

Flash Fiction Online



Mahjabeen Syed

Literary Magazine Report

Spring 2014

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: *Flash Fiction Online*

Web Address: www.flashfictiononline.com

Email Address: editor@flashfictiononline.com

Founded: 2007

Founder: Jake Freivald

Current Editor: Suzanne Vincent

Current Publisher: Anna Yeatts

Frequency: Monthly

What They Publish: Flash fiction in any genre

Submission Guidelines: Acceptable submissions should consist of a minimum of 500 words and a maximum of 1,000 words. Looking for previously unpublished work, with the exception of their *Classic Flash* selections (if you would like to recommend one, you must e-mail the editor). Include an exact word count. Author information (including name) should be included only in the cover letter to ensure that stories are selected entirely on merit. Accept no more than three multiple story submissions. Simultaneous submissions are not accepted.

Submission Period: Open year-long

Average Response Time: Anywhere from 2-10 weeks

Payment: \$60.00 per story

Subscription Costs: All issues of *Flash Fiction Online* are available free of charge on their Web site.

Why Flash Fiction Online

I chose *Flash Fiction Online* because I thought back to the beginning of the semester when each of our tables had a website listed to research for our very first marketing sheet. Out of the three magazines I have explored throughout the course of this semester, *FFO* has stood out to me the most because I not only enjoy reading their stories, but I gave them the highest rating out of all three magazines.

I enjoy the artwork they have for each selected story, the variety in genre and overall content within them, and the layout of their Web site is appealing as well. Upon further reading, I found out that everyone ranging from the Editor-in-Chief to the Web designers are all volunteers. Realizing that the entire magazine is essentially a labor of love really made me invested in finding out more about them.

Staff bios are quirky and that the key players running the magazine are all moms, dads, and or pet parents which not only makes them awesome and ridiculously busy, but makes me admire them all the more.

Comparison of Issues

Issue	Issue 64	Issue 62	Issue 61
Number of Prose	3	3	3
Female to Male Authors	1:2	1:2	2:1
Fantasy	1:2:0:0	3:0:0:0	0:0:2:1
Science Fiction			
Literary			
Other Genres			

Flash Fiction Online publishes a wide array of stories, although they seem to accept more speculative fiction rather than anything else, it is likely because they have boldly stated on their Web site that much of the staff have a sweet spot for science fiction and fantasy in particular. They do not, however, discriminate based on genre or gender and publish a consistently even amount of male and female authors. Based on the short writer bios, FFO does not prefer well-established authors over emerging writers, seeing as many of their writers accredit *FFO* as their first publication credit.

Prose Reviews

Issue 61

The Land of Phantom Limbs by Bonnie Joe Stufflebeam is a realistic plainspoken exotic story told in third-person. After a grenade has gone off, Jon realizes that although he can feel the weight of his left arm, it is no longer there because it has been blown off by the explosion's impact. The reader follows Jon as sporadic scenes and possible memories unravel on his journey to finding out where his arm is exactly because he soon comes to realize that although his arm is no longer attached to him he says, "I can feel everything..." as if his arm is in another land. Because of the morphine, Jon drifts in and out of consciousness and every time he opens his eyes, he sees his arm doing something different in a different room; from playing poker with other cut-off limbs like a foot that holds an unlit cigar, to his detached hand touching his beloved Karen's waist.

The story's title itself is an attention-grabber, which is why I chose to read it, and after having done so, I can honestly say that the content doesn't stray or disappoint from its implication to say the least. The recurrent use of flashback amidst the knowledge that Jon has perhaps pressed the morphine dosage button one too many times, is a good way in which to have the readers question whether what Jon is seeing and feeling is actually happening. The confusion is clear in the story when it says, "The nurse checked the morphine dispenser by the bed, asked him if he'd been pressing his button correctly," which can imply that Jon either did see his arms in a literal land of limbs, that he dreamt it all, or that he was hallucinating. Whatever the case, it seems unnecessary to the story's overall message because while Jon is mourning his arm as if he only has one, Karen reminds him that he only needs one to hold her.

