

Discoveries

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This past Sunday night was the annual event held by the Children's Book Caucus of PEN New England, honoring new, unpublished writers selected to receive this year's Susan P. Bloom Award.

A word about Susan P. Bloom: she has been a member of the Children's Book Caucus for several years, and so when she retired three years ago from a distinguished career as Professor of Children's Literature at Simmons College, we (the other committee members; she didn't get a vote!) decided to name the award - previously just called something more generic - for her.

Unfortunately, this year, though she had participated in the judging of entries, Susan couldn't attend the event because she had been babysitting for a small grandson, and caught his two-year-old's germs and was sick. That is what happens to you when you retire!

But the winners this year - selected from 125 entries - were Jodi McCallum from Vermont, Cindy Faughnan from Vermont, Joe Anastasio from Connecticut, and Katie Bayerl from Massachusetts. Four novels this year, both YA and Middle Grade. Some years there have been picture book winners, but not this time. Each award recipient has his/her manuscript read by a major editor, and many of our previous winners have gone on to publication. (Latest, "The Opposite of Music" by Janet Ruth Young, just published by Atheneum.)

Each author read from his/her work and we sipped some champagne and rejoiced that there are fine new writers in the field.

Next winter, when it is time for submissions for next year's award, I will post the submission instructions here for anyone who might be interested.

My office is to be painted this summer when I'm in Maine so I am starting the hard task of de-cluttering. I don't know how this clutter evolves. I am basically a tidy person. But during the night, pens reproduce; papers duplicate themselves; and somehow, magically, two huge bottles of vitamins and a large jar of Atomic Fireballs have appeared on my desk, along with a pedometer and a zippered case holding electrical adpators for every country in the world. How did this happen? Art supplies, bookmarks, coasters, coffee mugs, unanswered mail, fabric samples, folders marked TAXES. All of it must disappear.

One time, years ago, after I and a number of other writers had spoken at a week-long conference, the six of us were to appear on the final day as a panel. We were each to speak briefly first, before it became a Q-and-A session. I suggested to the other five writers that we should each describe what was on our desks, at home, as a way of describing ourselves and our work habits. I was voted down - no one liked the idea. And now that I look at my own mess of a desk, I see why. It is just too embarrassing to portray myself as someone who sits here looking at an unused pedometer and a jar of Atomic Fireballs.

Tags: Untagged