



**Cyn Vargas**  
**Independent Press Report**  
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# Curbside Splendor Publishing

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## Fact Sheet

**Website:** [www.curbsidesplendor.com](http://www.curbsidesplendor.com)

**Contact Information:**

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2816 N. Kedzie Ave. #2  
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**Founded:** Curbside Splendor was conceived by Victor David Giron in the early 1990's at an apartment in Urbana, Illinois. Officially, it was founded in the fall of 2009 and is located in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois.

**What They Publish:** They publish fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry and photography.\*

**Description of Press:** Curbside Splendor Publishing was established to publish literary fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art based in contemporary urban (and sometimes suburban) settings. Their goal is to support the independent publishing process and to promote urban-themed writing.

**Focus:** Curbside Splendor publishes books of prose and poetry on a regular basis. They like to make books that combine literature with art somehow, but more importantly, publish books that they love. Their books have received national reviews in Publishers Weekly, Flavorwire, Huffington Post, and LA Weekly, and Chicago Tribune. Curbside Splendor is open to all genres, though they are fond of gritty urban stories. They like realism that is slightly off-balance. Urban fantasy is welcome here.

**Distribution:** All trades, wholesale, university, and library accounts by Consortium Book Sales & Distribution beginning in June of 2013. Currently, Curbside Splendor titles are also available through Ingram's distribution list and local independent bookstores.

**Activity:** About eight books a year with new partnership with Consortium.

**Titles Available in Print:** 8

*\*They also publish an online journal and a print semi-annual journal.*

**Average Print Run:** They average 500 – 750 each print run. Their highest selling books is at about 1,200. They have been small due to lack of distribution, but now with Consortium next year and their catalog of upcoming titles they're hoping their sales units will increase.

**Submission:** They accept book submissions by invitation only. If you have a book that may fit their vision, please send them a one or two page query letter by email to [info@curbsidesplendor.com](mailto:info@curbsidesplendor.com) summarizing the finished work, yourself, and why you think Curbside Splendor may be a fit.

**Upcoming Publications:**

- *The Way We Sleep: An Anthology* by C. James Bye and Jessa Bye, 2012
- *Everything Flows* by James Greer, 2013
- *Lost in Space* by Ben Tanzer, 2013
- *The Waiting Tide* by Ryan W. Bradley (Concepción Books, a CS imprint), 2013
- *Kiss As Many Women As You Can* by Franki Elliot, 2013
- *Always/ Siempre* by Helen Vitoria and B.L. Pawelek (Concepción Books), 2013
- *FLY GROUNDED* by Chris Terry, 2013
- *True to the Blues* by Tom Williams, 2013
- *Porn & Cookies* by Samantha Irby, 2013
- *Animals in Peril* by Ryan Kenealy, 2014

## Why Curbside Splendor Publishing

I came across Curbside Splendor when they hosted an event at the Empty Bottle. I befriended Victor David Giron on Facebook and then met him briefly at the event. The more I learned about Curbside Splendor's online and print journal, along with their press, the more I was interested. I submitted a short story for their semi-annual journal and when I heard about the report I had to do, there was no question; Curbside Splendor was my first option.

Besides publishing good work, Curbside Splendor intrigued me because they published great short story collections. Notice the plural: short story collections. Being a short story writer myself, it was encouraging to see an independent publisher invest in a form that so many say is not profitable and not as enjoyable to the reader as a novel.

I wanted to sit down with Victor and discover why he publishes short story collections, how he got started, and how it seems that Curbside Splendor has grown so quickly and effectively over such a short period of time. I was curious to hear what he had planned for the future.

And being a Chicago writer, I thought: why not explore what's in my own backyard?

## Interview

**Victor David Giron**  
**Curbside Splendor Publishing Publisher/Editor-in-Chief**  
**(Conducted in person, November 2012)**

**Cyn Vargas:** What I find intriguing about you and Curbside Splendor is that you publish short story collections when the market seems to dictate that novels are the way to go. What is it about the short story form that makes you want to publish them?

**Victor David Giron:** My real interest in short stories originally came from of being aware of them as an actual art form. Later I began to discover there were all these people writing short stories. I was interested in these people writing short stories because I, myself, can't, and I realized how hard it is to do. That's what started my pursuit of developing a publication company. I thought, "why not showcase the art form of the short story?" That's what we focused on initially.

I want them all to succeed commercially, but primarily I think it's important that they stand as art projects. That's why I don't shy away from the short story. I view short stories as powerful a medium as the novel is and as poetry is as long as the concept fits what I view as an art projects. I'm also a fan of the longer form, so for the next year we do have some longer projects that we're going to focus on. We're still doing short story collections, but as I grow Curbside, I want to showcase different forms. I don't want to be known as just a short story publisher. We have two fiction projects and more non-fiction projects planned, along with poetry, for 2014.

