

Author, Adventurer Jenkins Joins UW Staff



MARK JENKINS ON
WEST AFRICA'S NIGER
RIVER

Mark Jenkins, a critically acclaimed author and internationally known adventurer, has formalized his longstanding relationship with the University of Wyoming by accepting a sen-

ior lecturer position.

A native of Laramie, Jenkins will contribute lectures and presentations to classes in UW's Creative Writing Program, the International Studies Program and the Outdoor Adventure Program.

"For most university faculty members, the frontier of knowledge is a metaphor," says UW Provost Myron Allen. "For Mark, the term is literal, and it barely begins to describe the physical and psychic rigors that he endures in pursuing his craft."

Jenkins is a contributing writer for National Geographic magazine, and he

wrote a monthly column, "The Hard Way," for Outside magazine. With a circulation of about 700,000 and readership of about 2.2 million, Outside is the only magazine in history to win three consecutive National Magazine Awards for General Excellence.

In addition, Jenkins has written three books that document his adventures in remote parts of the world, including Africa, Asia, Europe and Siberia, among other places.

For more information about Jenkins, go to his official Web site at www.thehardway.com.



8 Questions, 500 Words: An interview with Andy Fitch

By *Ernie Hemphill*

What has drawn you to the world of writing?

I like deferred gratification—working on things that take a long time.

Are there specific literary influences you can identify?

Too many influences to name. I forget content right away, but my mind keeps track of stylistic touches and methodological practices that interest me. Visual artists and filmmakers provide a more direct influ-

ence (I think it's even "literary"): Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, Ed Ruscha and Stephen Shore in a Pop-related vein; Jean-Luc Goddard, Agnes Varda, Hollis Frampton and Jonas Mekas in film. I'll look at this work and think, "Finally I know how to write."

Your recent dissertation, Pop Poetics: Between Lyric and Language, sounds fascinating. Can you give me a 30-second summary of what you're after in that project?

Pop-inflected poetic projects by Joe Brainard, James Schulyer, Eileen Myles, and David Trinidad rarely receive attention as exemplary experimental texts. This dissertation thus introduces the concept of "Pop poetics" as a meta-critical third-term by which to problematize reductive distinctions between "lyric" and "language-based" postwar poetry. It probes the constructive, yet constrictive, schema by which critics have sought to canonize *continued on page 2 ...*

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Director's Note

This year promises to be an eventful and exciting time for the MFA. We had a brilliant recruiting season last spring: we successfully signed up every one of our top 13 recruits, and they're a talented and adventurous group (see the description of the new class elsewhere in the newsletter for more details). We're also being joined in our work this year by three Eminent Writers in Residence. The first, award-winning poet and playwright Claudia Rankine, arrives in September. She'll be teaching a poetry workshop, visiting university classes, and giving a public reading of her work on Sep-

tember 16th. Her stay is followed by two more Eminent Writers in the spring: nonfiction writer and Paris Review editor Philip Gourevitch, in January; and Pulitzer-Prize-winning novelist Edward P. Jones, author of *The Known World* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, in February and March. Their residencies will be complemented by our Visiting Writers Series, which is packed with superb writers again this year, including Rebecca Curtis, John D'Agata, Thomas King, Kate Greenstreet, and Don DeLillo. Many of our visiting writers will meet closely with students for meals and discussions

in our new Writers House, located on Ivinson Avenue between 14th and 15th. A generous gift from university president Tom Buchanan, the Writers House will be a reading library, quiet writing room, and lounge for our graduate students, and an intimate space for workshops and events with our guest writers. Brad Watson and I have been scouring the local flea markets for furnishings, our students have been painting and decorating, and we hope to have a grand opening early this fall.

Further good news: last year's *continued on page 3 ...*

"CREATIVE
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8 Questions continued...



"radical poetry," "serial poetry," and "New York School" poetry, even as it posits a direct relation between Pop poetics and the modernist grid, the mixed-media assemblage, the serialized gallery display, and the serialized art manifesto.

