason we go to poetry is not for wisdom, but for the dismantling of wisdom," (Jacques Lacan)? Why do you read poetry?
7. What does this quote mean to you, "It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there," (William Carlos Williams)?
8. What messages is the poet communicating about globalization? What are the pros and/or cons of globalization?
9. Which poem speaks to you the most?
10. Pick 2-3 poems of different lengths and describe how the author uses length, stanza structure and language to help communicate tone and theme.

## ABOUT ED BOK LEE



*Ed Bok Lee was raised in South Korea, North Dakota, and Minnesota. A former bartender, physical education teacher, journalist, and translator, Lee has a M.F.A. from Brown University. His work has appeared in journals and anthologies and on public radio and MTV. Lee's first book, Real Karaoke People, was the winner of the Asian American Literary Award and the PEN Open Book Award. He teaches part-time at Metropolitan State University.*

**Learn more about the author at [www.edboklee.com](http://www.edboklee.com).**



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

## A CONVERSATION WITH RICHARD A. THOMPSON

### What inspired you to write *Big Wheat*?

You no longer have to be all that old to have seen the passing of not one but several eras. With some, it is goodbye and good riddance, but I am truly sad to see some gone. I have always been fascinated by the threshing era, which survived at least forty years past the time when newer technology actually made it unnecessary. It was a special, even magical time in American history, and at some point, it seemed a shame to me that nobody had ever written a good novel about it.

### How long did it take you to write your award-winning book?

That's a trick question. The first draft was actually done in 30 days, as the subject of a National Novel Writing Month, in November of 2006. It was only 50,000 words long then, and definitely not ready for prime time. I put it aside and went back to work on my Saint Paul bail bondsman series.

Then, in 2009, my editor and I couldn't agree on the plot of the next novel in the series, so I picked up *Big Wheat* again and seriously set about making it 50 percent longer and a whole lot more serious. I spent a little less than a year on the expansion and rewrite. My editor accepted

it in spring 2010, and it went to press in January of the following year.

### What do you like most about *Big Wheat*?

There are so many things going on—a serial killer story, a love story, a coming-of-age story, the struggle between good and evil, the high road to the Dust Bowl—that it's hard to pick. I think what I most enjoyed doing was the atmosphere.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I always envy the people who say they knew at an early age that they wanted to be an author. I did not. At various times I aspired to being an animated cartoonist, a comic book artist, and a sculptor. I read a lot of novels to try to find out how the world worked and what people were all about, which led me to believe that writers were a lot smarter than I was. I also suspected that a lot of them had rich patrons. Not me, in other words.

Ultimately, in the interest of making a living at something I seemed to be very good at, I became a civil engineer and a building code official and spent 45 years in heavy construction. Before that time was over, in 1995 I picked up a copy of Julia Cameron's fine book, *The Artist's Way*. It would

be a gross understatement to say that it changed my life. Soon I was taking classes and going to writers' conferences and submitting short stories to magazines, and I wrote a 500-plus page, never-published novel set in the construction industry, called "Carpenter Gothic."

In 1995 I picked up a copy of Julia Cameron's fine book, *The Artist's Way*. It would be a gross understatement to say that it changed my life. Soon I was taking classes and going to writers' conferences and submitting short stories to magazines

### How do you most enjoy spending time when you are not writing?

Now that my wife and I are both retired from our "day jobs," we spend a lot of time traveling to places we never thought we would ever go, like Europe and England, and recently, Egypt. The notebook and/or laptop goes along, of course.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

## 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

### Genre Fiction Winner

Category sponsored by  
*Marvin Windows and Doors*

## Big Wheat

Richard A. Thompson

*A Tale of Bindlestiffs and Blood*

### *Big Wheat*

by Richard A. Thompson

POISONED PEN PRESS

# Big Wheat

## SUMMARY

The summer of 1919 has come to a close, and men, women and machines are moving across the land, bringing in the wheat harvest. Jilted by his childhood sweetheart and estranged from his drunkard father, Charlie Krueger leaves home to seek employment in North Dakota's booming wheat threshing industry. There, he witnesses the notorious Windmill Man serial killer committing the most recent in a string of murders, and becomes a target himself.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What role did the year and setting play in creating the tone of the book and your experience in reading it?
3. What have been the biggest changes in farming since 1919? Would the telling of *Big Wheat* work in a modern-day farm setting?
4. Did you experience *Big Wheat* as being more a book about a serial killer, a love story, or coming-of-age novel?
5. How would you describe Charlie, and what changes do you see in him over the course of the book?
6. Are you surprised by Charlie's attraction to Emily? In what ways are they different, and how are they alike? What do you predict their future to be?
7. Where do you think the bindlestiffs went in the winter?
8. The book jacket says that this is a stand-alone mystery. Do you see the opportunity for a sequel, and if so, what might that story look like?



