

# The Seventh Week

clarion west writers workshop • spring 2014

INTERVIEW

## Eileen Gunn: Stubborn and Tightly Stacked

NISI SHAWL (CW 92)

*Seattle-based author Eileen Gunn's subversive genius has contributed not only to the greater glory of literature, but to the improved Clarion West experiences of hundreds of alumni. A recipient of SFWA's Nebula and Japan's Sense of Gender Award, Gunn has been nominated for the Hugo and Philip K. Dick awards, and her work appears on the short list for the 2004 James Tiptree, Jr. Award. She's a tough and insightful editor, responsible for the second volume of Aqueduct Press's WisCon Chronicles and the online speculative fiction website The Infinite Matrix. Her fiction and nonfiction have been published inside and outside the genre in magazines such as Asimov's SF, Nature, and Smithsonian. The Norton Anthology of Science Fiction includes her "Stable Strategies for Middle Management" among its 57 essential genre stories.*

**You're one of the smartest people I know. How does intelligence help you write? Does it hurt in any way?**

What helps people become writers or poets is not the stuff of IQ tests. It's not how many big words they know or how



Eileen Gunn

many tricks of the trade they've mastered. It's the drive to tell stories and/or express their emotions that makes people writers — coupled with a desire to effectively put the results on paper. I can't say that pure intelligence, whatever that means, either helps or hinders me. It might be that the innate characteristic that most helps me write well is stubbornness.

**With CW cofounder JT Stewart, you've taught a Mystery Muse poetry workshop for CW students for several years. What's it about?**

JT Stewart is a brilliant poet and a brilliant teacher and mentor, and this lunch-time workshop comes from her many years of teaching. The concept is that writing poetry can give fiction writers deeper insights into the fiction that they're working on: it's about poetry as a practice, not a result. Writing poetry gives you access to

a part of your consciousness that writing fiction may not get to on its own. We guarantee participants that they will write two poems during the two-hour session. Some of the poems that they have shared have been startlingly good.

**You've also taught a Clarion West One-Day Workshop session on overcoming writers' block. Is there any advice on that topic you can offer us?**

The workshop, "Going Through an Impasse," was not so much about learning to overcome writer's block as it was about learning to understand your own writing process and how to give yourself opportunities to write productively even if you're feeling blocked. In terms of a particular technique, I've found that timed bursts of writing can be very helpful: pick a scene or moment from your story, and write for 15 minutes without stopping to think about what you're writing, or correcting anything, or looking back in any way. Using a visual prompt — a photo or painting that you're not overly familiar with — can be helpful in starting a story. I tend not to find verbal prompts very helpful.

**You received a Nebula Award for "Coming to Terms" in 2004. Is that your favorite of your short stories? The best? Do you know why it won?**

Well, I certainly hope it's not my best: I wrote it fifteen years ago, and I'd like to think I've developed a few new chops in the interim. My favorite is probably whatever one I just finished. Why that one won a Nebula is a tricky and probably meaningless question. It didn't win because it

► was the “best” story: it won because more people voted for it than voted for five other stories. Possibly it won by only a few votes: unlike the Hugos, Nebula voting is not made public. It’s certainly not a perfect story, but its irregularities are evidence of hand craftsmanship and should not necessarily be considered defects.



Nebula Award given to Eileen Gunn

**You attended Clarion in 1976. Where were you? Who were your teachers? Did you learn anything important?**

I went to Clarion when it was held at Michigan State University, in East Lansing. We were in the basement of a dormitory, during peak tornado season. My instructors were Robin Scott Wilson, Joe and Gay Haldeman, Thomas N. Disch, Joanna Russ, and Kate Wilhelm and Damon Knight. Fellow students included James Patrick Kelly, Leslie What, Cynthia Felice, and Robert Morales. I was already an experienced advertising writer when I attended Clarion, but the bonds I formed there with my instructors and fellow students made me part of a community of writers with whom I shared aesthetic concerns. The most important thing I learned there is that my subconscious knows more about what I’m doing than I do.