Didn't even take thirty seconds. I just pasted it.

How would you characterize your approach to the nonfiction genre?

Creative nonfiction should take advantage of its amorphous, oppositional status (getting defined by what it is not: fiction,

journalism, poetry, philosophy, etc.) for as long as possible, and revel in this freedom, and make everybody else jealous.

What do you find to be the most difficult part of your writing process? What comes easiest?

Difficulty: I have no capacity to make things up.

Ease: Ideas for conceptual projects.

With your fresh experience navigating publication, what advice do you have for young writers preparing to enter that territory?

Start a journal, or a press, or a non-solipsistic blog so that people need to know who you are. Make sure it looks nice.

Is there a class you recall as your best experience teaching? Why was it so worthwhile?

I very much enjoyed emphasize-

ing online audio materials in a Multicultural American Literature course this spring. I could never predict which students would enjoy a particular piece.

When you're not reading or writing or teaching, what do you enjoy doing?

Talking to girlfriend, cooking, stretching, animals.

Director's Note, continued

Eminent Writer in Residence, Joy Williams, enjoyed her time with the program so much that she has now joined the MFA faculty permanently, and will be reading student manuscripts, serving on thesis committees, and assisting the program in other invaluable ways. We're truly fortunate that she has stayed on. And she's joined by two other wonderful new members of the MFA faculty. The celebrated magazine writer and world-class adventurer Mark Jenkins came on board with us last winter, and will visit classes and work with MFA students

one-on-one in between his global travels for National Geographic. And we had the great luck to hire recent CUNY graduate Andy Fitch as the newest member of our nonfiction faculty. Interviews with Andy and Mark are included in this newsletter.

We also had difficult news this past year: our colleague, the poet Craig Arnold, fell to his death while hiking in Japan. Craig was in Japan on a US-Japan Friendship Commission's Creative Artists Exchange Fellowship, researching a new manuscript on volcanoes. His second volume of

poetry, *Made Flesh*, had been published the autumn before his death, and Craig had just completed a semester's Fulbright Fellowship in Colombia. Our thoughts go out to Craig's friends, students, and family. The MFA program will be celebrating his work and life with a memorial event on campus on September 2nd, and a reading of his work at the AWP Convention in Denver next April. Please feel free to contact me for further details of these events.

Beth

Faculty News

Andy Fitch had publications in *Octopus*, *LIT*, *Interculture*, *Life Writing*, and *Runbook*. His book, *10 Walks/ 2 Talks*, co-written with John Cotner, is forthcoming this fall from *Ugly Duckling Presse*. The reading series he curated, "Writing in the Dark," will soon be available on *PennSound*.

Alyson Hagy's story collection, *Ghosts of Wyoming*, will be published by *Graywolf* in February 2010. Recently, her novella "The Sin Eaters" was published in *Copper Nickel* and her story "Lost Boys" in *The Idaho Review*.

Harvey Hix's book, *Incident Light*, will be published by *Etruscan Press* in November 2009. It is a "verse biography" of an artist friend who learned at age 49 that the father who had raised her was not her biological father. Harvey recently traveled to China, to lecture on American

poetry as part of UW's faculty exchange with *Shanghai University*; and to *Victoria, BC*, to give a paper, "Whose Crisis?," at the *Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment* conference.

Mark Jenkin's article for *National Geographic* on the gorillas of *Virunga* won the *National Magazine Award in Photojournalism*.

Jeff Lockwood published "Unwrapping the Enigma of Ecofeminism: A Solution to the Illusion of Incoherence", an introduction to *Rhetoric, Sex, Technology: Critical Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, and "Ecofeminism: The Ironic Philosophy", an epilogue to *Feminist Ecocriticism: Women and Environment in American and European Literature*.

Kate Northrop attended two residencies: *Caldera in Sisters, Oregon*, and the *Baltic Centre*

for *Writers and Translators in Visby, Sweden*. New work is forthcoming in *The American Poetry Review*, *Raritan*, and *The Yale Anthology of Younger American Poets*.