9. In what ways does *Big Wheat* remind you of other books you have read?
10. What techniques make a really good mystery, and to what extent are they used in *Big Wheat*?

## ABOUT RICHARD A. THOMPSON



*Richard A. Thompson is a civil engineer who traded his transit for a laptop and now writes mysteries full time. His first book, Fiddle Game, was short-listed for a Debut Dagger Award. The second in the series about bail bondsman and former bookie Herman Jackson, Frag Box, was a Minnesota Book Award finalist.*

**Learn more about the author and his work at [www.fiddlegame.com](http://www.fiddlegame.com).**



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH SHAWN LAWRENCE OTTO

### What inspired you to write *Fool Me Twice*?

I organized the first presidential science debate, in 2008, between Barack Obama and John McCain. At the time it was the largest political initiative in the history of science, which was weird when you think about it. Science is always political. But scientists had disengaged from the debate and basically ceded the definition of reality to other social forces.

When we came on the scene and put up a website calling for a presidential science debate, we had 38,000 scientists and engineers sign on within a few weeks. We'd clearly touched a nerve. I ran into so much opposition to the idea – from the media, from the campaigns, and from scientists themselves – that I decided to write a book about it and how we have arrived at a place in our national dialogue where most of our major unsolved challenges revolve around science policy issues. And yet, it's more taboo for candidates to talk about science than it is about religion.

### What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing your award-winning book?

The most interesting thing was how hungry everyone was to talk about this topic,

and the amazing access I had to the top minds in the country. It was really a pleasure and an amazing, humbling experience downloading their knowledge and putting it all together in a grand picture.

### What research did you undertake in writing *Fool Me Twice*?

Through the science debate initiative I had developed relationships with hundreds of leading scientists, journalists, members of Congress, university and organization presidents and corporate CEOs. I started by conducting a lot of interviews with them and the book began to take shape as I condensed their wisdom.

Then I went back and did a lot of reading of the foundations of science and democracy, and how Western science emerged from religion as a way of understanding the will of God through observing His creation, what they at the time called Natural Philosophy, which was a sort of radical, anti-authoritarian thing. All those ideas from the Gutenberg Bible and Luther's do-it-yourself religion on down through Bacon, Newton, Coke, Locke, Hume, and on to Jefferson and Franklin helped form the basis for the relationship between science, democracy and anti-authoritarianism.

### How long did it take to write the book?

That's sort of a trick question because much of the research and thinking I did evolved over time as I worked on the Science Debate initiative. And in some ways this reminds me of the old Picasso story – a woman runs into Picasso on the street in Paris and asks him for a portrait. He takes ten minutes and hands her an incredible work of art, and charges her an incredible fortune for it. She objects, "That just took you ten minutes!" "No," he tells her, "it took me my whole life." I'm no Picasso and this isn't a painting, but in some ways the book took me my whole life. That said, I wrote the first draft in about two months.

### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

The Loft is a tremendous resource we have here in Minnesota. My college education at Macalester and learning how to be a critical thinker really helped me as well. My experiences with Minnesota statewide and local politics taught me a lot of nuances that I learned so much from and that I draw on in the book. Plus, everybody's quirky in Minnesota, as Garrison Keillor frequently reminds us. So, to be a good writer all I had to do was let my quirky Minnesotan flag fly. But also keep it politely reserved at the same time.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

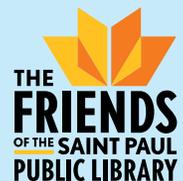
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature



325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242

[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

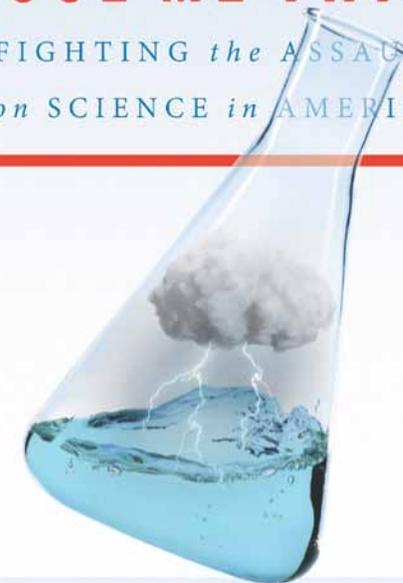
# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