**As noted above, you’re an alumna of Clarion, and you served on Clarion West’s board for 22 years. What do you see as the relationship between the two workshops? Are they siblings? Rivals? Both?**

Both workshops are descended from the original workshop that Robin Scott Wilson founded in 1968 in Clarion, PA. They have evolved over the years to be slightly different, like fraternal twins, but are far more like one another than they are like any other workshops. The important commonalities are: six weeks of rigorous self-examination and interpersonal struggle, isolation from ordinary life, and the fact that every week there’s a different instructor with a different approach to fiction. Although a modest amount of sibling rivalry is both inevitable and necessary, grads of both workshops share a commitment to rigorous pursuit of quality — not to mention a touch of Stockholm syndrome.

**Why did you join Clarion West’s board of directors? What did you do as part of it? Why did you leave?**

I joined in 1988 because I wanted to help ensure that Clarion methods and values were carried on by both workshops with the Clarion name. In addition to attending Clarion, I had spent a number of years in Kate and Damon’s “Milford” workshop in Eugene, and I felt I had a good idea of what made Clarion valuable. I especially wanted to participate in instructor selection, because the quality of the people who teach is of critical importance.

When I joined the board, CW was trying hard to attract students and keep its head above water financially. Clarion was stiff competition. It had been around for 20 years, and had a string of stellar alumni. Kate and Damon still taught there and selected the students. I offered to handle the strategy and execution of CW’s marketing goals.

To attract students, CW needed its own identity, separate from Clarion — but not disparaging of it, because both workshops offered essentially the same thing. To project an image of quality, it needed

quality advertising and printed materials, which it did not have. (And neither did Clarion.) To attract a diversity of students, marketing alone would not help: it needed to have a diversity of teachers, and it needed to reach out to people who had been mostly ignored by the white SF community.

Clarion West was founded with a special commitment to diversity in both instructors and students, so I don’t mean to imply that I was the only one who cared about diversity. Attracting a diverse student body is just the beginning of a sometimes volatile process, and, as you know, Nisi, your joining the board in 1996 meant we had more energy and knowledge in its implementation. The growth of a prosperous scholarship fund has helped ease some economic inequities. As the SF field itself has become more diverse, CW now has a broader commitment to diversity and better understanding of how to implement it.

I left the board because I felt the organization was stable and healthy. For 22 years, I had been spending 20 – 60 hours a month, year-round, participating in making Clarion West work, and I felt I’d done my part. By 2010, the organization had strong systems and cultural traditions in place for student and instructor selection, for classroom methods, and for maintaining diversity and financial stability. It had a strong and energized board, and solid local alumni support. It was a good time to let other people come in and manage in their own ways.

**Your latest book, *Questionable Practices*, is your second story collection. What are short stories good at doing? What are they bad at?**

Pretty much any statement that starts out “Short stories are not good for —” makes me want to sit down and prove that they could too be good for whatever that is. It’s not the form that is good or bad at something. It’s the writer.

About the only thing that short stories are not good at doing is helping pay the rent. I was going to say that they’re not good for building fireplaces, but I bet if you stack them tightly and cover them with mud, they’ll work well enough. ♦

# Letter for You

## From Our Chair and Our Executive Director

KAREN G. ANDERSON AND  
CAROLINE BOBANICK



Board of Directors Chair Karen G. Anderson



Executive Director Caroline Bobanick

Time for some experimental writing: The first joint letter from a Clarion West board chair, Karen G. Anderson, and a Clarion West executive director, Caroline Bobanick.

While our responsibilities are different, our focuses are quite similar, including refining and strengthening Clarion West's many systems.

As always, new and creative ideas abound. But our immediate concerns are to make sure that our existing programs are running well and that they are financially sustainable. Quality programming — from our Six-Week Workshop to the One-Day Workshops to the Summer Reading Series — is the top priority.

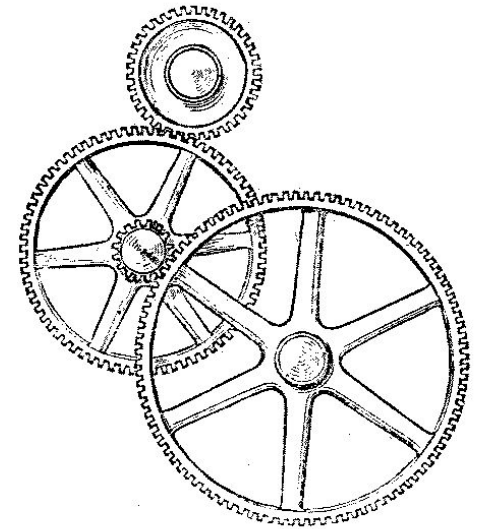
Fiscal management is also a concern as tuition received from students covers only a small portion of our operating costs. The One-Day Workshops are intended to be self-sustaining as well as to increase Clarion West's value to the writing community. We've been asked to create other short workshop programs, but we need to first make sure that we're managing existing ones as effectively as possible.