David Romvedt's poetry and essays have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *basalt*, *American Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *The Sun*, *Pilgrimage*, *Cimmaron Review*, and in anthologies edited by *Russell Rowland*, *John Bradley*, *Lowell Jaeger*, and *Poetry East*.

Brad Watson's story "Visitation" appeared in *The New Yorker*, and new stories are forthcoming in *The Idaho Review*, *Narrative*, and *Ecotone*. He served on the selection panel for the 2010 *NEA literature fellowships*. His collection of stories, *Aliens in the Prime of their Lives*, is forthcoming from *Norton* in spring 2010.

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Introducing the MFA class of 2011

“QUINNIE SPENT
SUMMERS IN
KELLY, WYOMING
AS A CHILD, AND IS
THRILLED TO
RETURN...”

Lindsay Beamish, a fiction writer from Los Angeles. A graduate of University of California, Santa Cruz, Lindsay has lived and worked in LA as an actress, dancer, performance artist, and filmmaker. Her latest film, "The Greatest," was screened at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. She's at work on a collection of short stories and a novel about "the idiosyncratic malaise" of a couple with an autistic son.

Adam Boucher, a fiction writer and graduate of the University of Arizona with a B.A. in English. Adam currently supervises a crew of wild land firefighters in the Bighorn Mountains; he'll be attending UW in the spring semesters, when the fire danger is low.

Maya Cohen, a fiction writer finishing a Biology and English double major at Cornell University, where she is an honors student. She has been both a teaching assistant for organic chemistry classes and a volunteer with inmates at the Lansing Detention Center for Girls, and she works in the Kotlikoff Lab of Cornell's Veterinary School, where she explores how certain molecules cause the muscles of the heart to contract.

Sara Daniels, a fiction writer from New York City with a BA in English from Skidmore College, where she graduated Summa cum Laude. Since graduating, Sara has worked as an assistant at a New York literary agency, as an editor and professional writer for the development department

at Mount Sinai Hospital, and as a workshop leader for the Girl Scouts of Greater New York. She hopes to pursue her wide-ranging interests in environmental studies, folklore, and Native American literature while at UW. At Skidmore, she experimented with prose poetry, nonlinear narrative, and linked short fiction; at UW, she plans to begin work on a novel.

Stephanie Dugger, a poet who has just completed her MA in English at Austin Peay State University, where she also completed her BA Magna cum Laude. Stephanie grew up on a farm in the south, worked in factories and warehouses, and is now publishing nonfiction and poetry in Arts and Letters, CUT-THROAT, and Red Mud Review.

Dana Hantel, a fiction writer most recently residing in Arizona. Dana grew up in the Appalachians where her grandfather was a local sheriff, studied law at West Virginia University, and worked as civil litigator, law clerk, criminal lawyer, and family court mediator before deciding that writing was the life she wished to pursue. At UW, she intends to work on a short story collection about "perceptions of control, destiny, and free will," set in the landscapes of Appalachia and the Southwest.

Kelly Herbinson, a nonfiction writer who just completed her MS in Ecology at San Francisco State University. Kelly has studied ant queens and desert tortoises; in San Francisco, she

created a "citizen scientist" project for schoolchildren called the Bay Area Ant Survey. Kelly comes to the MFA program hoping to "knit together stories of science and convey them in all of their absurdity and excitement."

Quinnie Kenworthy, a nonfiction writer with a BA in English from Brown University, where she also played rugby. Since college, Quinnie has worked for the AVP Pro Beach Volleyball Tour, volunteered with Earth Matters!, and run the 2008 Treasure Island Triathlon. Quinnie spent summers in Kelly, Wyoming as a child, and is thrilled to return to the state. At UW, she plans to pursue her interest in cross-genre work, writing "prose-poems that combine observation, story, reflection, and earnest questions."