**General Nonfiction Winner**

*Category sponsored by Minnesota AFL-CIO*

## FOOL ME TWICE

FIGHTING *the* ASSAULT  
on SCIENCE in AMERICA

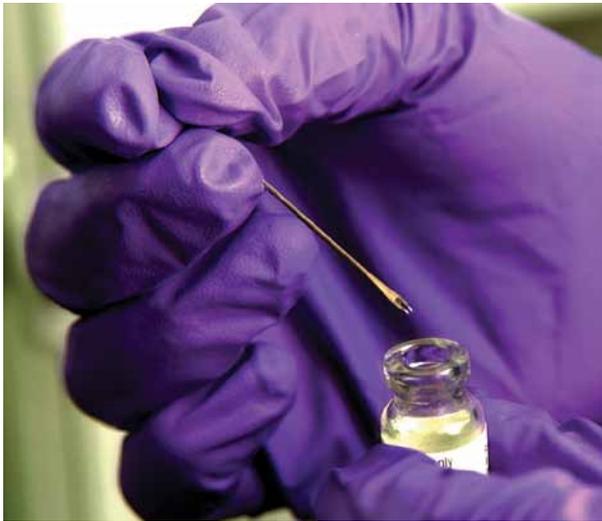


***Fool Me Twice:***  
***Fighting the Assault on Science in America***

by Shawn Lawrence Otto

RODALE

# Fool Me Twice



## SUMMARY

Shawn Lawrence Otto's book is an exposé on anti-science views in modern-day America and the ramifications misinformation is having on society. *Fool Me Twice* explores the scientific values that our country was founded on, and traces the relationship between science and politics throughout history. The book explores how anti-science views – from climate change denial to creationism to vaccine refusal – have become mainstream.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the premise of *Fool Me Twice*?
2. In speeches the author often says, "Science is never partisan, but science is always political." Do you agree?
3. If you were in President Obama's position in 2009, would you have focused on health care or climate change?
4. What risks did the author take in writing the book? In what situations are you willing to take risks?
5. Which is more important to good government: values or knowledge? Give one or two examples of a politician's effectiveness based on his/her values and knowledge.
6. Do you agree that all of the world's major problems revolve around science and technology? If not, give some examples of problems that don't.
7. What areas of your life are not affected by science and technology?
8. If you wrote a book on a controversial topic, what topic would you choose?
9. Does having a global economy require us to have a global government? Is it possible to have an effective global government?



10. What feelings did you experience in reading *Fool Me Twice*? In what ways, if any, did the book change your understanding of science in America?

## ABOUT SHAWN LAWRENCE OTTO



Shawn Lawrence Otto is the cofounder and CEO of Science Debate 2008, the largest political initiative in the history of science. He is also an award-winning screenwriter best known for writing and co-producing the Academy Award-nominated "House of Sand and Fog." Shawn and/or his work and writing have appeared on and in many publications and stations including NPR, PBS, CBS, FOX, NBC, ABC, New York Times, and Science.

Learn more about the author at [www.shawnotto.com](http://www.shawnotto.com)



Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN FARREY

### What inspired you to write *With or Without You*?

I was interested in writing about how we, as individuals, change. I knew I wanted to write about two things that had the power to transform lives: art and AIDS. I brainstormed a few different ideas, not thinking a single project would include both. But around the time I started writing about a young gay artist, I read an article about how AIDS education is almost non-existent for today's teens and that's when the idea clicked to weave both art and AIDS into a single story. In doing so, I ended up writing (inadvertently) about a third power that transforms: love.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I grew up in the 80s during the height of the AIDS crisis but it wasn't until I read Randy Shilts' fantastic *And the Band Played On* as research for this book that I learned what was really going on at the time. And, of course, I got to take several trips to Madison, Wisconsin—a city I love—and chalk it up as research. Most of the locations I mention in the book are real, while a few I made up for dramatic purposes. But the real locations were visited, photographed, and noted in a journal.

### What interesting challenge did you encounter in writing the book?

When I'm drafting a book, I tend to write *everything* that comes into my mind, figuring I'll sort it out later. The first draft of *With or Without You* was especially long and unwieldy and the challenge was to pare out the parts that, while interesting, ultimately didn't move the story along. I cut tons and tons of character backstory that just wasn't necessary. As things left the book, other things came to the foreground. It's so interesting to start out writing one thing and then, at some point, the book takes over and you find yourself taking new directions you hadn't considered. The challenge for me is often letting go of my original idea of what the book is "about" and letting the book choose the path.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I suspect you could ask any of my elementary school teachers who remember me and they'd tell you that I was a writer from a very young age. It most likely stemmed from the fact that I was an avid reader, throwing myself into anything and everything I could read. I spent much of my time writing short stories throughout middle school. This was followed by some "Doctor Who" fan fiction

novellas (yes, I'm owning up to it) in high school. I mainly dabbled with screenplays in college. Thing is, I've pretty much always been writing. It was when I enrolled in Hamline's MFA program that I thought I might actually try to get it published.

