

SHERYL ST. GERMAIN

Nominated by Judith Baumel, Adelphi University, and seconded by Heather McNaugher, Chatham University.

CAMPAIGN STATEMENT

Not only have I directed an innovative MFA program for the last nine years, but I also founded a program, Words Without Walls, which takes graduate creative writing students into jails and half-way houses to teach creative writing to inmates and those in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. I have watched over the last few years as this program transformed the lives of the MFA students and alums as well as those who were benefiting from their instruction. I have watched our alums flourish and go off to other states and start programs like the one here in Pittsburgh in their hometowns. Other writers who have gotten involved in the program are reminded that this is why they started writing to begin with: to tell a story, to create an image that mattered. As for myself, I teach creative writing for the MFA program I direct in the evenings, but every Thursday morning I go into a home for women in recovery and teach creative writing there, and I am always moved by the courage of these women trying to find the right words and sentences to tell their stories.

If I am elected to the board I will work to help establish guidelines and resources for those interested in teaching creative writing in alternative spaces such as prisons, jails, Veteran's centers and drug and alcohol treatment facilities. I will also work to help develop resources for MFA programs that might wish to innovate in other ways: adding the idea of the concentration outside of the genre (nature writing, food writing, travel writing, social justice for example).

I also think it is really important for the program directors to be in regular contact with each other, especially within the region, to share information and help each other, and I would like to contribute to maintaining the community we already have and deepening it so that we trust each other enough to share information that will help us all.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Sheryl St. Germain's poetry books include two chapbooks, *Going Home* and *The Mask of Medusa*, and four full-length collections: *Making Bread at Midnight*, *How Heavy the Breath of God*, *The Journals of Scheherazade*, and *Let it Be a Dark Roux: New and Selected Poems*. She has also published a translation of the Cajun poet Jean Arceneaux, *Je Suis Cadien*, and a memoir, *Swamp Songs: the Making of an Unruly Woman*. She co-edited, with Margaret Whitford, *Between Song and Story: Essays for the Twenty-First Century*. Her most recent book, *Navigating Disaster: Sixteen Essays of Love and a Poem of Despair*, was released in September of 2012. She is currently co-editing an anthology designed for use in alternative teaching spaces, *Make Mine Words*, which is under contract with Trinity University Press. She directs the MFA program at Chatham University where she also teaches poetry and creative nonfiction. Her work has received several awards, including two NEA Fellowships, an NEH Fellowship, the Dobie-Paisano Fellowship, the Ki Davis Award from the Aspen Writers Foundation, and the William Faulkner Award for the personal essay.