Of course, even when we want to focus on fine-tuning existing systems, change occurs. Thus Clarion West is currently embarked on finding a new residential setting for next summer's Six-Week Workshop. Yes, the wonderful building we currently rent, and which we'll still have for 2014, is scheduled for major renovation in 2015. That means that in 2015 — and possibly in the years following that — the Six-Week Workshop will have a new home in the Seattle area. We don't know if a new location will increase our costs, but we are prepared to deal with increases if they occur.

As we head into 2014, our focus is increasingly on strengthening our communications with our alumni and friends. We are excited to announce that our new communications specialist, Kris Millering, will be curating a monthly online Alumni News feature starting this spring, and expanding Clarion West's social media presence. We've also invested in a new website and are upgrading the related systems for handling donations, registration, the annual Write-a-thon, and other business processes. These updates help us better meet the needs of our supporters

and expectations of granting agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts. They also help us reduce risk and improve long term planning. (Major thanks to web designer Erik Owomoyela, database guru Kate Schaefer, and web consultant Kathy Gill.)

We are looking forward to a wonderful summer, and you'll hear more about that in the Workshop Report. We hope to see you at the Tuesday readings and Friday parties. And it's not too early to note that we are planning at least one fundraising event in Seattle this fall — stay tuned for details. ♦





# Eventful Horizon

## Our First Workshop Report

NEILE GRAHAM (CW 96)  
AND HUW EVANS (CW 12)



Workshop Director Neile Graham



Workshop Administrator Huw Evans

We cut our teeth as an administrative team on Clarion West's One-Day Workshops. Taking the baton from Leslie Howle, we've held six exhilarating One-Day sessions since September (led by Daniel Abraham, Karen Joy Fowler, Kij Johnson, Eileen Gunn, Nancy Kress, and Ellen Klages), and we have three more to come in the near future (led by Rachel Swirsky, Nicola Griffith, and Lisa Gold and Louisa Marley as a co-teaching team). Both alumni and writers new to Clarion West have attended, with some students coming from as far as Colorado and Nebraska.

Now we have selected our first Clarion West class. Eighteen students, hailing from Nigeria, Portugal, China, Australia, Canada, and all over the United States, are preparing to join us in Seattle for six weeks. Those of you who are alumni will remember your own nerve-wracking preparations: weeks of negotiating with the rest of your life, planning travel, determining survival essentials for life in a sorority room, reading your instructors' works, and getting acquainted with classmates online, asking yourself all the while what adventures await, and wondering how they will affect you.

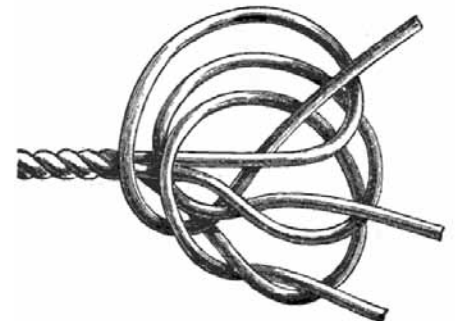
We're planning and preparing for the upcoming Six-Week session, too — we've recruited newly retired Workshop Director Leslie Howle and workshop graduate Caren Gussoff Sumption to assist us this summer. We've already begun to benefit from their expertise, and are delighted we'll have their support during that hectic time. As we look ahead, we may even be as excited as the new students, because we remember how transformational our own Clarion West experiences were, how they altered and expanded our worlds.

