

And the award goes to...

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I am thinking about awards. I am thinking about awards today because this afternoon I went to the Kennedy library to watch several very deserving writers receive the Hemingway/PEN NE Award and the Winship Award. One of the writers, the poet Stanley Kunitz, was not there because, well, he is 101 years old; and when you are 101 they understand if you choose not to show up. You have shown up for 100 years or so and now it is okay to stay home and read a book instead.

But I bet he is delighted to win the award, anyway. He probably has a whole room of them.

I have a wall, myself. I call it the Wall of Perpetual Self-Adoration and I have included a couple of photos of it here. It is a sneaky way to display my grandchildren, as well.

You won't be able to see this in the small photos but on my W of PS-A, there is a tall crystal pyramidal structure roughly the size of the Eiffel Tower. It is the Eliot Rosewater Book Award,

which I received from the state of Indiana in 1997. Near it, also crystal, but smaller, is the Great Stone Face Award from 1995, and there is a certain historic value to that because the Great Stone face, which you'll remember was a piece of a mountain in New Hampshire, toppled a few years ago and fell off. The state of NH still uses it on their license plates, and perhaps the organization called Children's Librarians of New Hampshire will continue to use that name for their award. But the truth is, folks: there IS no Great Stone Face anymore,

As for Eliot Rosewater? He never was. The award from Indiana was named for a fictional character created by Kurt Vonnegut in his book *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. And bless his award, too, only I wish it weren't quite so tall. I had to move a shelf to make room for it.

The only problem with awards, which are in every other way to be desired, is that they take up space. My Wall of Perpetual Self-Adoration is in my dining room. You can tell that from the photos because you can see the Oxford English Dictionary there on the shelf. (What? You don't keep a dictionary in your dining room? Well, what do you do when people start arguing about the pronunciation of a word like, say, flaccid*, over dinner?)

I think it would be nice if they made awards really small and flat and maybe foldable. Or: here's a thought: the citation could be printed on a small sponge, and when you want to look at it, you put it in water and it would expand to twelve times its size for a viewing, and then dry and shrink again.

However, the people who were given large framed certificates at the JFK Library today looked very pleased, so probably my idea is a bad one.

The keynote speaker today was the distinguished scholar, professor, writer, award winner and extremely thin person Joyce Carol Oates. She was funny. I did not expect Joyce Carol Oates to be funny. What did I expect? Oh, I don't know: intellectual, literate, articulate, certainly; maybe even a little arcane. And she was all of those things, don't get me wrong. But funny, too! A bonus.

* just for the record, flaccid is not pronounced the way you think it is.

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