The Card by H. L. Fullerton is a plainspoken subjective third-person flash piece told in a domestic setting. Jack Durand has become the mailman in a sense, becoming more so the carrier of mail than the receiver ever since his wife's hip replacement. One particular day he fetches the mail as always but is startled to find a card when he observantly notes that, "Cards arrived in December, May, and June for holidays. January and October for birthdays. *Never* in August." However, this isn't the only predicament, the pale blue envelope has an unknown sender from a state in which they know no one. Jack has also

been habitually hiding all the charitable requests and shredding them to bits so his kind wife Mary wouldn't be tempted to give money away to everyone who asked. He considers doing the same to the unknown card but after a restless night's sleep, decides against it because, "...ripping the pretty blue paper felt the same as shredding his wife's trust." In the end, upon receiving the anonymous card, Mary's feelings are akin to Jack's; therefore, deciding to throw it away.

Fullerton takes the readers through Mary and Jack's relationship by presenting the inner turmoil a simple card caused a man and what hiding it from his wife meant to him. The author doesn't have time to place instances to vouch for Jack's love and respect for Mary, instead, he uses Jack's point-of-view within one situation to explain his devotion to her as a partner during the course of their marriage. The change in the character's mentality to do the right thing, "Because it was only half his: Mr. and *Mrs.*," is what brings the story together. The ending in which Mary's solution for the letter is the same as Jack's is what keeps the story intact without leaving the readers feeling as if they were cheated out of an ending by not knowing the contents of the card.

Issue 62

The Faerie and the Knight on Valentine's Day by Izabelle Grace is a plainspoken magical-realism, exotic piece told in first-person. A seven-hundred-year-old woman meets her lover Sir Magvelyn on Valentine's Day, handing him a scarlet box in which her supposed faerie wings lie and tells him, "...his love lifts me high enough." At that moment, she's not quite sure if he grasps that those wings have been constructed out of chicken wire, gauze, and a glimmer spell, while her real wings are tucked away in an oak wardrobe. He then reaches into his parka and hands her a paper bag that holds a sharp white tooth, the tooth of a dragon that he apparently, has slain specifically for her gift. His breath smells of cheap beer and beef crisps and as many times as she has scolded him, he doesn't comprehend that her magic can slow his aging only so long. In the end, she admits to having seen Magvelyn purchasing the tooth in the goblin's market but it doesn't bother her that they lie about their gifts because she knows that real love is trying to keep your lover around no matter how much it withers you.

Grace does a very fine job of spreading out the pacing of the story so that the most drastic scenes correspond with the perfect timeframe. Grace adds particular subtleties that hint toward the main characters declining health every time she uses her magic. The fact that the character uses her magic almost always to please Magvelyn (who does not know the toll it has on her), makes her sacrifices all the more painful to read and sweeter to witness. She settles for all the pitfalls of casting anti-aging spells for him because she says, “I’ve found, and love always forges a much sweeter version of the truth.”

Pranked by a Pixie by Matt Mikalatos is a plainspoken magical-realism flash piece told in third-person in a domestic setting. Grissom is a television producer who has recently found out that he has cancer. A clumsy faerie twirls about his office enthusiastically telling him, “I’d like my own reality show.” Grissom has been meaning to come up with another show so as he can make certain that his wife Lauren is taken care of. The only issue with the faerie’s idea is that they never show up on film. Grissom and the faerie run through basic plots for possible shows but his are too mean because those are just the kind of series he produces and hers are too nice. But something the faerie says strums a chord in him, “You should do a nice show,” because his wife had said something similar. Lauren loves faeries, unicorns, and the like. Eventually, he brushes his pride aside and tells his secretary to write up a contract for an unnamed show so that when he is gone, his wife can look at the credits and think of him and what he did for her before he died.

Grissom is a complicated man, stuck between wallowing in his sickness and trying to make everything perfect for his wife Lauren before he dies. There isn’t much that he wants but the one thing he does is time, “...and that was the one thing he couldn’t give her.” He has come to terms with his impending death and using the remainder of his time to do things like getting their home cleaned and paying off all his debts. The best part of this story is the dynamic between the faerie and Grissom. The humor of a human versus that of a being from a different world is displayed all through the story and how certain phrases can be confusing for the faerie because she is a creature who thinks literally like their discussion about film, ““But you don’t show up on film,” She cocked her head to one side. “I thought you used digital now?”” Mikalatos also does a very good job at subtly creating two characters that contrast till Grissom meets her halfway in sentiment.