---

It's so interesting to start out writing one thing and then, at some point, the book takes over and you find yourself taking new directions you hadn't considered.

---

### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

There is an *amazing* community of writers who write for kids in Minnesota. You can't throw a stick without hitting one. People are very supportive of one another and that can be very energizing.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

## 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

### Young People's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Sit Investment Associates



***With or Without You***

by Brian Farrey

SIMON & SCHUSTER

# With or Without You



## SUMMARY

Best friends Evan and Davis have helped each other through homophobic bullying and every other challenge high school had to throw at them. But after graduation that friendship becomes strained from two directions as Evan struggles to tell Davis about his secret, long-term boyfriend Erik, and Davis gets caught up in a mysterious fringe crowd.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Throughout the book, Evan offers several reasons for hiding his relationship with Erik from his family and friends. When have you hidden a relationship (or something) from someone you care about and why?
3. Davis's attempts at being popular (joining clubs, etc.) often derailed if they weren't immediately successful. When have you given up on an endeavor too early, or when have you stuck with something too long?
4. Despite seeing several red flags, Erik continues to trust Evan for most of the book, until he's forced to realize Evan hasn't been honest with him. At what point would you have lost trust in Evan?
5. Davis joins the Chasers because he thinks it will make him popular and powerful. What else might he have done to gain popularity or power?
6. Many of the characters face the pressure of choosing between doing something to please someone else and doing what's right for them personally. Talk about the different ways the characters handle this choice.
7. Self-expression comes in many forms throughout the book. Discuss how the main characters choose

to express themselves and which of their methods you would or wouldn't choose.

8. Evan discovers that one of the bullies who has tormented him his whole life is in the closet. Discuss reasons why someone in the closet would act out violently against someone who is openly gay.
9. Evan and his sister, Shan, hated each other when they were younger but grew to have a mature relationship as they grew older. Talk about how you relate to siblings or other family members and how those relationships have changed over time.
10. If you wrote a book for young readers, what topic would you choose, and what would the book be called?

## ABOUT BRIAN FARREY



*To get to where he is today, Brian Farrey's career path took this route: student, stock boy, waiter, college TV program director, local TV news promotions producer, community theater executive director, bookseller, community relations manager and publicist. He currently acquires young adult novels for Flux. Brian holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Hamline University and lives in Saint Paul with his husband.*

**Learn more about the author at [www.brianfarreybooks.com](http://www.brianfarreybooks.com)**



Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH KURTIS SCALETTA

### What inspired you to write *The Tanglewood Terror*?

I loved horror stories as a kid and wanted to write one of my own. I set out with the idea of writing something in the vein of H. P. Lovecraft, whom I read voraciously as a teen. Some of his stories had luminous mushrooms as a harbinger of doom, monster gods buried deep in the earth. I decided to start there.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I learned more about those glowing mushrooms. I decided mine would belong to the honey fungus, which can live for thousands of years and sprawl for miles through subterranean networks. It felt like sci-fi already! I stretched the truth a little toward the end but most of the book is somewhat true to science.

### What do you like most about *The Tanglewood Terror*?

I'm proud of the female characters. It occurred to me after two books that I really hadn't created any female characters that were not mothers or crushes to the boy heroes. This book has three great female characters who are not love interests or rela-

tives. There are four if you count Cassie the pig!

### What do you hope your readers take away from the book?

I tend to walk a line between improbable and impossible stories – the endless rain in *Mudville*, the snake in *Mamba Point*, and the mushrooms in *The Tanglewood Terror*. There are always scientific explanations and magical explanations for the weird phenomena. I would rather have kids wonder about those things than give them canned answers.

### What is your current writing project?

My next novel is the first that takes place in my own neighborhood in North Minneapolis. It's about kids building a giant robot to fight a monster lurking in the ruins of an industrial park somewhere near the Camden Avenue Bridge.

---

There are always scientific explanations and magical explanations for the weird phenomena. I would rather have kids wonder about those things than give them canned answers.