**CV:** Of the books that you publish and have planned for the future, how many of those are those you sought out and how many were submitted?

**VDG:** Thus far we have mostly people that we sought out. We aren't adverse to something that just comes to us. I guess it depends. Some projects have come to us, but the author had a connection to one of our editors and was interested in what we do and said they'd like to work with us. One writer who came to us is Samantha Irby. She's a prolific performer, always performing at reading events, and is a very engaging reader. She runs this blog: [Bitches Gotta Eat](#). It's a super popular blog and she writes like crazy. She's been approached by agents and is shopping a series to Showtime. She discovered what we were doing and approached us. She wrote this essay that hundreds of people have read and through that agents began contacting her, but they only wanted to publish stuff that she already had published on her website. She envisioned writing something that was more personal, and they were shying away from that.

One author we sought was [Franki Elliot](#). She wrote *Piano Rats* which was published in October 2011. She's a really interesting writer because she's in the music industry. Works for a music agency company and I guess she went to school and studied screenwriting, graduated, and kind of more got into music, started working in nightclubs, booking bands and stuff while still continuing to write on the side. She wrote a blog and collected all these little stories that she was writing. She used to always complain about wanting to be a writer and not being able to figure it out, and then somehow her boyfriend, after they broke up, collected all bunch of little stories she had written and put it all together and gave it to her and said, "See you are a writer. Here's your book." So, out of that came her collection, *Piano Rats*. She

actually had self-published a version of it earlier in 2011 and did a hundred copies. It was designed by a friend of hers who's an artist from Chicago, [Shawn Stucky](#), who is a really prolific multi-disciplined artist known mostly as a painter, but also does jewelry and other crafty things and as a favor to her, 'cause he liked her work, he actually made a painting on wood inspired by her collection and gave it to her and also designed the cover. So she made a hundred copies on her own and just sold them to her friends and was thinking of doing a larger print run. That's when we discovered it and asked to publish it so more people could read it. The version she had was bigger and clumsier looking; we put it into this little pocketbook format. The idea with *Piano Rats* is that it's forty-four micro-stories. Some people would say poems. It's on the verge of poetry and stories, some of them are five lines, some are more prose-y, some 2-3 pages.

Not that we are avoiding unsolicited manuscripts. We need to take steps of identifying names that will allow us to develop unknown voices. Half of the contributors in Curbside's journal are published for the first time. We highlight some fresh voices. Curbside is also taking on the new imprint Artifice Magazine which we will now call [Artifice Books](#). They have been in Chicago awhile and are on their fifth issue. They are going to become an imprint completely different from Curbside or ACM.

**CV:** What about [Chicago Stories](#) by Michael Czyzniejewski? How did that come about?

**VDG:** Michael is was an instructor of Creative Writing at Bowling Green in Ohio and, while there, was editor-in-chief of [Mid-American Review](#) which is one of the most prestigious literary journals. Their print runs are thousands of copies. So, he's worked as an editor and recently moved from Bowling



Green State to Missouri State University. He has been writing for years and he's known as a short story writer. His first collection came out in 2008 called [Elephants in Our Bedroom](#), a highly-acclaimed book of short stories put out by [Dznac Books](#).

He's a true blue Chicagoan. The inspiration for *Chicago Stories* happened when the Cubs lost their chance to go to the World Series, supposedly when Steve Bartman interrupted the game and the Cubs ended up losing. For some reason Michael drew the connection between Bartman and Mrs. O'Leary, this little old lady whose cow accidentally kicked over a lamp and caused the great Chicago fire. He wrote a short story about it; it's the first short story in the book where he imagines her ghost consulting Steve Bartman at the ruin of Megs Field that Mayor Daley just decided to tear down.

Mike gets these ideas to write these little short stories that fed him to write other little short stories and he submitted them to [Another Chicago Magazine \(ACM\)](#), which Curbside now publishes. The editor-in-chief of ACM, Jacob Knabb was really intrigued with these and wanted to publish two to three more and asked if there were more. Michael said no, but thought that maybe he should make some more, so he just started writing them over the last 3-5 years. He started to writing these sorts of micro-fictions, taking these characters in Chicago and imaging them in different situations. A couple of years later ACM, Jacob and Michael started talking about putting them together in a book.

**CV:** How did you meet Jacob?

**VDG:** I started Curbside Splendor to first publish my novel, but in the process of doing so I discovered there were all these publishers here and things like ACM and companies like [Featherproof](#) and as I tried to evolve Curbside Splendor I took the liberty to emulate what the other entities were doing.