Adam Million, a poet with an MA in English from Clemson University and a BA in English from William Woods. At Clemson, Adam taught composition, co-founded the Clemson Poetry Review, and organized the Clemson Literary Festival. At UW, Adam intends to work in the ENR program as well as the MFA in order to prepare for a future as a poet and a scholar of ecocriticism.

Scott Rosenberg, a poet with an MA in music composition from Mills College and a BA in music from Wesleyan University. Scott has received awards and grants from the Ford Foundation, the Ucross Foundation, and the Illinois Arts Council, among

Introducing the MFA class of 2011

others. He plays five varieties of saxophone, clarinet, flute, guitar, and drums, and his discography is too long to reprint here but includes his latest album, "The Full Sun," of which *Crawdaddy Magazine* writes, "the songs deftly balance classical allusions and plainspoken rock and folk images without ever sounding forced or self-conscious. The words pack the same punch as the music." Scott comes to UW seeking formal training in writing to match his training as a composer, so that he can pursue a unique blend of songwriting, poetry, and musical drama.

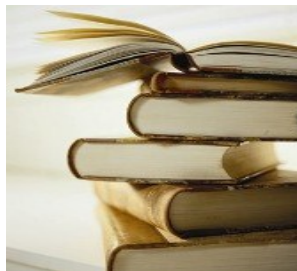
Katie Schmid, a poet with a BA in Writing and Literature from Millikin University. Katie, who corresponded with the MFA program last winter from Hong Kong, China, and Thailand, interned with the Poetry

Foundation in 2008. She is associate editor of *Dirty Napkin*, an online literary magazine, and has worked as a tutor, freelance copy writer and research editor. Her poem "Jobs" was accepted for "Best New Poets 2009: 50 Poems from Emerging Poets," edited by Kim Addonizio, from the University of Virginia Press.

Estella Soto, a fiction writer born in San Diego with a BA in Creative Writing from University of Southern California. Estella is a founder of the writers' collective and literary space Sneaky Uncle, which has made a recent appearance in *The Huffington Post*. Estella plans to write short fiction while at UW and eventually to teach English and creative writing in low-income, urban neighborhoods.

Emily Trostel, a nonfiction writer with a BA in English

Writing and the History of Art and Architecture, and certificates in Africana Studies and Global Studies, from University of Pittsburgh. Emily's interest in travel writing has led her to Ghana, Mali, and Berlin. She plans to join the ENR program here at UW and is already the recipient of the ENR program's 2009 Yellowstone Field Course/Erivan Haub Scholarship, which allowed her to spend thirty days this summer in the national park exploring the ecological, cultural, and geological dimensions of the region.



"...MARK CRUISES
EASILY ON OLD-
SCHOOL TOURING
SKIS WITH LEATHER
BOOTS..."

Interview with Mark Jenkins

By *Emilene Ostlind, MFA nonfiction*

I'm following Mark Jenkins up a trail in the Medicine Bow Mountains of northern Colorado on a sun-sparkled winter afternoon. On top of his job as a contributing writer for *National Geographic* magazine, Mark has recently joined the UW faculty where he is shared among the Creative Writing and International Studies departments, the Haub School of Environment & Natural Resources, and the Outdoor Adventure Program. This weekend, he has joined a group

of Outdoor Adventure Program trip leaders on our winter training. We are skinning up a snow-covered trail toward the yurt where we will spend three days and two nights evaluating snow stability, practicing backcountry travel, and discussing leadership skills.

Skis swish along the snowy skin track and shadows of the bare aspen branches lattice the smooth snow along the trail. The mountain air is crisp, but skiing in the sunshine warms us enough to unzip jackets and take

off our hats and gloves. While us students slog along on our shiny name-brand ski equipment, Mark cruises easily on old-school touring skis with leather boots, his ham-like hands enveloping the tops of simple black ski poles. I'm surprised that he has joined us; he is only briefly home to Wyoming between assignments abroad, and he spent the week handling the aftermath of an ice climbing accident that killed his friend and climbing partner when an avalanche broke free thousands of feet above them in the mountains of

Interview, cont...