---

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

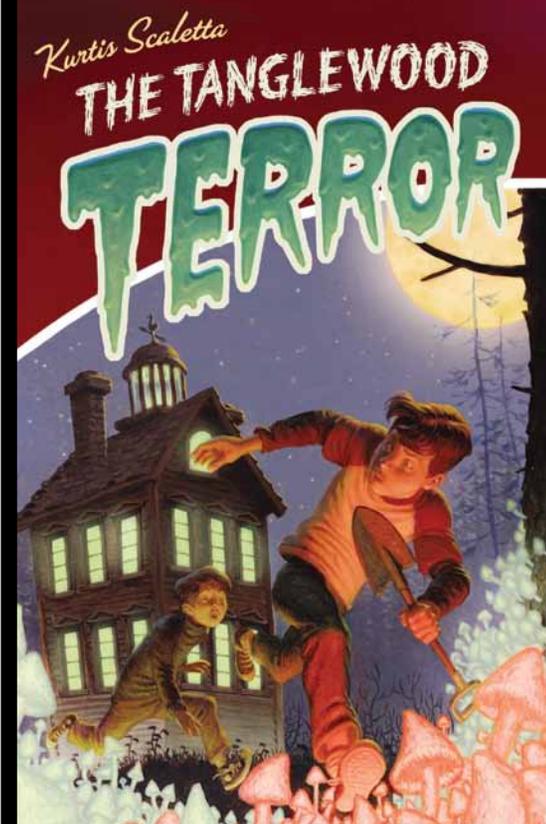
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

**Readers' Choice Winner**

Category sponsored by Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com

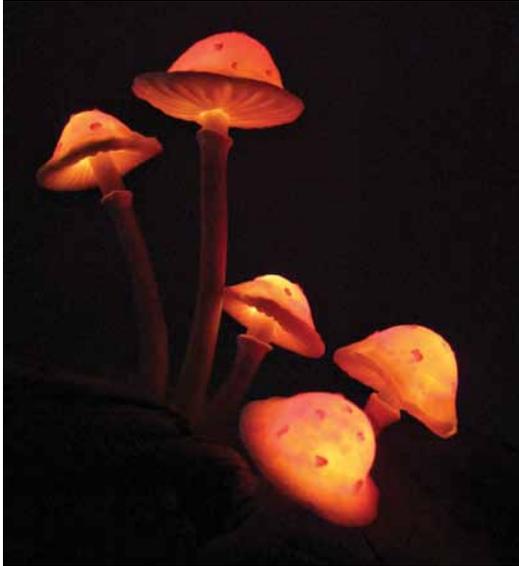


***The Tanglewood Terror***

by Kurtis Scaletta

ALFRED A. KNOPF/RANDOM HOUSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS

# The Tanglewood Terror



## SUMMARY

When Eric Parrish comes across glowing mushrooms in the woods behind his house, he's sure there's a scientific explanation. But when the fungus begins to overrun the entire town of Tanglewood – in a repeat of a blight that, legend has it, reduced the town to rubble two hundred years ago – it falls to Eric, his brother Brian, and a runaway girl named Mandy to get to the bottom of the mystery.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What is the most realistic part of the story? What did you find unrealistic or hard to believe?
3. Do you think Eric is a bully? Why or why not?
4. How does taking care of Cassie change Eric?
5. If you were Mandy, would you have made the choice to run away?
6. What is the significance of the two different colors of mushrooms?
7. Should Eric's dad pursue his dream of being a rock star or stay in Maine with his family? What would you do?
8. Maxwell Bailey's dream was to discover a true-to-life science fiction story. Have you ever seen anything in real life that was so incredible it felt like make believe?
9. If a sequel was written, what might the next adventure be for Eric and Tanglewood?
10. If you wrote a book for young readers, what topic and title would you choose?



## ABOUT KURTIS SCALETTA



*Kurtis Scaletta was born in Louisiana and grew up in New Mexico, North Dakota, England, Liberia, Brazil, and a few other places. His books for young readers include Mudville, which was a Booklist Top 10 Sports Book for Youth and Mamba Point, which the New York Times Book Review called "entertaining and touching." Kurtis now lives in Minneapolis with his wife, son, and several cats.*

**Learn more about the author at [www.kurtisscaletta.com](http://www.kurtisscaletta.com)**



Minnesota Department of Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

## A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE L'ENFANT

### What inspired you to write *Pioneer Modernists*?

In 2007 the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Museum of American Art held a joint exhibition, curated by Brian Szott and titled *In Her Own Right: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists*. It featured Frances Cranmer Greenman, Alice Hügy, Clara Mairs, Jo Lutz Rollins, and Ada Augusta Wolfe. Afton Press invited me to write a follow-up book that added Elsa Laubach Jemne and Evelyn Raymond to this distinguished list.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I read everything that had been published about these female artists, investigated their personal papers and documents in various archives, and conducted numerous interviews with their descendants, students, and collectors. I also read as much as I could about Minnesota art and modern art in general.

### What interesting challenge did you encounter in writing the book?

Pursuing seven different lines of research in writing about seven different women was a challenge,

and, since these artists were not members of a group or movement, it was exciting to discover connections among them I hadn't expected.