Issue 64

Oubliette by Stewart C. Baker is a domestic plainspoken magical-realism piece told in first-person. The main character stumbles upon a poster and brochure that promises to, “Change your life,” by implanting a chip in the hippocampus which is activated every time stress produces neuropeptide in the amygdala. The chip basically allows you to live in the moment by preventing you from revisiting old memories. He pawns the thought of the chip off as some pathetic excuse for science but keeps the brochure anyway. Upon returning home from yet another conference, he finds that his wife Marjorie is not speaking to him because she’s had enough of his busy career while his daughter Kate only turns her music up louder once she hears her dad approach her bedroom.

Hopeless, he thinks that nothing can be as bad as his current situation and decides to get the chip implanted. What follows are instances in which he remembers very little and although he remembers Kate and Marjorie, they are no longer with him and every time he tries to recall what happened, he blacks out (a side effect of the chip). In the end, he manages to have the chip removed but at this point he is already grayed, Marjorie is dead, and Kate is married to a woman.

The ending is what really sealed the deal for me. It’s the type of ending that is so utterly despondent that you need to reread it to make sure you feel the full severity of the words. “I nod, unable to speak, and we turn and walk from the grave, from the past, together.” Flash of course doesn’t allow a lot of room for copious amounts of development among characters, but Baker captures the kind of desperation and bleakness we have all felt at some point and ups the ante per scene by blurring the conditions of his world before each blackout.

One Last Night at the Carnival Before the Stars Go Out by Caroline M. Yoachim is an exotic plainspoken magical-realism piece told in third-person. Lady Earth is attending a Galactic Carnival with her pet Moon trailing behind her. She is wearing an exquisite gown, “of watery blue and earthy green, with a shawl of swirling gray clouds.” Mars is, as always, asking Lady Earth out on dates but she doesn’t know if he is worth leaving orbit for and is worried about what would happen to poor Moon if he were left all alone. Mercury is trailing behind Venus as everyone at the carnival heads to watch the great magician hosting a Constellation Animal Show. During one of the tricks, Lady Earth

stands too close after Mars has told her to move back because a trick is being conducted with Sun and he may burst into hot flames any moment. Lady Earth, too occupied with herself, doesn't act quickly enough so when Sun bursts into flames, so does the bottom of her dress, dulling out every city light, evaporating every ocean, and burning away any land. Both Mercury and Moon have been burned and are gone forever, leaving Lady Earth without an extravagant gown and without moon, only to be left to see the constellation lights go out just like her dress.

The best thing about this story is the personification of the sun, planets, and moons because really, how cool is that? The way that they were anthropomorphized also blended in with the setting and everything that was going on within the story, particularly the way relationships were created based on the current knowledge we have about the planets. A great example of this is how Lady Earth, "...kept Moon's leash short..." because in reality, the moon is always orbiting close behind Earth. Using factual evidence to build a world in which these characters can live is a beguiling example of just how far writing can go.

Interview with Flash Fiction Online Editor-In-Chief Suzanne Vincent & Publisher Anna Yeatts

Mahjabeen Syed: I understand that Jake Freivald founded *Flash Fiction Online*, how did you both become involved with the magazine and ultimately, the key players within it?

Suzanne Vincent: I first met Jake at Orson Scott Card's Hatrack River Writer's Workshop. I probably critiqued some of his work, and he critiqued some of mine. One story of mine that he critiqued was one that I wrote for a Liberty Hall Writer's Workshop called "I Speak the Master's Will." During that time he was actively working toward building the magazine. As he was preparing to launch he contacted me and asked if he could buy "I Speak..." for his inaugural issue. Of course I agreed. It was during our dialogue in preparing the story for publication that the subject of my joining the staff came up. It was an exciting opportunity, and I took it readily. A year or so later Jake restructured the staff and asked if I would be willing to act as a team leader, vetting and assigning slush to a team of readers and choosing those stories that would move on the final selection round. Then a little more than two years ago Jake decided he needed to concentrate on more pressing needs and asked if I would take his place as Editor-in-chief, and not long after he made the decision to either close or sell the magazine. That's where Anna comes in....

Anna Yeatts: I began working at *FFO* as a slush reader in early 2012. Suzanne posted an advertisement on a professional bulletin board (Codex Writer's Forum) and I happened to see it. I auditioned by critiquing a story for her and she brought me on staff. I basically read slush for a very, very long time but I suppose I was a reliable and quick slush reader. I started slowly working my way up the food chain by taking on extra slush and little responsibilities here and there.

Jake decided to step out of the Publisher's role in the summer of 2013. Suzanne was a saint. She was keeping everything going but it was far too much for her to handle on top of her "outside" life.

I decided to take on the role of Publisher in late August. I spoke with Jake and he was willing to turn the reins over to me after the September issue.

MS: How does your job (Anna Yeatts) as a publisher, differ from that of Suzanne Vincent's as editor-in-chief?

AY: I think of it like this: Suzanne is the true artist. She can pick that diamond of a story out of the slush. So she deals with story selection - slush management, rewrites, acceptances, rejections. If a story is accepted, it's because she chose it.

I'm the business end. I make the money decisions and make sure we get the issues out on time. I coordinate the contracts, illustrations, website, e-distributors, and social media promotions.

SV: I think I have the easier job. I do very much appreciate that Anna trusts me in making the final story choices. I have never felt pressured by 'the boss' to choose a story my conscience, taste, experience, or expertise could not abide, despite the fact that there have been MANY stories she and I have disagreed over.

MS: I noticed that a great deal of your staff have busy family lives and are located all over the country, from California to North Carolina, Utah to Kentucky. How do you ensure that deadlines are set and met and that everyone works together?

AY: A lot of the staff has been with *FFO* since the very beginning (or close to it). It's definitely a labor of love. Those who don't love it, well, they tend to drop off staff pretty quickly. Most of us are writers and know that this kind of work makes us better in our own writing. So we want to do it. But sometimes there are deadlines that have to be met. Which means I have to start sending emails and Facebook messages reminding everyone of what I need and when.

If that doesn't work, I use my scary voice. It's quite good.

SV: Staffing is primarily my job. First it takes a great deal of consideration. We are all busy, none of us are paid, so we have to work hard to make the job enough of a pleasure to keep the work of reading, voting, and commenting a high priority. We also manage the staff in such a way that each of our three teams of readers are well balanced between those who have the motivation and time to get a great deal of work done and those who put in what they can. We also have two or three long-time staff members who are 'floating'--contributing when and where they can. I heavily rely on my three team leaders to keep up on their assigned slush piles, and they do a good job of keeping their teams motivated and informed. Personally, I think they work too hard. But if they didn't I suspect we'd struggle a great deal more.

Slushing schedules are not quite as rigid as publishing schedules. Anna and our Webmaster, Chris Behrsin, are the ones to thank for regular publishing dates. We have a

little more freedom in the slushing schedule to accommodate everyone's busy lives--including mine. But we do work hard to keep a regular schedule, to respond to stories in a timely manner. We have four important monthly deadlines--1st of the month is publication day; 8th of the month is the last day to read and vote on stories for the month's final/winnowing round; 10th of the month is first day of winnowing; 20th of the month is the last day of winnowing. Everyone is regularly informed of those dates via automated email reminders. Primarily, though, it all rests on everyone getting their jobs done. Most of the time that's not a problem, and if it is a problem there are always extenuating circumstances--more important priorities that *should* come first.

MS: As an online magazine, what do you find to be the greatest challenge(s) about being based online? The feats?

AY: The hardest part about being based online is that you don't have anything to put in people's hands. It's contradictory to what I just said, I know. But there is something about having a story published and being able to take it home and hand to your mom and say, "See, there's my name. In ink."

But on the other hand, our overhead is much lower than a print magazine's. Which, I like.

MS: All of your staff consists of volunteers. What do you do to pay the bills at the end of each month and where you get the funds to pay the authors?

AY: My pocket. Sadly. When I took over *FFO*, I took over the existing business model, meaning each issue would always be free online. I've been working on finding other ways to finance the magazine but it's a very slow process. Neil Clarke and *Clarkesworld* have proven that it can be done. It's just going to take a while. We've begun selling downloadable convenience copies each month in addition to a monthly subscription through several major distributors (WeightlessBooks.com, Amazon, Smashwords, B&N). It's making money...slowly. But the difference definitely comes out of my personal bank account.

SV: Mostly Anna's answer, but I will say that our entire staff consists of writers. Every wise writer knows that an important way of improving your own writing is to analyze and critique the writing of others. So our staff members enjoy that benefit, and that benefit is the reason most of them join. Some stay because they find they enjoy this side of the industry as much as the writing side of it. Some cycle out because they've reached a

point at which they feel they've learned all they can. Some go on to bigger and better things.

