



**Cereal**  
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Writing about life in the small press

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**FREE**

## Cereal—The Magazine

Hello Readers! I've often thought the writer's life is a life of its own and is a story that needs telling. So, I came with an idea for a publication that centers around what it is like to be a writer and how one sees life both on general day to day terms but also as part of a community of writers bound, more or less, into a category known as the small press. We'll publish letters from poets, reviews, editorial experiences as well as act as a resource for new and established writers. I hope you enjoy! G.P.

## Appletree Lane by Lyn Lifshin

I'm sitting at the desk I used to nights after ballet class. I'd come home around 9 pm and work until midnight. I didn't realize I was lit up as if spotlights were on me until I got a strange letter. But, to go back to the beginning.

I moved to Appletree lane in September, the same month it is now though years ago. Dogwood red berries and the smell of burning applewood. Was it an omen, carrying boxes and records, that my knee went thru the glass paneled door, shattering my tights, the afternoon, as in weeks my marriage would be? Weeks later, with the house we still had not sold full of dressers and hanging lights I didn't want to get rid of on Rapple Drive and one bedroom on Appletree, a mountain of books, my now ex husband ran off. He sprinted from my life with the wife of a man who had come hopefully to rent our other house to buy. She looked like a slightly younger me, wore

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## The Story of Gloom Cupboard: How to create a moderately successful litzine

By Richard Wink

Before you even think about starting your own litzine you need to set aside a little bit of spare time for the venture. Luckily for me when I started Gloom Cupboard in August 2007 I was then in between jobs, time was an object I could afford to waste willy-nilly. I spent the first two weeks of my exile from the working world sending out poetry submissions to a variety of outlets. A great deal of these outlets depressed me because there seemed so little incentive for the writer to contribute other than rack up another easy publishing credit, did the editors really give a shit about what I was trying to say? The first thing I thought to myself was "I can do better than that! I'm going to create my own litzine."

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a long skirt just like one I had. When she saw Appletree she sighed, “I would do anything to have a house like this.” Apparently, she had.

Living alone on Appletree—was maybe the richest time in my life, scary at times, exasperating, wonderful. I had hardly lived alone. A room by myself for a few months in graduate school didn’t count. The terror or really being in charge in an unfamiliar house ( the first day I found my ex had not paid the oil bill and it was late November and I had to quickly come up with a way to fix that. Then, a day later, the credit card I had to use for new tires was rejected) I vowed to keep this house. I had fallen in love with its dark wood and stained glass, fire places and a room whose floor was 2 by 4’s on end. I had no idea how I could. I imagined going into the R and D Center were the man who left me worked and shooting him on a pale dove floor. Instead, I settled in and got back to writing.

My desk faced the front road, the window close to a Chinese dogwood. As I sit here writing this many years later, not that much has changed. Some birch have died. The trilliums I dug up and brought from Vermont when I spent Mother’s Day with my mother a week after her mother died, spread wildly tho last winter’s snow plow knocked some out. Almost as if to say come back, there’s more here to do. My third Abyssinian cat’s at the bottom of the bed looking so much like my first two who mostly grew up here. The maple drags branches into glass. Light is twisted thru stained glass. Photographs of gone lovers are still in drawers and my mother’s dress, the one she wore for my wedding, hangs in the coat closet as if waiting for her to come back. I don’t live here much. I’m not sure if it is still my home.

Am I the woman who waited in filmy gowns for the man who often didn’t show to come in the dawn from his all night radio show? The nude girl in sketches from the recently dead folksinger-painter, the two of us still locked in a sketch in the dining room wall Jules Feiffer did? Or the woman who held her mother in her last moments, the clock’s 9:46 pm tattooed in her blood? Are they me? Are any of them me?