I want readers to know these artists and appreciate their accomplishments, for some of them were nearly forgotten.

### What do you hope readers take away from *Pioneer Modernists*?

I want readers to know these artists and appreciate their accomplishments, for some of them were nearly forgotten. I also hope the book will promote understanding of the depth and richness of Minnesota's cultural tradition. And since I teach art history to art students, many of them women, I hope it will inspire them to work hard and achieve great things right here at home.

### What do you most like about the book?

I am very grateful to Afton Press for the book's beautiful design and the excellent reproductions of the artworks. Many of these works have never before been published, or even exhibited, and so the book is a visual treasure.

### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I'm originally from Louisiana. Since moving to Minnesota in 1993, I've had opportunities to study, teach, and write about an artistic and cultural tradition that was entirely new to me. The more I learn about it, the more impressed I am with the rich cultural environment in Minnesota and the state's commitment to supporting the arts.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

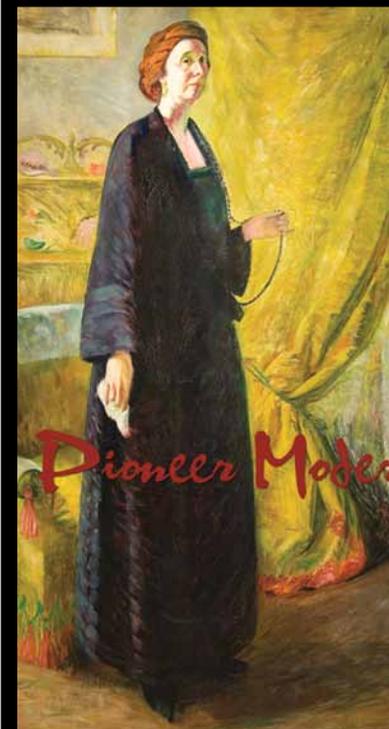
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

**Minnesota Winner**

Category sponsored by Xcel Energy



BY  
Julie L'Enfant

MINNESOTA'S  
FIRST  
GENERATION  
OF  
WOMEN  
ARTISTS

***Pioneer Modernists:  
Minnesota's First Generation  
of Women Artists***

by Julie L'Enfant

AFTON PRESS

# Pioneer Modernists

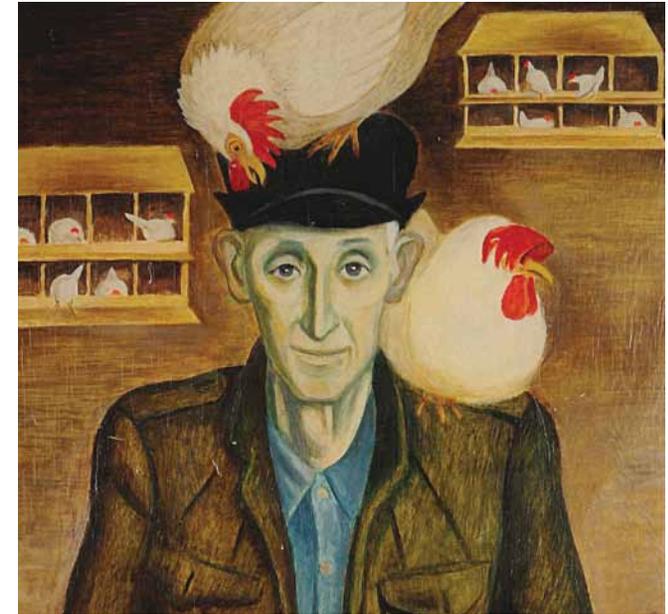


## SUMMARY

In *Pioneer Modernists*, Julie L'Enfant uses a host of sources, including previously unpublished papers, to tell the untold story of a generation of ground breaking Minnesota women artists who played a significant, yet often-overlooked role in the development of art schools, galleries, and other institutions that make the Twin Cities the major cultural center it is today.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are these women artists pioneers?
2. Modernism in art history can be defined different ways. How was the work of each of these women “modern?”
3. Most of these women did not come from privileged backgrounds. How did the decision to become an artist open up the world to them?
4. Some of these women were regarded as liberated from social conventions of their day. Would their lifestyles be seen as particularly unconventional today?
5. Does the work of these artists seem like women’s art, or could it have just as easily been created by men?
6. How did these artists use Minnesota history and culture in their work?
7. Did these artists influence Minnesota art and culture in ways that can be felt today?
8. Should these women be considered local artists, or do they have a place in the larger picture of twentieth-century art?
9. With which artist in *Pioneer Modernists* did you most identify?
10. If you wrote a book about an aspect of Minnesota history, what topic would you choose?