MS: On your website, it's mentioned that many people on your staff have a sweet spot for science fiction and fantasy submissions, when it comes to accepting stories of a different genre, what helps a story stand out?

AY: Story, plain and simple. A good story, well told, will always stand out. And it needs to start in the first line. Grab us by the nose and hold us glued to that laptop screen from the very first words. Don't dilly-dally your way into the story.

Personally, I adore horror. I'll admit I have a soft spot there. But you have to make us care about the main character. We need to know her. Love her. Hurt with her. Otherwise, meh. Off with her to the rejection pile.

SV: First of all, I think we're publishing a pretty well-balanced mix of genres. But Literary, Mainstream, Sci-fi, Romance, Western, Slipstream, any good story has the same essential qualities: three of them for me:

First and most important is a story that makes me feel deeply. I don't care what the feeling is--joy, laughter, giddiness, grief, love, hate. Make me *feel!* The author needs to show me he understands the concept of empathy (not sympathy), and that he knows how to use it make his characters powerful in conveying emotion.

Second, writing that shows me the author cares about more than just slapping words on a page, more than just about telling a story, but understands that how you tell a story, every word chosen, every sentence constructed, is important. I want writing to sparkle. I want it to be delicious on the tongue. Authors should be reading and studying poetry as a tool in the writing of fiction. I don't need fiction to sound like poetry. I don't need fancy, self-important prose. But letting a form of writing that is all about word choice and sentence structure influence an author's fiction can only improve it.

Third, a story that shows me the author knows how to use that delicious language to construct a story, how to draw a reader in, how to hold the reader's attention, understands the promise of a story's opening and the responsibility he has to keep that promise.

MS: In the most recent post on FlashBlog, Anna wittily discusses the importance of a writer being befriended by a non-writer for the author's overall sanity and well-being. Now, I'm stuck somewhere between what Yeatts calls a hermit, who hides away to chuck out her entire story and only gets up to feed her crazy-eyed cat, and the introvert's introvert who avoids eye contact at all costs and needs someone to take her out into a world to converse with more than mere characters in her head. Who are you as writers

and who keeps you normal? Do you still have time for writing while running such a flourishing magazine?

AY: I'm a moderate level hermit. I need the house to myself and a large stash of coffee. I block myself into a room and write until the muse lets me up. The only thing that keeps me from staying there for months on end is that I have children who would be living on ketchup packets and stale cheerios if I didn't come out. (Not really!) I have the world's most supportive husband who keeps me sane. He's wonderful with the kiddos and does all kinds of great daddy things with them so I can have my writing time.

It is hard to find a balance between writing and running the magazine. The magazine takes an enormous chunk of time, especially since branching out into social media and e-distributing. I tell myself that I'll write first while my creative mind is fresh and then use the magazine as a break but that's when a crisis will break out and I'm back into the magazine.

SV: I'm afraid I've let my writing slide these past few years. But I can't entirely blame *FFO*. I have, however, found that I enjoy this end of the process as much as I enjoy the initial production end (writing). But I've found it's harder to find quiet writing solitude with teenage children than it was with small children. The little buggers don't take naps, they don't go to bed at 8:00, and they all hang out at my house. And life is really about priorities. I have many priorities that take precedence over my writing. But when I do write, who am I as a writer? I'm a train. I get myself chugging along and prefer to keep moving. When something comes along to interrupt me it's not unlike a train derailment--a mangled wreckage of shrieking metal and burning diesel fuel! Someday, when the rest of my life gives me more opportunity to write, I'll get that train going again, but it's not *FFO* that's taking away my writing time.

MS: What are the perks of working with so many people dedicated to writing?

AY: You never stop learning. Suzanne is absolutely brilliant at what she does. I love going onto the winnowing boards after she gives her final story critiques. I always see something differently or realize all the nuances of storytelling and technique that I've missed. I couldn't ask for a better Editor-in-Chief. She's amazing.

SV: You know, we can talk about political correctness and tolerance 'til the cows come home. But the truth is, it's always nice to be in a room full of people with whom you have something in common. But the greatest perk is finding just how different we all are, just how much we don't have in common, learning from each other, learning to be more

tolerant of differing opinions. Because we may all be writers but that hardly means we all agree on anything involved with storytelling. We very seldom see complete agreement on stories. And I value that. I value every opinion, every comment, even if I don't agree with them. Even the most wildly disparate opinions give me food for thought as I mull my decisions.