The first neighbor I met was a tall elderly lady, always elegantly dressed, Mrs. Isabel Buell. She lived in the white clapboard across the street with the large beautiful Dalmatians she walked proudly. Within months of my new single life she invited me to a holiday party where I met a gay couple who had owned my house before the previous owners. They mourned the changes the dentist made but still loved the house. Wood smoke and lemony. They missed the room and wanted

to come back. I met Isabelle's daughter and her husband who lived nearby and were often mowing her lawn. She had gorgeous flowers. In time Isabelle moved into a new smaller additions and didn't keep getting new dogs. Mr. and Mrs. Martin moved into what had been her original house. They were wonderful. He seemed to be able to fix anything. If I was away and a smoke detector came on, he came and checked it. When my car didn't make it up a snowy hill, he was here to make sure I got it into my driveway. His wife introduced my books to her book club and invited me to read. Between ballet and men and writing books, months and years tangled.

My mother came to visit driving her black Pontiac and later taking the bus. Though I saw her getting more frail and gray, without children who were born, went to school, grew up, time didn't seem as linear. The Martins were first on my Christmas card list. He with his mowers and shovels, tall and lean and it seemed to me, always smiling. And she was so warm and friendly too. I'm not sure if I knew exactly when Isabel, who walked less and less, stopped walking outside or anywhere else for good. The Martin boys were already tall and hot-rodding the neighborhood. I worried about my mother getting older, worried about my sister. I worried about getting pregnant, about gaining weight. I traveled for readings and workshops all over the country, edited four anthologies that always knocked me out. It was fun to be the subject of a documentary film, toured the premiere on the east and west coast and Hawaii. The night the Challenger exploded, I huddled in a former boy friend's terry cloth jacket I scorched as the January storm kept the power off for days and I listened wrapped deeply in quilts near the fire place to news and then to an all night radio man I knew I had to know.

One day the strange long long letter. Handwritten. It was about how seeing me at the window every night gave the letter writer, who turned out to be one of the Martin boys, a feeling he was not alone. He said he watched me for days, writing in the almost dark alone, as he was, and knew only I could understand him. He wanted to meet with me and talk. This gave me the creeps. I didn't know which son it was but I stopped feeling ok in the place that had been a refuge. I didn't want to insult him but I didn't want another word I put up curtains tho I never wanted them, wanted the outside to feel part of the space around my desk. Tho the house is hardly visible with thick leaves, I stopped running around nude. The intensity of his letter frightened. I had had student stalkers but this was worse. It was worse than students who came to my house at odd hours or editors pre-

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tending to be insurance salesmen.

It didn't change my life. I didn't have a lot of time to think about it. Travel, relationships, my mother's declining health, writing and publishing and publishing, difficulties with my sister, ballet—there was little time to think again about the letter. And others never followed.

When I began to spend much of my time, most of my time in Virginia and came home occasionally, I always went to see the Martins. Mr. Martin was always in the yard working as before but I learn he'd given in to spending winters in Florida. Then I heard he had been tired and down. Something to do with his heart.

I kept my plants on Appletree in the house and the mail came there as before. Someone comes to check and water and forward things on. I learned the Martins had bought smaller house across the street and bought a small one for one of their sons. I thought it might be the would be -poet-letter writer. Not long after that they moved out of the big house to the smaller rugs with the beautiful oriental rugs. Since they covered the big house, I wondered where they would fit. I still saw Mr. Martin puttering in his new lawn and checking on the flower gardens he had planted. His old ham radio station antenna went with him up the street.

By then the Martin boys had kids of their own. The one who wrote me the letter was divorced, had gone through a few girl friends and AA and was divorced and doing yard work. Cutting lawns, doing the snow plowing. He or maybe his father asked if I'd be interested in helping me with over grown pines, and maples and mulberries. Someone else was mowing and I couldn't shake the uncomfortable ness I felt in the past. We all waved to each other. The fairly young man who did my lawn died suddenly but had arranged for someone else to take over. Somehow coming up with my own man, I felt less vulnerable, but still..... Someone who knew the Martin boy, now a man, said he'd had some problems but had stopped drinking and was a truly nice, reliable man. He seemed great with his kids who, surprising to me, kept getting older.