## ABOUT JULIE L'ENFANT



*Julie L'Enfant is professor of art history and chair of the Liberal Arts department at the College of Visual Arts in Saint Paul. She has written about various artists and writers including Dora Maar, Edith Wharton, and Virginia Woolf. Her previous books are The Gag Family: German-Bohemian Artists in America (2002), William Rossetti's Art Criticism: The Search for Truth in Victorian Art (1999), and the novel, The Dancers of Sycamore Street (1983).*



Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH NANCY PADDOCK

### What inspired you to write *A Song at Twilight*?

Throughout my family's struggle with our parents' Alzheimer's, I spilled every day's experience into my journals. It was healing to put the pain I felt into words – to tell the truth, whether good or bad. This journal-writing cleared my mind so I could concentrate on my demanding teaching job. Eventually, with encouragement from others, I turned it all into a book.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

Because this book is a memoir, my main research was examining my own feelings and memories—especially those recorded in my journals. But I also relied on oral history interviews with my parents and sisters, read books and articles about aging and Alzheimer's, and found support in the spiritual writings of Dainin Katagiri and Lao Tzu.

### How long did it take you to write *A Song at Twilight*?

I've kept journals since age 13. All through my parents' decline, which began in 1992 and ended with their deaths four days apart in 2001, I recorded events and emotions in order to clear my

mind and try to understand. In 2007, Blueroad Press included two chapters in *Stardust and Fate: The Blueroad Reader* and, in 2011, published *A Song at Twilight*. I can't say whether the book took 10 or 19 years, or even longer to write.

It's especially gratifying to learn that my book—which I believe to be honest and heartfelt—has helped some people deal with their own related problems.

### What do you like most about your award-winning book?

I love Blueroad's cover and book design and am grateful for the chance to honor my parents and tell my family's story. It's especially gratifying to learn that my book—which I believe to be honest and heartfelt—has helped some people deal with their own related problems.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

My mother, who had dreamed of being a writer, gave me a diary when I was thirteen. I soon switched to thick spiral notebooks where I recorded events, dreams, problems, beliefs, poems,

everything. As an English major at the University of Minnesota, I was inspired especially by poet James Wright. Later I joined a supportive group of women writers and began submitting poems to literary magazines.

A woman from our group founded Vanilla Press and published my first book of poems: *A Dark Light* (1978). My husband, Joe, and I worked for arts and humanities organizations, doing residencies in Minnesota schools and elsewhere. Minnesota presses—Blueroad, Milkweed, Holy Cow! and Red Dragonfly—published our work. And, of course, the support and encouragement from friends, family and especially Joe, has been essential.

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature  
General Nonfiction  
Genre Fiction  
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction  
Minnesota Novel & Short Story  
Poetry  
Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner

Category sponsored by  
Leonard, Street and Deinard



## A SONG AT TWILIGHT

*of Alzheimer's and love*

a memoir  
Nancy Paddock

***A Song at Twilight: of Alzheimer's and Love***

by Nancy Paddock

BLUE ROAD PRESS

# A Song at Twilight



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What is the importance of memory, and how does its loss or impairment change who we are, as well as what we can do?
3. How might we best prepare for our own aging?
4. In a situation in which we are essentially powerless, how can we learn to adjust, let go, and live fully in the moments we still have?
5. What qualities make a memoir a page-turner? Did you experience *A Song at Twilight* as a page-turner?
6. If you wrote a memoir about an aspect of your family's story, what would the focus and title be?
7. What role does humor play in the book? When is humor appropriate and helpful in dealing with a painful situation?
8. What risks does an author take in writing a memoir?
9. In what ways, if any, did *A Song at Twilight* provide you with insight, ideas or information for dealing with the illness of a family member or close friend?
10. The author is also a poet. Can you find examples of poetic-influence in the tone of the book, language used and/or style of writing?



## SUMMARY

Nancy Paddock's memoir chronicles her parents' descent into Alzheimer's and the challenges and choices she and her sisters face while confronting this most baffling and tragic of diseases. Discovering that she cannot save them from their crumbling reality, Paddock works to rescue the details of their lives and seeks to retrieve a pattern from chaos—preserving, examining, and reliving the interwoven stories of lovers and family.