I did a reading as part of [Milwaukee Ave Arts Festival](#). I had never been to a reading before and I read a short story and afterwards met the girls running it. This was when [Beauty Bar](#), which I own, was first opening and I thought maybe we should do something like this on a Sunday night when no one was there anyway and by having these readings I started to meet people. I would go on Facebook and try to find authors/publishers in Chicago as a means to invite people to the series and that's how I met Jacob. I invited him to come read at an event at Beauty Bar and he was the editor-in-chief of ACM. We hit it off.

**CV:** How did your relationship with Jacob and having ACM become an imprint happen? How did *Chicago Stories* come into play?

**VDG:** I started to do this bookstand at [Logan Square Farmer's Market](#) as another way to help promote these cool independent publishers. So, I started to collaborate more with Jacob and through that process I started to learn about Jacob's ideas and that's when he said he was thinking about putting out *Chicago Stories* and about Michael. He also started talking about how ACM was really struggling and had really bad organization. I'm a business guy. That's my specialty and I enjoy organizing things and making them better. I told him about Curbside Splendor and that I really wanted to expand and start producing more books. At that time, I already had published my book, [Sophomoric Philosophy](#) and then [Curbside Splendor Journal](#) and then published this book of poetry, *The Chapbook: Poems by Charles Bane Jr.*

Between Jacob and my conversations he had great ideas, but was lacking resources and organization and I had the resources and organization, so I said you should come on board with me, and we can take over ACM plus we can pursue some of these projects you have and make them happen.. I met Michael and he sent me the manuscript and I was like, this is awesome it needs to get published like now. Then I met Rob Funderburk, the illustrator. He and Michael had been exchanging stories, and Rob being a perpetual artist was drawing as he was reading the stories; the book was well underway. So, I got it organized and we ended up publishing it.

**CV:** Who is your printer?

**VDG:** Our books are printed by [Lighting Source](#) which is owned by Ingram, another big distributor, because our printer is owned by Ingram, the books that are printed by them are put on their Ingram distribution networks, but they don't do anything to promote it.

**CV:** I know you recently attained [Consortium Books and Sales](#) as a distributor. How did that come about?

**VDG:** It's really hard to get hooked up with a distributor, especially with one like Minneapolis-based Consortium who will be distributing for Curbside Splendor next year. They have a reputation of working with independent publishers. Distributors like that shy away from new publishers, though, because new publishers tend to come on and then disappear. I decided to focus on building a brand and building a catalogue.

About a year and a half ago, I met one of my favorite authors, James Greer, who has two novels published with better-known independent publisher, [Akashic Books](#). I randomly emailed him asking him if I could publish a short story of his in Curbside Splendor's Journal. He sent me a story and it was wonderful. I told him we should work on a project at some point and he said Akashic was publishing his next novel, but that he had never had a short story collection published. We're publishing his debut short story collection, [Everything Flows](#).

I confided in James about not having any real distribution. He suggested I talk with Akashic Books who distribute through Consortium and have often, in the past, done sub-distribution for smaller publishers. James made a recommendation to the president of Akashic Books. I had a conference call with Johnny Temple and talked about what we are doing. He suggested I approach Consortium directly and gave me a referral for the president of Consortium. I sent her a package and she called back the next day and a couple of days later she agreed to take us on. It just happened like that.

**CV:** How will having a distributor change things for Curbside?

**VDG:** Consortium needs us to publish eight to ten books a year—to make it work for them we have to be really active and have an active catalogue. Our biggest selling book is *Chicago Stories* and that's only sold 1,100 books and Amber Sparks' book, [May We She These Human Bodies](#), has sold 600 thus far. I have to have all the artwork and marketing plans in place by January for all the books that they are going

to distribute in the fall of next year. When a book is published and they distribute it, the books are done in advance by three-four months of the publication date. We are already discussing 2014.

**CV:** Will Consortium distribute past titles or just the upcoming ones?

**VDG:** All of our titles that are on backlist will be in their system, but we won't become effective in their distribution system till June of next year. The first time Curbside will be in one of their catalogues will be in fall of next year.

We have to make decisions about which books to put up front as new releases: Samantha Irby's book; a blues road novel, [Don't Start Me Talkin'](#) by Tom Williams who is the chair of English at Morehead State University, and a nonfiction book about being a father by [Ben Tanzer](#) who is a Chicago author.

We also have a new imprint called [Concepción Books](#). The idea is that it's a bilingual imprint focused on elegant or romantic poetry and prose. We have two books scheduled to come out under this imprint. *The Waiting Tide* by Ryan Bradley is coming out next March.

We have another book on poetry/photography- [Always/Siempre](#) coming out later next year written in English by Helen Vitoria and B.L. Pawelek. Both excel as poets and great photographers who collaborated, so half the book is poems written by Helen based off pictures taken by B.L. and the other half is the reverse.