As I write this, chronology fades in and out like radio stations late at night. He came to a poetry reading I did in town with a girl friend and I was glad to see him. Last winter or maybe the winter before, after a snow storm, assured the driveway would be cleared by the man who had taken over the lawn cutter's jog, but instead finding drifts deep white and impassable and this man refusing to answer his phone, George came out and said he would do the driveway with his sons so we could

get in. And so from then on he's done the snow and cut the grass. Last summer I gauged my shin badly on my uneven slate stairs, to the bone, there wasn't a lot of time to look for a stone mason. When George said he'd try, I said ok. It wasn't a perfect job but no one's fallen again. When I come up with a friend from Virginia, we always chat. Then when I decided it was time to sell my beloved 86 Thunderbird with only 20,000 miles on it, George put a sign on the car and it sold in hours. This weekend, one of the first in mid September since I left, here to put on a new roof, George stopped by. Tho I'd planned to talk to him about some work inside the house, painting the cellar and putting in a ceiling, a part of me still felt on edge because I would have to give him a key. His parents always had one. Maybe still do. I know if he had the urge to get into my house he probably could have quiet easily and seemingly innocently. The letter was years ago.

My friend and I were in the hall talking to him about the painting inside and then about painting eaves that had to be pretty much rebuilt from ant damage and George said his parents would be moving very soon. They had been on a list to go into assisted living and it came up fast. They sold their house in a day. George said it is very sad. He said for many years he was not close to his father, talked of his father's temper, something I never saw, but said they became so close and now he hated the thought of him not being there two doors away. He would miss him being able to help him with projects and tools, said they shared so much, tools and stories. He had gotten to love being with him. He said his son's dirt bike broke down and he spent the summer rebuilding it with his grandfather, the two of them becoming so close. He said it was going to be hard not to have these long warm days all together go on. Sure his father would be in the same town but not down the street. And he worried what his father would do without a workshop and tools and things to putter with. George has the kids on weekends. One has a job now. They all have friends. I gave George the key. He said he was going to his house to disassemble the bunk beds he put up for the boys since they would be over less and less as their own lives were starting.

He shook his head, his parents were not ready for assisted living, they didn't need it, at least not yet. I thought how his parents had moved from at least four houses within view of my desk. I've kept mine, even there rarely as if I want nothing to change. I still have long long hair, wear size double zero minis and take up to 20 dance classes a week. Maybe I am just more comfortable looking backward than ahead.

**Visit Lyn Lifshin's website at [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com)**



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## **BLUE RIBBONS At the County Fair**

**By: Ellaraine Lockie**

**63 Pages / 34 Poems**

**Price: \$10.00**

**PWJ Publishing**

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**Tehama, CA 96090**

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**ISBN: 0-939221-45-4**



### **This Review First Appeared In: Chiron Review**

Ellaraine Lockie once again walks the tight rope between poetry that is accessible and ethereal - poetry that is at once plain spoken and musical. The title for her most recent collection of poetry is deceptively colloquial, *Blue Ribbons at the County Fair*, but her poems travel a varied world taking us far beyond the confines of the county fair. She uses a variety of technique and style to take us with her. As in her past work, she tiptoes along the high-wire that can separate the work of the academically trained and the self-taught writers.

In her poem, “Lost Legacy,” we find her wonderful ability to use alliteration with good effect. Moving us gently forward as she reflects on her beloved Montana, “Houses a hundred years old / with Alzheimer’s / Abandoned in isolation wards / on western prairies // Where homesteads were settled / on small town sanity brinks / Mine long ago lost / to profit margins / on minimal Montana farm // Hospice where I come to heal / from city assaults / My heart heavier / than the hard timber / turned driftwood soft.”

Lockie has received first place prizes for each poem in this collection, and as Lockie explains in her essay at the conclusion of the book, “And yes, some received blue ribbons at county fairs.” She goes on to say, “When I began writing poetry, naturally I thrilled to the idea of poetry contests. Not only are they fun and suspenseful, but placing in them gives credibility to cover-letters, pays money prizes or other honorariums and sometimes provides public reading opportunities.” So in a sense *Blue Ribbons at the County Fair* is sort of an Ellaraine Lockie Greatest Hits Collection. I especially enjoyed her poems focusing on the topic of modern romance - of one sort or another, such as in “The Other Woman”: “She shows signs of jealousy / That slight smart of suspicion / Of course she would know / How a woman / can move in on a man / Hang her underwear / over his philandering lines / Being a practiced poacher herself / An artist in sculpting seduction”. And again in, “Silk Dreams”: “I told you ahead of time / this affair / if it happened / wouldn’t be casual / But here it is a few hours old / Already wearing sneakers / and a wrinkled tee shirt / You say you will pass my way / when time permits / I say the way has pot-holes / that require attention / Mapped maintenance.” “Defying Gravity” also covers this eternal landscape with exceptional skill.