## ABOUT NANCY PADDOCK



*Nancy Paddock is the author of two poetry collections: Cooking with Pavarotti (2012) and Trust the Wild Heart (2006) which was a Minnesota Book Awards finalist. Her poems have also appeared in many journals and anthologies. Nancy lives and gardens in Litchfield with her husband, Joe. She writes and does other work in support of sustainable and environmentally sound agriculture.*



Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## A CONVERSATION WITH GREGORY BLAKE SMITH

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

Some of the short-short stories included in the collection are set in times or places remote from my experience. There's a young Chinese woman during the Cultural Revolution, a Muslim boy in Tangier, a Russian woman who survived the Siege of Leningrad. For those stories, I had to do a fair amount of reading and research to get the facts and the feel of the time and place right.

### How long did it take you to write *The Law of Miracles*?

Interestingly, one of the stories in this collection was written when I was a student at the Iowa Writers' Workshop thirty years ago. But the rest of the stories were written over the five-year period just before the book's publication.

### What do you hope readers take away from the book?

Each story is different, and I would hope the reader would enjoy each in itself (like the courses of a good dinner), while

also having a sense of the book's overarching themes.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I went to the Iowa Writers' Workshop and since those days I've been a working writer. I've managed to publish three novels and this collection of stories, while also working full-time as an English professor at Carleton College in Northfield.

### What are you currently writing?

I'm currently working on a novel set in Newport, Rhode Island. The novel has five parallel stories which take place in times ranging from 1692 to the present. By parallel, I mean that the stories are concerned with the same thematic and moral dynamics, but alter the particularities of character, circumstance, gender, etc. so that each story extends or deepens or offers a variant of the novel's central theme.

---

Each story is different, and I would hope the reader would enjoy each in itself (like the courses of a good dinner), while also having a sense of the book's overarching themes.

---

## Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

  
**THE FRIENDS**  
OF THE SAINT PAUL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
325 Cedar Street  
Suite 555  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-222-3242  
[www.thefriends.org](http://www.thefriends.org)

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

24TH ANNUAL

# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Novel & Short Story Winner

Sponsored by Anchor Trust

## THE LAW & MIRACLES



AND OTHER STORIES

GREGORY BLAKE SMITH

*The Law of Miracles and Other Stories*

by Gregory Blake Smith

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS PRESS

# The Law of Miracles and Other Stories



## SUMMARY

*The Law of Miracles* is a collection of short stories in which characters navigate between the everyday and the extraordinary. While settings range from St. Petersburg to Venice to rural Indiana – and the characters are nearly as varied – there lies in each tale the suspicion that the transcendent lies just at the edge of perception.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. The collection has a structure of short-short stories, moral problems, in between each of the longer short stories. How does this affect your reading of the book?
3. Are there ways in which the "moral problems" speak to certain themes or concerns you find in the longer stories, or in the book as a whole?
4. In the story "Punishment" the main character, who sees herself as always having been "a good girl," is brutally beaten by a stranger. What "moral problem" does this present for the main character? How do you see her Catholic upbringing figuring into this?
5. The story "Being and Nothingness (Not a Real Title)" seems to play around with postmodern ideas of identity as being indeterminate and variable. And yet the main character insists that "somebody has to stick up for reality." Discuss the interplay of the real and the unreal in this story.
6. At the end of "The Madonna of the Relics" the art restorer seems to understand that the discoloration in the angel's wings in the painting he has been working on was done intentionally. How does this moment of "revelation" inform this story and the movement of the main character towards the young woman?
7. The title story, subtitled "Five Ways My Wife Could Die," presents the reader with varying realities in

which the main character's wife dies in different ways. Only in the last paragraph does the reader learn that it is in fact the main character's young son who has died. How does this last "fact" resonate backward through the story?

8. Compare the title story, "The Law of Miracles," with "Destroying Herman Yoder."
9. To what extent did you experience a connection among the stories? What techniques did the author use to tie the stories together?
10. Do you think it would be easier to write a novel or collection of short stories?

## ABOUT GREGORY BLAKE SMITH



*Gregory Blake Smith holds an A.B. summa cum laude from Bowdoin College and an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His writing has earned numerous awards. He is the author of three novels: The Madonna of Las Vegas, The Devil in the Dooryard, and The Divine Comedy of John Venner. Smith's short fiction has appeared in several literary journals and been reprinted in anthologies.*

*Since 1987, Smith has taught American literature and creative writing at Carleton College in Northfield, where he lives with his wife and daughter*

*Learn more about the author and his work at <http://apps.carleton.edu/people/smith/>.*



INSTITUTE of  
Museum and Library  
SERVICES

Minnesota Department of  
Education



The Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Statewide outreach partners include: the Loft Literary Center, Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota

Department of Education—State Library Services; Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; and *Saint Paul Almanac*. Major funding for the Book Awards was provided by the Boss Foundation, Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; the Hognander Family Foundation; the Huss Foundation; the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; a Library Services and Technology Act grant administered through the Office of State Library Services.

# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS