

ENGLISH

A Slice of Life at Bread Loaf

Poet **Jennifer Grotz** calls herself a “Bread Loaf poster child.” The associate professor of English first went to the famed Vermont writers’ conference as a 23-year-old graduate student, paying her way by waiting tables in the dining room. Since 2005, she has been assistant director of the annual August conference that was founded by poet Robert Frost and has run continuously since 1926. This year, the conference will take on a pronounced Rochester flavor, when Grotz is joined by poet **James Longenbach**, the Joseph Henry Gilmore Professor of English, and novelist **Joanna Scott**, the Roswell Smith Burrows Professor of English, who are members of the 2013 faculty.

What is Bread Loaf like?

It’s like a summer camp for writers. It’s on this rural campus, very beautiful, on a little mountaintop in the Green Mountains, which is called Bread Loaf Mountain. That’s how the conference got its name.

What makes it unique?

People respect the history and integrity of Bread Loaf. It’s the oldest and the most prestigious writing conference in the country—and it was at Bread Loaf that the creative writing workshop, that staple of American universities, was more or less invented. One of the things I really treasure about director Michael Collier’s vision for Bread Loaf is an ongoing emphasis that the conference remain about teaching and workshops, not just networking with editors or agents, though they attend the conference as well.

Is it for writers just starting out?

Yes, but there are different ways

to attend, depending on where you are in your apprenticeship and career. Now acceptance is so competitive—we had 1,700 applications this summer for 150 slots—that many writers attending are slightly older than in the past. The competition is keen, especially for scholarship positions, but there is still a true diversity of people who attend every year, from the ages of about 20 to 80 and beyond.

How does it work?

Sometimes folks think you write there, but you don’t. The time is much too busy and packed with readings and lectures and workshops. It’s also very social. You do your writing during the year, by yourself, in your “garret.” When you go to Bread Loaf, you bring work in progress. So the

workshop is about sharing work you submitted with the goal of receiving constructive feedback. Workshops are buttressed with craft classes and lectures and readings by faculty and fellows and waiters—pretty much everyone reads. When I get back from Bread Loaf, I’ve heard significant chunks from the entire landscape of contemporary American writing.

How does being at Bread Loaf compare to life during the academic year?

Writers by and large have been sort of tamed into the academy, and that’s a good thing. I think the university is a great ecosystem for writers, and I also think writers contribute a lot to the university environment. I consider myself a poet-teacher, and as such, I

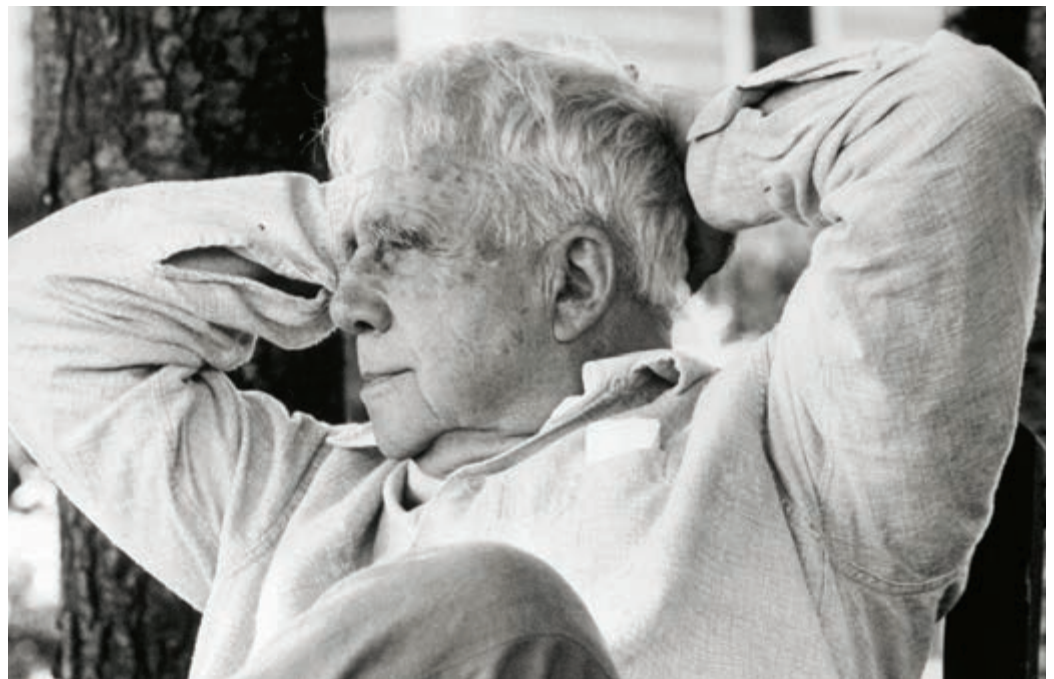
teach poetry as well as write it, so I talk about it with students, I conduct workshops, and then as a published poet I’m also traveling and giving readings. I have a hybrid and very lucky life getting to do that during the year, but most writers really don’t—and they crave ways to be part of a writing community as well as to continue to improve their skills. Often participants at Bread Loaf are lawyers or high school teachers or nurses or folks who have a professional life but still want to pursue their writing.

What do you value most in the experience?

Writing is lonely, and it’s competitive, and it’s filled with moments of doubt and rejection. Bread Loaf—with its emphasis on nurturing new talent, reading and conversations, celebrating all the writing of the culture—well, it’s kind of the antidote to that. That’s my hope.

—Kathleen McGarvey

The Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference was once the subject of an episode of *The Simpsons*—a sure sign of its cultural stature, says assistant director Jennifer Grotz.



FIRST POET: Founded by poet Robert Frost, Bread Loaf has run continuously since 1926.

CARDIOLOGY

Keeping Hearts Healthy—on a ‘Justice Basis’

Making healthy choices easy is key to preventing heart disease and stroke, says **Thomas Pearson**, director of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute and Albert David Kaiser Chair of Public Health Sciences. And supporting people’s efforts to be healthy is only fair.

Pearson is the coauthor of new guidelines from the American Heart Association to help communities improve cardiovascular health. Rochester has long been a leader in the kind of community-based prevention programs envisioned by the new guidelines.

How does changing the environment help heart health—and what makes that a matter of fairness?

One example is nutrition. We did a nutritional readout of the foods served at the Medical Center’s cafeterias. One of the concerns was all the sodium in soup. So we ratcheted down the sodium—on a justice basis. If you have high blood pressure or heart failure, or any of the other reasons why you shouldn’t have a high-sodium diet, it’s unjust because we haven’t provided you with anything to eat. If you want to shake extra salt into the soup, you can. But the default option is healthy.

Why is it important to take on heart health at the community level?

If we’re going to prevent heart disease and stroke, simply relying on medical interventions won’t get us there. So we’re focused on changing the context to make people’s default deci-

sions healthier. We came up with healthy behaviors we’d like to encourage—not reducing bad behaviors but encouraging healthy behaviors.

How effective do you expect these guidelines to be?

We have everything we need to prevent heart disease. I’m not saying we shouldn’t be doing research, and heart failure is still a problem. But places that have implemented our guidelines have had huge reductions over very short periods of time in the number of heart disease cases. It’s been the leading cause of death for over 100 years in the United States. By 2020, in many places it won’t be anymore.

Is this a new way of approaching medical care?

An article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* recently, by David Asch and Kevin Volpp, argues that what people really want is health. Not health care—health. The U.S. health care system needs to figure out how to keep people healthy, not how to treat their disease.

We’re in a terrific position, with guidelines like this, to say, we’re going to spend X amount of dollars—what should we spend it on? And to say we need another surgical suite or another CAT scan is basically to say people want health care. To have community programs, community engagement, and better outpatient facilities and wellness programs is more consistent with what people want: health.

—Kathleen McGarvey

Communities can act to prevent heart disease and stroke by making it easier to choose healthy options.



COMPUTER ENGINEERING

Can Your Smartphone Hear You Crying on the Inside?

If you feel as if your smartphone is your best friend, that relationship might be about to deepen.

A team of Rochester engineers is developing a computer algorithm that assesses human emotion in speech, with greater accuracy than existing approaches.

Wendi Heinzelman, professor of electrical and computer engineering, is collaborating with other researchers to develop an app that will detect emotions in voices.

It’s a tool designed for use in a study of family conflict among parents and teens led by **Melissa Sturge-Apple**, assistant professor of clinical and social sciences in psychology, but the concept has provoked broad interest.

The group presented its

research at the IEEE Workshop on Spoken Language Technology last December.

Computers may have an edge over human assessors because of their lack of biases, says Heinzelman. Given optimal data to work with, “I actually think the computer would be

better” than people in judging emotion, she says.

By the end of the summer, Heinzelman’s team hopes to have an app that can label an utterance emotionally positive, negative, or neutral. And the research has more to it than the mood rings of old.

Such a device could ultimately aid people with autism or other conditions that make it hard for them to interpret others’ emotions.

—Kathleen McGarvey

How you speak— independent of the words you say— may be enough for a computer to tag the mood you feel.