

Join us for a literary extravaganza!

★ March 29–April 1, 2012 Portland
MAINE
Festival OF THE *Book*

Most events are **FREE!**

The Maine Festival of the Book brings together readers and writers to enjoy readings, panel discussions, book signings, activities, and performances.

Thursday, March 29

7 pm *John Cole, Founding Director of the Center for the Book, Library of Congress*
Glickman Family Library, University of Southern Maine

Friday, March 30

Opening Night: Tony Horwitz

7:30 pm Abromson Center, University of Southern Maine

Pulitzer Prize-winner Tony Horwitz, author of the historical narratives *Midnight Rising* and *Confederates in the Attic*, will give an illustrated talk.
(Tickets at www.mainereads.org starting in February)

Saturday, March 31

9 am - 5 pm *Readings, Book Sales, Signings, Performances, and Author Discussions • FREE!*

Abromson Center, University of Southern Maine

More than 75 authors, illustrators and performers! Something for all ages and interests. Biography, memoir, mystery, fiction, fantasy and kids programs too! Presenting authors include J. Courtney Sullivan, Peter Behrens, Heidi Julavits, Jessica Treadway, Debra Spark, Morgan Callan Rogers, Lou Ureneck, Ben Marcus, Barbara Walsh, Caroline Leavitt, Angus King, Gibson Fay LeBlanc and Lynn Plourde.

5 pm *O' Brother Man: The Art and Life of Lynd Ward,*

Abromson Center, University of Southern Maine

A film presentation with discussion by director Michael Maglaras

7pm *Annual Poetry Party*

(Location to be determined)

Sunday, April 1

10 am – 3 pm *Book Arts Bazaar*

Wishcamper Center, University of Southern Maine

7 pm *Longfellow's Shorts*

Portland Stage Company, 25A Forest Avenue



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READS**

The Maine Festival of the Book is produced by Maine Reads in collaboration with community organizations statewide.

Dedicated to the fight for a more literate Maine, Maine Reads provides meaningful programs that celebrate Maine's rich literary heritage and encourage literacy and collaboration.

For more information visit www.mainereads.org

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A Stone's Throw from the Heart

Morgan Callan Rogers's *Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea* may have crisscrossed the Atlantic, but her debut novel roots us on our rocky coast.

INTERVIEW BY DAVID SVENSON

Maine novelist Morgan Callan Rogers has a real need for writing: "I had this voice," she says. "She just kept talking to me." That voice was Florine Gilham, the main character of her debut book, *Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea*. Released through Viking Press this month, Callan Rogers's narrative pulls us vividly through 320 pages of empathetic adolescence, startling loss, and kindling love.

Starting in 1963, on through the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the mysterious disappearance of Florine's free-spirited mother, Carlie, Callan Rogers plunges us into the small lobstering hamlet known as The Point, reminiscent of the rocky coastline tourists photograph in warmer months. But Callan Rogers's teenage characters live year-round in this beautiful and tumultuous environment, swimming through the crisp waters of summer and skittering across icy roads in the gut of winter.

When Carlie vanishes while on a trip with her friend Patty to Crow's Nest Harbor, the gates to a winter Hell spill open into the everyday life of Florine, and we accompany this twelve-year-old to her eighteenth year, stumbling into hidden family dynamics



along the way.

What Callan Rogers accomplishes here is a piercingly knowing portrait of the complicated thoughts and actions of a maturing teenage girl. Through first-person narration, she reveals a prickly and questioning mind ravished by the inexplicable disappearance of her mother. While Florine appears to find a groove in her new life, living with her

grandmother, the absence haunts her as she reconciles personal distances with family and friends, particularly her neighborhood chum, Bud.

Just as Oskar Schell, Jonathan Safran Foer's nine-year-old protagonist in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), demonstrates a provocative youthful candor in his search for understanding after

THE ARTS

his father's death in 9/11, so does Callan Rogers's Florine surprise with her singular manner. There's a reality in her voice. The true-to-age speech patterns and thought processes strike the reader with stunning originality. This is a refreshing take on what a narrator *should* or *should not be*. The bottom line: be true to a character.

Florine's inner world brings to mind the chic, evocative memories in Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* (1984). Both tales juxtapose physical absence with emotional detachment, and both are so striking visually you find yourself still 'seeing' the story long after reading it.

Morgan Callan Rogers does more than detail the journey of a young woman in search of her own maternal identity; she embodies a wide range of audiences with her cast of teenage characters. This New England novel captures the local flavor with a one-of-a-kind setting and dialect straight from the shore—Where else would you expect to hear a character described as "spleeny?" But what's more, the emotional appeal makes sense no matter what coast a reader looks out onto tonight or how they'll describe their persnickety friends. This New England novel will sail around the world.

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What are your memories from growing up in Bath?

In the summers we lived in a cottage my grandfather had on the New Meadows River. There were lobster-men there every summer, so we got to hear the boats go out and come back in. It was a little like where Florine lived.

I was a town girl, and people would start showing up in eighth grade from the small elementary schools, like in Woolwich and Phippsburg. I always wondered how they felt, having grown up in a small, safe, familiar environment [before being moved] to a bigger one.

Have you always been a writer?

I started writing at eight years old. I wrote stories about horses, and I illustrated them. I've been writing ever since, mostly journalism. I wrote fiction on the side. I never expected it to be published. But I wanted to be more of a fiction writer, I wanted to pursue it. I enrolled in USM's Stonecoast MFA program. I worked with some really terrific people and wrote a story there that had a very strong voice in it. And I developed it into [*Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea*].



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I graduated from Morse High School in Bath in 1970. I was born in 1952. That makes me 60 years old this year. How do I feel about publishing a book a little later in life? Great. Would I change the course of my life to have published it earlier? No—it wouldn't be the book it is without me being who I am today.

How much has Florine shown up in your work?

Florine figured into three or four stories. She's got a 79-page novella. She just came full-blown. She had a whole life.

To what extent is this a work of fiction?

Fiction is a funny thing. In order for it to be good fiction, it has to ring entirely true. Regarding *Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea*, the plot and the situations are entirely made up. The characters are mixes of folks I've known, yet they are totally themselves. The setting is a mix of Phippsburg, Bath, Georgetown, Freeport, and a tiny place called Quaker Point, where I grew up during the summers, yet it's a place that exists only in my imagination.

How would you classify the book's genre?

I didn't think about genre when I wrote it, I just wrote it. Now that it's written, I guess it would be classified as a coming-of-age story, where a young protagonist is thrust into adult situations. Some places have it pegged as an historical novel, which makes me feel ancient.

Is there talk of a movie?

I don't believe that my agent has been approached about screen rights, yet. If it were to be made into a film, than I hope it would be a good film. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a fine example of a wonderful movie adapted from a beloved novel. But I think we've all seen movies adapted from books that we loved that were disappointing to us. If any of this comes to pass for me, I hope I like the adaptation. But really, I have less control over that than I think, so I'm not going to worry about it.

The notion of your book first being published in Germany is intriguing. What's the story behind this?

Mine is one of those annoying fairy tale stories. A kind mentor and friend suggested I contact their agent when I finished the manuscript, which I started during my stint at Stonecoast. I did, following the steps to get



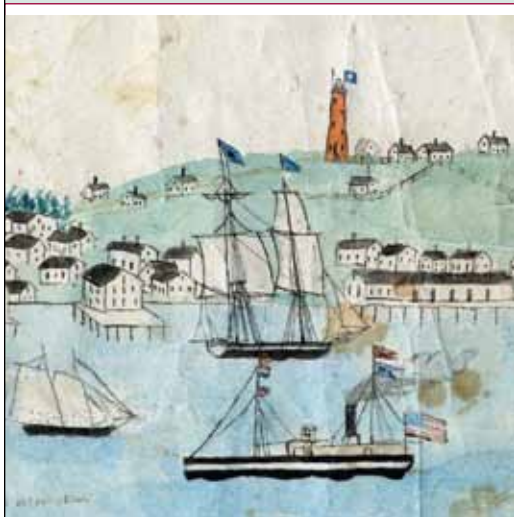
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Port of Portland: A Ship-Shaped History



Portland Harbor detail from a 30' x 2' panorama roll, circa 1850, in MMM collection.

Maine Maritime Museum's latest exhibit presents a vision of the history of Maine's Gateway City as portrayed by the ships that have transited Portland Head to clear Spring Point Ledge; a series of vessels as diverse as the different eras they represent; vessels that have brought hope, grief, sustenance, prosperity, disappointment, and a good day's work to its people.

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there. I wrote a synopsis and sent in the manuscript, and the agent accepted me as a client. While the manuscript was on submission to U.S. editors, a foreign book scout stopped into the agency, saw the manuscript, took it to the Frankfurt Book Fair, and sold it to mareverlag, a Hamburg-based company that specializes in fiction and nonfiction about the sea. They loved it, and I worked with them as it was translated into German and published in July, 2010. The month it was published, my amazing agent sold it to Viking here in the U.S.A. When I look at the catalogue of authors who have been published under Viking, I pinch myself. Both experiences with both publishing companies have been amazing. It's also scheduled to be published in Spain, Australia, and Italy.

Did you have to visit places in Maine to write the book?

I was in Portland, in a little, crooked house near Washington Avenue and Silly's. I wrote it in a little loft while working for the fire chief in Portland. I wrote it nights and weekends.

I stayed away from [the Bath area] when I was writing the book, because I wanted a different landscape. I wanted to imagine the landscape. I didn't want to be sitting in it. So in Portland, in a little house with a small backyard, I could make the landscape bigger than it was, different than it was.

There's a rough music to your Mainers' dialogue: "bone-kind," "jeezly," and "He's down-deep." The matter-of-fact way Florine's father takes his unsold culls home so he can steam the "cripples" for supper. How has your background in acting helped tone your ear to this?

The Mainers I know speak in what you refer to as a rough music. They've honed the art of the pause to a 't.' I don't know the origin of "jeezly," but I'm thinking it's a combination of Jesus and Christly. I used my mother's form of swearing, "jumped up Christmas," at least once.

I've been hearing this 'rough music' all my life, and it's the way Florine began speaking to me. Being on stage for a number of years did help with dialogue. On stage, playwrights rely on rhythms to convey what's going on. Harold Pinter, for example, has a pause named after him—the Pinter Pause. To be more specific, as far as plays I've either performed in or admire, *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder, captures the rhythm of a plain-spoken New England town. *Spoon River Anthology* by Edgar Lee

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Masters also does a wonderful job. Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood* and *A Child's Christmas in Wales* are examples of recitation nirvana. Shakespeare! On the other end of the spectrum, one of my favorite playwrights, Sam Shepard, does brilliant things with dialect, rhythm, and speech.

How has Maine made you the writer you are today?

I would have been a writer no matter where I lived. Place and environment is crucial to who you become, but I believe that the desire to write comes from somewhere inside, and that would have happened anywhere. What Maine gave me was the space to get away by myself and feed my imagination, along its shores, along the trails in the woods, without the hectic pace that somewhere down the coast may have drowned out for a time. The people in Maine, at least the people I know, are funny, practical, un-sentimental, wry, and smart. I was lucky to grow up with several oral storytellers in my clan. The rhythms of their speech and the cadences of their silences make up the backbone of the book. I hope they know how much they've honored me with who they are and what they represent to me. I love the Maine I know.

Who do you enjoy reading?

I just finished David Wroblewski's *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*, and I'm still inside that book. It's an amazing read. I'm not sure what I'm going to pick up next. I have a whole stack that I've packed to come to Maine with me. Contemporary writers: John Irving, Margaret Atwood, T.C. Boyle, George Saunders, Lorrie Moore, Amy Bloom, Amy Semple, Denis Johnson, Kent Haruf, Anne Tyler, Cathie Pelletier, Linda Hasselstrom, Barbara Kingsolver, Bobbi Jo Mason, Alice Munro, Ann Patchett, and so on. This type of question is hard to answer. I'll think of fifty more in a minute.

Have you been contracted by Viking for another book? What kind of advance can a debut writer look forward to?

There is stuff in the works, but everything is subject to change. Advances vary, according to the agent, according to the publisher, and so on. Am I going to tell you what I got? Nah. ■

▶▶ Hear Morgan Callan Rogers read from *Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea* on Jan. 27, 4 p.m., at Local Buzz in Cape Elizabeth. 541-9024. For more from Morgan Callan Rogers, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2011/12/a-stones-throw-extras.

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