

The Georgia Review Editorial Voices web feature

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Long Road to the Big Apple

Here at *The Georgia Review* we're now in our sixty-sixth year of continuous quarterly publication, and though I've been around for only fourteen of those years I've dug deeply enough into the magazine's history to have formed a good sense of what has changed and what has not. I'd like to consider what's changed, so allow me to first observe what's been consistent over the course of more than two hundred and sixty issues: a genuine, adamant commitment to good writing, first and last. Though what constitutes "good writing" has always been debatable (naturally), and though literary standards and tastes have shifted, changed, and evolved with the passage of time and the occasional changing of *The Georgia Review's* editorial guard, I firmly believe that each of the magazine's nine lead editors sought, acquired, and printed absolutely the strongest fiction, nonfiction, and poetry they could find. I know for certain that this effort has been at the core of our mission in the years I've been privileged to work for *GR*.

Our commitment to quality writing has been constant, but *The Georgia Review's* stated editorial aims, the diversity of our readers and that of the writers whose work we publish, and the geographical reach of our subscriber base and "influence" (if I may be permitted to employ such

a loaded, slippery term) have all changed considerably since our first issue came out in Spring 1947. *The Georgia Review* was conceived by founding editor John Donald Wade as a publication that would literally be true to its name, one that would attempt “to make its contents of special concern to Georgians,” that would “try to confine itself, *at least for the time being*, to topics that bear somewhat closely upon the history, literature, art, education, and social activities of Georgia” (italics mine). Despite Wade’s caveat that “the *Review* will not adhere rigidly to a program of being always explicitly ‘Georgian,’” there is no question that in its first twenty-five or so years the focus of the magazine was primarily regional and agrarian. Browsing the tables of contents of those early years makes that focus clear -- one sees titles such as “Regional Library Development and Service in Georgia” (Fall 1949), “The Pasture Potential in Georgia” (1954), and “Hunting in the Old South,” (1966). When Wade and his editorial successors John Olin Eidson (1950–57), William Wallace Davidson (1957–68), and James B. Colvert (1968–72) included material that was not strictly regional, it was most often of a political or scholarly bent: “The South and the One-Party System” (1948), “Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness” (Spring 1957), “Shakespeare and Southern Folklore” (Winter 1967), or “Time and Man’s Possibilities in *Light in August*” (Spring 1971). It is true, however, that Eidson, Davidson, Colvert, and Edward J. Krickel (1972–74) increasingly concentrated on the quality of the writing rather than on the local interest of the subject matter or the mailing addresses of the authors.

It was the *Review*’s sixth editor, John T. Irwin (1974–77), who gave the journal a major push toward its present status (though not its present focus): Irwin, emphasizing literary criticism rather than primary works, and calling upon such big-name critics and writers as Harold Bloom

and Jacques Derrida, began moving *The Georgia Review* toward the national (and even international) prominence it still retains today.

Only during the long editorship of Stanley W. Lindberg (1977 - 2000), however, did *The Georgia Review* truly achieve name-recognition on a national scale. He opted for essays of broad artistic and cultural concern rather than theoretical critical articles; he brought art portfolios into the regular mix of each issue; he upped the ante on active editorial involvement with accepted manuscripts; and he took special pleasure in “discovering” new talent. This last made the *Review* among the first to publish many writers whose careers subsequently blossomed—including Lee K. Abbott, T. C. Boyle, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Rita Dove, Mary Hood, Judith Kitchen, Judson Mitcham, and George Singleton. Lindberg was in charge in 1985 when the *Review* was honored with its first two nominations as finalist by the National Magazine Awards and in 1986 when the magazine won its first Ellie -- in the fiction category, for a trio of stories by Lee K. Abbott, Gary Gildner, and Mary Hood. Over the remaining fourteen years of Lindberg’s editorship, *The Georgia Review* was named as a National Magazine Award finalist eleven times.

And that’s more or less where I come in. I had the honor of working under Lindberg’s leadership at the very beginning of my *GR* days, but the vast majority of my time here has been spent working with editors T.R. Hummer (2001 - 2006) and Stephen Corey, who has been at the helm from 2007 to the present. Though I’ve long been aware of *GR*’s beginnings as a self-consciously regional publication, my direct experience has been that of a journal with a solid, national reputation. Still, we’re considered a “little magazine,” with all of the virtues and

limitations, budgetary and otherwise, that that term connotes. Outside of Georgia, we have the most subscribers, readers, and website visitors in New York and California, respectively -- so I know, intellectually and factually, that in some respects we're better known elsewhere than we are in our own backyard.

Still, never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that a night would come on which I would witness my boss, *Georgia Review* editor Stephen Corey, being handed a National Magazine Award trophy (affectionately referred to as an "Ellie") by Princess Leia herself, actress and author Carrie Fisher. But witness it I did (and so did a live audience at least a thousand strong), and I have the photograph that proves it.

It was the presentation of the Ellie, a copper-colored stabile sculpture by Alexander Calder, resembling an elephant, by a principal cast member of Star Wars that was truly surprising, even more surprising than the fact that *The Georgia Review* went home a winner that night. Before that 2007 win -- for Michael Donohue's essay "Russell and Mary" -- we'd been named as finalists in either fiction, essays, criticism, or single-topic issue sixteen times but had won only once -- the aforementioned 1986 win in fiction. We'd grown somewhat accustomed to attending the Ellie Awards, though there were certainly years in which we didn't make it to the finalist round in any category and therefore weren't participants in the big dance, but winning -- actually hearing the name of our publication called out in the moment after the sealed envelope was opened -- was unfamiliar and genuinely thrilling to us. Still, none of us showed up at the awards *expecting* to lose, so despite our 1-for-16 batting average at the Ellies, on the evening of May 1st, 2007 my *Georgia Review* colleagues and I entered Frederick P. Rose Hall, home of Jazz

at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th Street, confident that we were in for a good night.

From the vantage of the hall's floor to ceiling windows I watched a glorious sunset descend upon Manhattan abuzz at rush hour. I waited for the buffet and bar lines to thin. My rented tuxedo fit awkwardly. Tony New Yorkers with tailored tuxes and couture gowns swept past me, hands on one another's elbows and arms draped across each other's backs, engaged in close conversations I didn't think I could join – not here, not now. Just then a dark-haired man approached me, hand extended in greeting. He looked familiar but I couldn't quite place him. We shook hands. "Well hello!" he said merrily. "Hello!" I returned, hoping to play out the scene until I discovered to whom I was speaking. "I'm David Ingle from *The Georgia Review*." Confusion flashed across his face then just as quickly fled. Whoever he'd thought I was, I wasn't – but no matter. "Well I'm David Remnick from the *New Yorker*," he said. "I know all about *The Georgia Review* – you folks do great work, really great. I'm so glad you're here. Best of luck tonight!"

That night, luck was indeed with us. Despite stiff competition in our nominated category from the *New Yorker*, *Smithsonian*, *Foreign Policy*, and *New Letters* (for pieces by Calvin Trillin, Paul Theroux, Thomas L. Friedman, and Harrison Fletcher), when Carrie Fisher opened the envelope and announced the winner, she called the names of *The Georgia Review* and Michael Donohue. Perhaps we did belong in this room after all.

The awards ceremony concluded, my colleagues and I exited the building and stood at Columbus Circle, still giddy from our big win. There we met up with my wife, Mary Anne, and another *GR* spouse who'd waited things out by poking around the neighborhood while we editors and staffers were inside at the big show. As a group we realized that none of us had given any thought to post-event plans, and specifically not to what a victory celebration might involve -- maybe this was indicative of our low (or shall I say realistic) expectations going in. We huddled up and began to debate the possibilities. Just then it started raining, and within a couple of minutes we were caught in a deluge. We scattered, some of us tumbling into taxis headed uptown and me, Mary Anne, and my then-coworker Linda DePascale scrambling on foot down Broadway in the general direction of our rooms at the Hotel Edison on West 47th Street. Our usual not-from-around-here confusion combined with the driving rain and dark of night led us to overshoot our intended destination by a block. Linda and I were dressed to the nines, she in her formal dress and me in my rented tuxedo, and soaked to the bone. Mary Anne was equally soaked but better outfitted for such, having had the foresight to don a raincoat before we left the hotel earlier in the evening. None of us, however, thought to bring along an umbrella, and for reasons I still can't fathom the street vendors who seem to always magically appear on Manhattan's sidewalks as the first raindrop falls were nowhere to be seen on our waterlogged route. So it was that we found ourselves on West 46th Street, veritable rivers running off our uncovered heads and sodden clothes, when we saw something familiar to us: Le Marais restaurant, a pleasant, friendly bistro where we'd eaten lunch a couple of days prior. Through the windows we could see that the place was almost empty and that chairs had already been flipped atop some of the tables, but the lights were still on -- so we entered.

Our drowned-rat trio must have been a pitiful sight to the hostess, who was already busy with her closing time duties, for she beckoned us in and seated us right away, dismissing with a wave of her hand our profuse apologies for arriving at the last minute and for soaking the floor, chairs, everything. She even brought us a stack of towels from somewhere in the back, and they were warm as if they'd just come out of the dryer (perhaps they had). Our waiter assured us that the kitchen was still open and that we could order from the full menu. "We'll be quick," I told him. "De rien," he replied. "Take all the time you need. I'll bring you some hot tea."

What followed was a wonderful meal made even better by the attentive service we received. At some point one of us mentioned to the staff where we'd been earlier in the evening and what had transpired. There were heartfelt congratulations and backslaps all around, especially when it came out that *The Georgia Review* had bested their very own *New Yorker*. Perhaps we bragged a little. Perhaps we overplayed our hand. But under the circumstances, I think it's understandable. After all there we were, triumphant in midtown Manhattan, three representatives of a highly-regarded but small-circulation magazine whose strictly regional origins were no predictor of the nationwide success we were enjoying.

Later this week *The Georgia Review* will return to the Big Apple, this time as host for two readings by a few of our outstanding NYC-area contributors: on Friday, May 17, beginning at 7pm, poet Sharon Dolin and essayist Martha G. Wiseman perform at Melville House Books, located at 145 Plymouth Street in the DUMBO section of Brooklyn, and on Sunday, May 19, also at 7pm, fiction writer René Houtrides, essayist and poet Laura McCullough, and poet Jane McKinley appear at the Julliard School, 60 Lincoln Center Plaza in Manhattan. Both events are

free and open to the public. It's been a couple of years since we last brought the *GR* roadshow to New York, but I'm sure we'll be met with the same warm, enthusiastic reception that's always awaited us in the city that has in some ways become our home away from home. As we say down South, y'all come!