**Neile:** My turn was in 1996. With seven years of university writing workshops under my belt, I was confident I'd already learned everything workshops could teach me when my husband encouraged me to apply. I didn't get excited about what Clarion West could offer me until I got the invitational call from Dave Myers. I immediately tracked down a couple of classmates for online introductions, then finally met all my class members (Twenty of us! Sixteen men and four women!) in person in June, and spent six exciting, galvanizing, terrifying, and inspiring weeks

with them and our wonderful instructors. I lost my heart to each and every person in that classroom: fellow students, our instructors, and the staff and volunteers. By the end of it I didn't feel like the same person. At all. I am, of course, but a version of that person reshaped by those six weeks with those people.

**Huw:** When I applied in 2012, I'd just stepped free of an ill-suited career in order to pursue my dream of writing fiction. I had no expectation of getting in, but bolstered by my wife's encouragement and armed with skills acquired in recent CW One-Day Workshops and Cat Rambo's SF writing course, I prepared my submission, sent it, and held my breath. Then the shock: a call from Les. Blessed call. During the next ten weeks, my class exchanged a thousand plus emails, so when we met in person, we were already friends. Then, for six weeks, we inhabited a parallel universe, and though we remained ourselves, we changed. Individually, we were augmented and empowered, but as a group, we twined and meshed and fused, became a new creature. Then it ended. But in addition to stories read, words written, wisdom bestowed, and a realization that sleep really can be postponed indefinitely, at the end of the workshop, a new family emerged and we live on, so the end was a beginning. Now I am joyed, honored, humbled, and very excited to witness and assist as the next cohort builds its own communal cocoon — its own pocket universe in which to struggle, grow, and create. In which to lose and find itself.

That's why we can hardly wait to meet these 18 new Clarion West students of the class of 2014. Their transformation is about to begin. ♦



# Rolling with the Punches

MARK BUKOVEC (CW 06)



Mark Bukovec

A physics professor of mine once said that Lenz's Law\* is the most human of all laws in physics because it's about resistance to change. I grew up near Pittsburgh, and we had a saying that if you didn't like the weather, just wait a minute. That's pretty much the way life is, but sometimes that weather goes from rain to a thunderstorm, and then to a tornado, and then a sharknado (Google it), so waiting isn't such a great strategy. You've got books to write!

Well, what's one to do? Sit in front of the computer, mostly. A lot. I don't have to tell most of you how prosaic the actual job of being a writer is. Even Hemingway religiously put in his writing time before heading off to the bar to arm-wrestle marlin and bears.

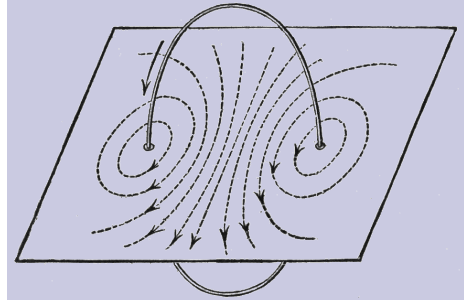
So, romantic notions notwithstanding, writers become time hoarders. You figure you can write a few pages in an hour. What if you had more hours? That would be even more pages (the actual math is left as an exercise for the reader). Soon you scrutinize every obligation in your life and calculate how you could write the equivalent of all the outstanding books in *A Song of Ice and Fire* in a month IF YOU JUST HAD MORE TIME!

You wonder how you can skirt the vicissitudes of life in order to stoke the creative furnace that smelts time into words. (I'm smelting right now!) You might consider enrolling in graduate school in creative writing (wrong answer, but I won't get into that here). How about one of those writer retreats like Bread Loaf? But not for artsy-fartsy fiction? I know—Clarion West!

Now, at this moment you alumni are rolling your collective eyes (try not to visualize this) because you know the dirty little secret of The Workshop: you don't have any time to write! You spend all morning in class, you spend the afternoon critiquing stories for the next day, and you spend the evening drinking (YOU HAVE TO DO THIS — DON'T YOU WANT TO BE A WRITER?!?!?!). Most of my writing was done between midnight and breakfast.

You're so tired that you end up writing a story about a time-traveling ham sandwich (she's looking for mustard, but not just any mustard . . . it could work after a rewrite). You sit quietly and are told all your failings (by all the other students plus

\*Lenz's Law concerns the induced electric current created by a changing magnetic field. This is fundamental to how generators work, without which our power grid wouldn't exist. Lenz's Law is essentially the minus sign in Faraday's Law, indicating that the induced current, in turn, induces another magnetic field to oppose the change. I like to imagine Michael Faraday spending a muggy summer day painting his house, after which his buddy Heinrich Lenz strolls over, assesses the work, grabs a brush and dabs a missed spot. "My work is done," he says, and helps himself to a glass of Faraday's claret.



the instructor). You think, "Hey, what happened to all that time I was supposed to have for writing?"

Yet somehow, when it's over, you've written six stories. Looking back, I realize that this is the genius of the workshop—you learn how to write under duress. It's the way you're going to be writing for the rest of your life (or until the Singularity . . . you know how it goes.)

When I began my Clarion West session (back in 2006), my youngest child Zack was 5 weeks old. My other kids were 2 and 4, so I knew my honeymoon would be abruptly over the moment I stepped out of the sorority house. Man, was it ever.

You see, while talking with my wife during the workshop, I'd found out that Alex, my two-year-old was having problems at preschool. He would wander around talking to himself on the playground. He couldn't sit still and participate in circle (for you non-parents, that's where the kids sit in a circle).

By fall, Alex had been diagnosed with autism. I'd stayed at home with my first child Nicky and sleepily written the lousy ►

► cyberpunk novel that was my admission piece for Clarion West. But now I was spending my days at a facility for kids with disabilities. I watched Alex take a speech test and was told he tested at one percent. Not the top one percent, that is. In moments like that you see the future disappearing.

Over time, I've come to think that a corollary of any piece of writing advice is the exact opposite of the advice itself. Here, I'll turn the most fundamental piece of writing advice on its head, the advice saying that a writer must write every day. I'm telling you don't have to. There are times when your energy needs to go elsewhere. There are times when you'll get no joy from it, and that joylessness will nullify what you put on the page.

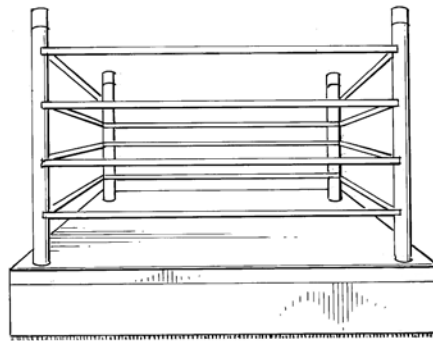
Here's my advice for getting back to work and having fun while doing it. Use this fallow time to exercise. It does wonders for combating depression and you'll get muscles that make you sexy. I took up boxing at age 42, so don't tell me you can't take a walk around the block or swim. Take time to read, watch movies, or whatever you enjoy. Volunteer — do not withdraw from other people.

When I was ready to write again, I did it in small intervals, 15 minutes a day — sometimes less. Then I'd try to get another interval in, maybe a third. I didn't wait for the ideal three-hour block of free time to arise. It wasn't going to happen. I find it more vital to keep the story fresh in my mind. My best ideas arise when I'm not sitting down. I use my phone to write the next sentence or leave a voice memo to myself if I'm in a pinch. I don't obsess over word counts anymore. Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is twenty words long (including the title) and it's the one thing he's written that most people remember.

Alex will be ten by the time this is published. He attends school. A classroom aide helps him through some of the more difficult parts of his day, like getting him not to say everything that he thinks of out loud. He has friends, goes to birthday parties, and this summer he'll go to a sleep-away camp for a week. These are things I never thought would happen — for a so-called speculative fiction writer, I clearly lack imagination. He also has a fondness for pop music, and I have to endure a lot

of Miley Cyrus. So it's not all unicorns and rainbows.

I live in Seattle, and I see the incoming Clarion West classes every year. Every graduate re-enters a world that is indifferent to their dreams. I see those same students overcome that and write anyway. All of us have it within us. (Take it from a guy who gets punched in the face by boxers twenty years younger than me at the gym.) Change can't be controlled — you'll get knocked around a bit. And then you'll pick yourself up off the canvas and fire punches right back. ♦



# Clarion West Writers Workshop

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# All That Glitters

DAN TREFETHEN



Dan Trefethen

Our new treasurer shows off his copy of Clarion West's 30th Anniversary anthology, *Telling Tales*.

Some of you know me from author readings, parties, and other Clarion West events, while some of you have met me in my new role as CW's treasurer. However, I have not been very active in volunteering for CW in the past, so a few words of introduction are in order.

I'm a librarian by profession and have served two terms on the board of a large international association, Special Libraries Association (SLA). During 2010-2012 I was SLA's treasurer. When my term there ended I mentioned to some CW board members that I would be willing to do some volunteer work. After an initial piece of volunteering, I was asked if I would consider succeeding Susan Gossman as treasurer. Our discussions led, as you can see, to me agreeing to do it.

Why I want to help CW is probably the same reason you do: Because we have a successful formula for forging excellent

writers and supporting our community. I am not a professional writer. Nor do I think of myself as a fan. What I am is an avid reader and collector. I know how precious this Clarion West community is, and in a selfish way I want to support it so that I can continue to read and collect great fiction from new and exciting writers. I believe I can help by bringing my previous nonprofit board experience and service to my work as a treasurer to CW.

And so to the task at hand. Alongside this article you'll find a financial summary of 2013 and our budget for 2014. As you can see, CW had a very good year in 2013, running a surplus of over 10% due to a number of factors. The degree of financial support provided by contributors is one of the things that pleased me when I first went over the books.

The success of the past few years has allowed us to take steps to improve our service to the community, including increasing hours for our part-time executive director and workshop administrator as well investing in a new website. However, these changes incur costs, and we will need to account for them. You can see that the budget for 2014 is a "break-even budget" with a marginal surplus that provides a small cushion against Murphy's Law. In order to cover our expenses we will need to continue to fundraise successfully. We have some new initiatives and special events planned that you will read about soon. We will continue the popular and successful Write-a-thon and appeals to individuals for scholarships, instructorships, and operating support. Since workshop tuition covers only one-third of our total costs we rely on our community of friends to provide that bulwark of support that keeps CW humming. Indeed, that's how I first got engaged with CW — by sending a check to the annual appeal.

This is an exciting time to be involved with CW. There are some alumni moving into new staff positions, and some positions being filled by people who are relatively new to our culture, such as Caroline and me. We are all committed to working hard to make this year another success, and to staying focused on the mission of CW: providing writers with the skills they need to fulfill their potential and enrich the field of speculative fiction. ♦

## Financial Report for 2013, Budget for 2014

	Actual 2013	Budget 2014
<b>Income</b>		
Unrestricted donations	16,940	14,500
Write-a-thon	20,808	26,000
Restricted donations	43,646	31,500
Matching Funds	3,161	4,000
Instructorships	2,000	12,000
Special Events/Readings	8,281	10,000
Grants	36,445	32,000
Workshop Income	83,510	69,300
Tuition offset by scholarships	-34,000	-33,800
One-Day Workshops	13,390	10,000
Other	5,821	3,050
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>200,002</b>	<b>178,550</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Special Events/Readings	12,565	6,800
Seventh Week newsletter	1,858	2,550
Workshop	77,330	77,405
One-Day Workshops	7,431	9,000
Administration	69,288	69,400
Fundraising	7,770	10,750
Total Expenses	176,242	175,905
<b>Surplus</b>	<b>\$23,760</b>	<b>\$2,645</b>



# Clarion West Invites You to Send Updates for Our New Alumni News

Alumni News is moving from *The Seventh Week* to its own section of the Clarion West website! We'll be able to bring you the latest updates from Clarion West alumni and instructors more quickly, so you can read them while they're still fresh. The Alumni News page is still under construction and will make its debut in April.

Have something to share? Email [alumni@clarionwest.org](mailto:alumni@clarionwest.org). We're interested in:

- Book releases
- Sales and publications
- Awards and nominations
- Appearances
- Teaching engagements
- Births, deaths, marriages, and all sorts of other life passages

Don't be shy — this is your chance to let everyone know what's happening! ♦

# Newsletter Schedule Change

Clarion West is changing the schedule and focus of *The Seventh Week*. Starting in Spring 2015, our newsletter will become an annual community report. There will be no Fall newsletter in 2014, but keep an eye on <http://www.clarionwest.org> for exciting developments throughout the year — One-Day Workshop announcements, updates from the Six-Week Workshop and the Write-a-thon, and much more. ♦