“...THE REAL CHALLENGE FOR ME IS TRYING TO DISTILL THE EXPERIENCE INTO THE PRECISE WORDS...”

northern Wyoming. Surely he must be too distracted by the rest of his life to participate in our discussions of trip protocol and leadership. As we glide through the trees, I wonder how a man with such a full and dynamic life will engage with something as basic as our trip leader training.

Conversation rises and falls as our group ascends single file. Every few minutes Mark looks over his shoulder and asks, "You want me to pull that sled for a while?" as if he is dying for the extra work. Then he races ahead to photograph the group skinning past. Then he skis back down the trail to help a trip leader repack and balance her heavy pack. Then he's checking in with me about the sled again and back to the front of the group. Always with a sparkle in his eye that matches the sun glinting off the snow and a big smile as if this is the most fun adventure in the world.

With a quality rare among big-time writers, Mark's worldly renown hasn't made him aloof to small-town Wyoming. Rather, he approaches this trip with the same engagement, diligence, and enthusiasm that he might bring to a confrontation with vigilantes on the back roads in Burma or spelunking into unexplored caverns deep under the Tennessee woods. His boundless curiosity and energy are not reserved for interviews with guerilla leaders in the African jungle, but rather, are part of his life philosophy and the way he approaches every day no matter if he is visiting a writing workshop in the Creative Writing program or heading out on his next assignment.

Mark's ebullient spirit is contagious, and those of us in MFA program lucky enough to brush shoulders with him are bound to come away antsy to plunge ahead full force into our next project whether it's cranking out an essay, preparing to teach a class, or planning our own adventures beyond the university.

EO: *Considering all your skills and talents, why have you dedicated your working life to writing? What is the purpose of your writing?*

MJ: Readers not infrequently remark upon the physical difficulties of the adventures in my stories, but honestly, the real challenge for me is trying to distill the experience into the precise words, sentences and paragraphs that create a tale which captures the spirit of the undertaking. I admit that because of my upbringing in Wyoming, physical adventure comes naturally. But I am not a natural writer. Very little pops out of me fully formed. Writing for me is rewriting, shaving every sentence with Occam's Razor.

As for the purpose of my writing, certainly it is to touch other humans in some way (in general, we writers are egotistical blowhards who somehow believe other people actually care what we say).

EO: *Describe the narrative arc of your life as a writer where did you come from and how did you become a writer?*

MJ: For starters, I wasn't some eight-year-old kid dreaming of becoming a novelist and scribbling away under the bedcovers. At eight I was riding my bicycle through the hills around Laramie

sucking in life. And at 16, and 24 ... and at 48. I became a serious reader after a year in Holland (Dad had a sabbatical), and I remember reading all of Solzhenitsyn at 16. Graduated from high school early and lit out for the world, arrested in Algeria, selling my Levis on the black market in Russia the day my class graduated. Circled back to UW, eventually majoring in philosophy. Prof Richard Howey, existentialist and raconteur, was a big influence. Taught me to think critically. Graduated, couldn't find a job and didn't want one. Had this idea I could be a writer. Spent a winter with Sue Ibarra (now my wife) in a cabin in the Snowies, then struck out for Boston where I assumed I'd be writing full-time for *The Atlantic Monthly* in no time. After a year in Boston working as a tinner installing heating ducts, Sue and I moved back to Laramie where I did a masters in geography under Tom Buchanan and Rick Reider, two men who taught me how to write tight. By the time I graduated I was making a peanut-butter-and-sardines-in-a-basement-apt living as a writer, freelancing adventure stories. Twenty-five years later and I'm still at it, just back from Greenland, off to Africa.

EO: *What is your role as a UW faculty member? Why did you join the faculty of UW's creative writing MFA program?*

MJ: I see my job as UW's writer-in-residence to bring the realities of the writer's life to the students, to bring the world of writing on assignment into the classroom. In all my lectures I use real life examples taken from my most recent assignment, whether

Interview, cont....

it be how to bribe soldiers in the Congo or canoe through Surinam or slip through landmines in Afghanistan---the point always being how to translate life into stories.

EO: *In a climate of technology that enables anyone to be a writer, how do you distinguish your work?*

MJ: Technology is only a tool. The medium may change, but a great story remains a great story, don't care if you write it on stone tablets or in an email.

EO: *What is the most interesting story you have written and why?*

MJ: Asking me my most interesting story is like asking someone their favorite song. Impossible. Can say that my story about Burma, which took up years of my life, was particularly meaningful to me. Also my book To

Timbuktu, which was about friendship and the life of adventure, might have caught the truth for a moment.

EO: *What is it like to go on assignment and write for National Geographic?*

MJ: I live for assignment work. I love to be dropped into the middle of nowhere and forced to think on my feet, to ask questions and find the story. I have always operated on curiosity and passion, and this hasn't changed with NG. I do have to be extremely meticulous about fact-checking, one of NG's hallmarks, but that only makes me a better reporter.

EO: *What is the most rewarding part of your job? What is the most challenging part of your job?*

MJ: The most rewarding part of

my job is to get a letter from a reader who has been moved or touched in some way by my writing. Most challenging? Hell, I love challenges. Biggest headache---even more than being arrested by the Tajikistan KGB and interrogated for a week---doing taxes.

EO: *What are the most valuable qualities for a professional writer to develop and pursue?*

MJ: Curiosity. Discipline. Open-mindedness. A willingness to do whatever it takes to get the story.

EO: *What is the most important lesson a student should remember while completing a master's degree and heading out into the world?*

MJ: Anything is possible if you really, really want it.

"I HAVE ALWAYS OPERATED ON CURIOSITY AND PASSION, AND THIS HASN'T CHANGED WITH NG."

2008-2009 Student Accomplishments

Alan Barstow's story "Imprisoned with the Dead" was published by the online magazine 10,000 Tons of Black Ink. He works as an assistant editor at Narrative Magazine.

Jason Burge won an Outstanding Master's Thesis Award from the University of Wyoming, for "My Mulatto Foundling."

Courtney Carlson won an Ellbogen Outstanding Graduate Assistant Teaching Award.

Meagan Ciesla's novella, "Me, Us, Them," won the Iron Horse novella competition and will be published in Fall 2009 as a single-author book by the journal. She

begins her Ph.D. in creative writing at the University of Missouri this fall. She was awarded a Ucross Foundation residency for the summer of 2010.

Pam Galbreath's "Three Note Song" will be published by South Loop: Creative Nonfiction and Art in September 2009.

Meggie Elliot won second prize for the Wyoming Writer's Contest for her poem "Pending Migration."

Lori Howe won a Wyoming Arts Council Individual Artist Development Grant to assist her research on Wyoming ghost towns and abandoned industrial sites.

Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela presented a paper at the annual meeting of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies last spring.

Randy Koch begins a full-time teaching position at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania this fall. Two of his poems will appear in Gival Press's anthology "Poetic Voices without Borders 2." "Skelated Bating" will appear in Measure: An Annual Review of Formal Poetry.

Megan Marshall has accepted a teaching position at the Breakwater School in Portland, Maine.

Sarah Norek had stories accept-

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The University of Wyoming's Creative Writing MFA program is an intensive two-year studio degree in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Special features include a flexible curriculum, cross-genre opportunities, opportunities for interdisciplinary study, and our Eminent Writers in Residence program, which brings distinguished authors to campus to work closely with our students.

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ROAM.



Accomplishments, cont...

ed by The New Anonymous,
Caketrain, and The Collagist.

Beth Peterson was accepted by
the University of Missouri's
Ph.D. program in creative writing
and will be begin her studies
there this fall.

Ken Steinken won a South Dako-
ta Arts Council Artist Grant.

Publications, awards, jobs, and
other news to tell us about? We
want to hear what you're up to.
Please email us at cw@uwyo.edu.