**CV:** Since now you have to print more books with Consortium, how does that increase your budget?

**VDG:** Where it really has an impact is that since we have to get ready right now for stuff that isn't coming out till next year we have to make investments to pay people right now and get things going. One thing they told me is that they don't believe in forcing publishers to print more than they can sell, so they said they would work with us to establish reasonable forecasts.

One thing we've done is that everything here has been able to pay for itself. The print runs haven't been that big because, using Lightning Source, we're able to print exactly what we need. We do a lot of pre-sales because if we can get that money right now, we can actually use it to fund the initial print run, but with whole new model it is going to require a whole new investment.

**CV:** Will you be using the same printer or is that conflict of interest?

**VDG:** When you print through Lightning Source you can choose to have it available through Ingram's distribution list or not. The way we have it now, only I can order books. If we continue using them, I'll order books and they will ship straight to Consortium.

**CV:** Do you pay the people you work with?

**VDG:** We pay the artists. We pay the authors, but no author gets an advance. Instead they get royalties. The editors work pro bono with the idea that if we can ever make this profitable, they can share the

profits among themselves. At the end of this, I won't get any profits, but I want to be profitable enough for the editors to be paid.

**CV:** Do you highly encourage your authors to be involved with the marketing aspect?

**VDG:** We rely on them heavily. They are the workhorses. A book doesn't sell unless they do that. We do all sorts of marketing: we put out the press releases and send out review copies to get authors reviewed or interviewed, but ultimately, if the authors are not doing their own marketing, the book isn't going to succeed.

**CV:** Ever encountered a project you wanted to take on, but met the author and knew they weren't going to be able to sell it?

**VDG:** I mentioned before that the authors we engage are the ones that we have sought out. The reason is exactly your point. A lot of these projects I see as investments, but I also see them as investments in a person. So, one big ingredient is that the author is marketable and can get people excited.

*Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions*

Michael Czyzniejewski

Illustrations by Rob Funderburk

[Curbside Splendor, 2012. 145 Pages, \$14.99 paperback]

ISBN: 978-0-9834228-5-3

I may never remember how to spell the last name of the author of *Chicago Stories: 40 Dramatic Fictions*—Michael Czyzniejewski—but I will remember the snippets of unique and powerful mini-prose referred to as “dramatic fictions” that make up this page-turner. They are not your traditional stories, more like conversations on the page that capture the varied voices of Chicago. Some are confessional, regretful, and gripping; others are sweet, goofy, and funny.

Czyzniejewski manages to capture the voices of famous and infamous Chicagoans from Mrs. O’Leary to John Wayne Gacy to even the Water Tower itself. Other stories include R. Kelley, Mayor Daley, and an Italian beef sandwich sitting at the end of a bar. These dramatic fictions would stand well enough alone, but like adding extra cheese to a deep dish pizza, they are even more delicious when accompanied by illustrations by Rob Funderburk.

Czyzniejewski writes about Chicago characters such as Rosetta Jackson, Jean Baptiste du Sable, Hilary Rodham Clinton, Rod Blagojevich, and David Hasselhoff, blending the past and present into a seamless braid of *what ifs* that was almost impossible not to devour in one sitting. From one page to the next, I didn’t know what to expect. There were moments in which I had to stop and do some research. Who is this person I am about to read about and why are they important or, better yet, why are they worth a story? The book was an impromptu Chicago history lesson that I didn’t mind at all.



From the smooth feel of the cover to the watercolor painting of Chicago's skyline, from the illustrations to the stories themselves, everything is there to engage the reader. This includes the entertaining titles: "Roger Ebert Critiques His Second Date With Oprah Winfrey," "Pat Sajak Explains the Many Metaphors of a Giant Spinning Wheel and In His Last Will and Testament," "John Hughes Leaves Specific Instructions for a Breakfast Club Sequel."

Czyzniewski captures so much emotion, place, and character development in stories no longer than a couple of pages. "In The Water Tower Suffers Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," he manages to create empathy for building:

Imagine everyone you've ever known, all your family and friends, dying in one fell swoop. Imagine their deaths coming quickly, one after another like dominos, but being horrible and excruciating, burning them alive in a wave of hysteria. Imagine believing the same death was coming for you, surrounding you, denying any mercy, promising to take you last. First, you'd have to witness its power, watch what it did to all your friends, all the while standing there helpless, impotent, no way to keep yourself from watching their agony. Their cries audible only to you, so many people about, bells clanging, panic as thick as fog, the city being laid to waste.

All the dramatic fictions in *Chicago Stories* are just as intriguing as the last and yet different and unexpected each time. It's a book that I will return to, talk about, but not one that I will pass on. People can go buy their own. This copy is mine.