Lockie told me about her jump into poetry, “I previously had written in other genres (and still do)-nonfiction, magazine articles and children’s picture books. Nine years ago I had not read a poem since high school, except for the occasional one I came across in children’s literature. I thought I hated poetry; I thought it had to rhyme. Then one day an old friend sent me some of his poems and wanted my opinion. I liked them, but they didn’t rhyme. So I called my children’s writing mentors for advice. When they told me about free verse, I became obsessed with writing it and with getting it published. This happened at a tough time in my life, and poetry became my salvation. I just jumped in and started writing like crazy, unaware of what other poets were writing. I entered the poems in contests before submitting to editors, knowing that I needed something in cover letters to entice editors into reading my work carefully.” If she needed verification that she was on the right track, she certainly got it.

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What I enjoyed most about this collection is Lockie's ability to use language beautifully and yet have it remain accessible. I understood her metaphors; I could relate to her stories and pictures. And while her writing was accessible, it remained well developed and carefully composed. There are only a few writers in the independent small press who manage to walk this line and not fall in to the pit of abstraction ( Michael Kriesel and Gloria Mindock are certainly two who come to my mind). One wonders if as poets grow and extend themselves that they must inevitably drift further away from the common and push the art form, play with structure and elevate their style of their writing? But it was a joy for me to settle into Lockie's recent collection and find no extraneous obstacles to my entering her world or her meaning. As Lockie has grown as a poet she has become more elegant about communicating common meaning.

## **MY NOVENA**

**By: Peter Schwartz**

**T.K. LLC**

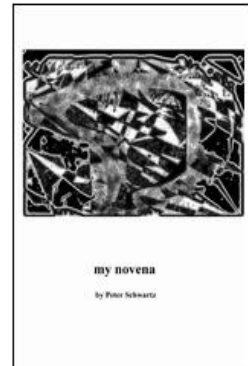
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**Price: \$4.50 / 19 pages / 1 Poem**

**Review By: Charles P. Ries**

Peter Schwartz walks the line between ethereal image and the everyday about as well as any poet writing in the small press. His new book, "My Novena" is a single poem that covers nine days in nineteen pages. The word novena is from the Latin word novem meaning nine. It is a process of hopeful mourning, of yearning and prayer which if conducted over nine consecutive days promises special graces. Schwartz embarks on his reflection and on day one notes that, "I swim without / meaning as my memory / tunes itself to the tides / becoming the net / it always was". And on day five: he comes into his own with the realization "to domesticate the distance / to acquaint flyspecks / with the celestial / because intimacy's / its own habitat / a pleasant anarchy / seldom discussed". Schwartz's considerable talent at



colliding the eloquent and common greatly elevated my experience with his reflections. “My Novena” no longer became just his prayer, but mine as well when on day four he notes, “I waver / from being somebody to nobody /so many time within the space / of a single hour that I really am / that person in between / the intermediate / the delegate / the agent and broker / to a condition / that can perhaps / be best summed up / as heartbroken”. This is a very talented writer.

**Charles P. Reis is Poetry editor at Word Riot Magazine. [www.wordriot.org](http://www.wordriot.org)**

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## Gloom Cupboard *(Continued from page 1)*



Gloom Cupboard Masthead image

Secondly you need a series of short term goals. I looked not at the literary world but to the music world for inspiration, specifically Factory Records. A rag tag organization that spawned great art and combined it with an unorthodox DIY ethos. I wanted my litzine to assist writers who were being ignored, to discover new talent and to one day release Print

Editions, staying faithful to the added authenticity that can be found on paper. The goals need to be simple and attainable.

Then most importantly you need a name for your litzine, I chose ‘Gloom Cupboard’ from a notepad of my own misanthropic scribbles, the name originated from getting home one evening after a night out on the lash and searching for a mug in a gloomy cup-

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board. It's distinctive and means nothing. The tagline of *GC Literature for the Common People* is a tongue in cheek dig at the closed doors nature of the mainstream publishing industry, the wealthy have a complete monopoly over what sits on the bookshelves. If that world doesn't exist to us then let's make our own world.

Nowadays it's easy to start your own zine; the internet has levelled the playing field significantly. My advice is to initially create your online base from a blogger or wordpress site, it's free and if you get bored of the project it's deleteable. If you fail you lose nothing. Later on, if your zine takes off you can easily and cheaply purchase a web domain and tart it up a bit.

Next you need to publicize your zine, spreading the word effectively and efficiently. Spread the word on forums, social networking sites; tell your friends, tell anyone, basically get the bloody word out. Utilize every possible resource you can. Set clear straightforward guidelines then wait, and hope the submissions come in, but deliberately leave these guidelines as vague as possible in order not to blunt spontaneity.

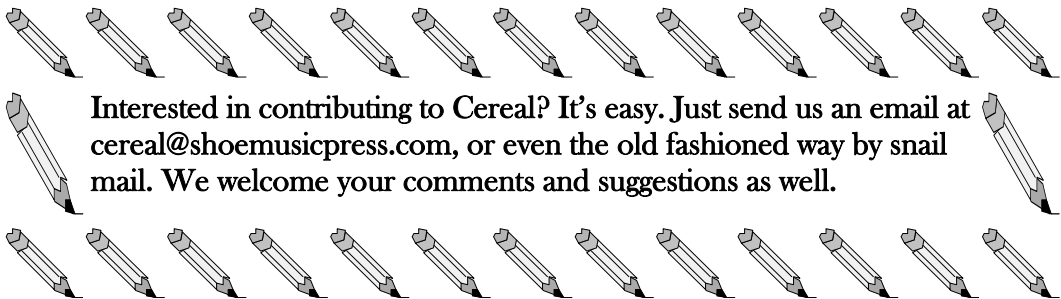
Patience is the ultimate virtue, as when you first start a zine you might well struggle, things will happen slowly but you need to persevere. When the submissions trickle in you can begin to put together that all important first issue, the first few issues need to act as an advertisement for future contributors as much as it needs to be an artistic showcase of writing talent. I tend to look for innovative, passionate voices and pieces that have interesting subject matter, make time for the sublime and the ridiculous; you also need to picture in your head how these submissions will fit together because it's no good having an issue with several different pieces saying the same thing. Make sure you remember to always reply to the contributors promptly, these people have taken the time to send you their submission, the least you can do is respond to them quickly. Also tell anyone whose work that you accept to spread the word about your zine, this helps you and it helps the writer.

If after a couple of months things have grown organically, you can begin to think about your next goal. Inviting new talent to submit their words to your litzine; email writers who have impressed you and offer them the chance to contribute to your zine. They can be anyone really, someone perhaps who has been unnoticed and have only ever posted a load of fabulous introspective jabber on MySpace. Be proactive; don't just wait by your inbox for submissions.

Then came the final short term goal, the print edition. I approached a publishing house called erbacce press who had previously published a chapbook of mine. I told them about Gloom Cupboard and they agreed to publish our Print Editions. With the Print Editions I always make sure every writer featured gets their own contributors copy and I never charge because it's not about the money, as soon as you think about profit you no longer become an artistic entity, you become a cold soulless business. If your small press publisher charges for copies let them have the money, or if you ever get big enough then pay your contributors but never take money for other writers work, it's unnecessary.

In order for a litzine to grow and flourish you need to create a community, you need to be welcoming, listen to suggestions from contributors, and keep people in the loop. I send out bulletins on a semi regular basis to contributors and ask them how they would improve Gloom Cupboard and what they want from the litzine. Doing this keeps things fresh; staleness is the number one killer of anything creative.

Visit Gloom Cupboard at [www.gloomcupboard.com](http://www.gloomcupboard.com)

Interested in contributing to Cereal? It's easy. Just send us an email at [cereal@shoemusicpress.com](mailto:cereal@shoemusicpress.com), or even the old fashioned way by snail mail. We welcome your comments and suggestions as well.