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« Baltimore's Millard Kaufman, R.I.P. | Main

Elizabeth Spires' I Heard God Talking to Me

Goucher College professor Elizabeth Spires has a fascinating new book that pairs her poetry with photos of the folk art sculptures of William Edmondson. *I Heard God Talking to Me* is accessible to both young and old, and the poems are as plain as Edmondson's cut stone. Here's a snippet from "Porch Ladies": But here on the porch/everything moves slow./slow as molasses./slow as a seven-year itch, slow as the day before Christmas./Slow, we tell you. Slow!

We asked Spires about the book and the creative process.

How did the idea for this book develop? I became interested in William Edmondson's stone carvings on several trips to Nashville (where he lived and worked in the 1930s and 40s). I like the strong sense of presence and individuality that each figure has, as well as the whimsy and humor in many of his pieces. ... He seemed like the perfect artist to introduce to young readers. I'm now finding out, however, that both adults and children like the book and really respond to his life story and his art.

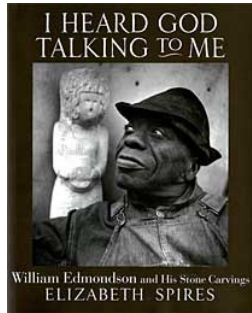
Are you generally a fan of folk art? I love folk art, especially its simplicity, directness and naivete. Edmondson was a master stone carver, but completely self-taught. He was not afraid to approach the stone in a direct, simple manner. Nonetheless, his style is completely his own and very original.

Was your writing process different because you were describing things, rather than concepts? I would describe my process as 'playful.' I have often written poems in the voices of other people, in the voices of mythic figures (see my book *I AM ARACHNE*) and even in the voice of a mouse (*THE MOUSE OF AMHERST*). I decided in *I HEARD GOD TALKING TO ME* to let each carving tell his or her own story. Thus the poems are monologues spoken by the figures themselves. I also found quotes from Edmondson (taken from old newspaper interviews) that I arranged into four poems, so that the reader could 'hear' William Edmondson talking.

Did you write the poems in the presence of the sculptures themselves? I was lucky enough to be able to see a wide variety of Edmondson's work --- some of it in museums and some on private collections --- and yes, some of the poems were created from the notes I took when I was looking at various figures.

How did you recreate Edmondson's thoughts for poems such as "A Vision" and "The Gift"? Those two poems use Edmondson's own words. I selected some of his stories and anecdotes and 'spliced' them together to give the reader a sense of the way he approached his art. Basically, he believed that he carved by divine inspiration; the title of the book is another Edmondson quote where he described his artistic process to a reporter for the *Nashville Tennessean*. In 1930 or 1931, Edmondson heard God talking to him and that was the beginning of a seventeen-year career where he produced over 300 limestone figures.

As you researched his life, what did you discover that surprised you? I was and am surprised by how much I continue to love his work, how I emotionally respond to it. It is still growing on me! I believe the way he went about making his art --- in a simple, unpretentious way, without any regard for fame or fortune --- is something all artists and writers should aspire to.



William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings
ELIZABETH SPIRES

Posted by [Dave Rosenthal](#) on March 18, 2009 6:00 AM | [Permalink](#)



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Calendar of events

- Linda Andre's 'Doctors of Deception'**
When: Tue Mar 24, 2009 7pm to Tue Mar 24,...
- Paul K. Williams and Gregory J. Alexander's 'A Brief History of Charles Village'**
When: Mon Mar 23, 2009 7pm to Mon Mar 23,...
- Steve Luxenberg's 'Annie's Ghosts'**
When: Sat May 9, 2009 4pm to 6pm EDT Where:...
- Leslie Miller's 'Let Me Eat Cake'**
When: Sat Apr 25, 2009 4pm to 6pm EDT Where:...
- Susan Detwiler's 'One Wolf Howls'**
When: Sat Mar 28, 2009 3pm to 5pm EDT Where:...

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Map: Bookstores

Favorite bookstores away from home



About the bloggers



While she always preferred The Hardy Boys to Nancy Drew, **Nancy Johnston** grew up reading nearly everything she could get her hands on, including a probably unhealthy amount of R.L. Stine and Christopher Pike, with the obligatory Jane Austen thrown in. She'll still read just about anything you put in front of her, especially the funny or weird. She lives in the city with her books, cat and drum set.



Dave Rosenthal came to *The Baltimore Sun* as a business reporter in 1987 and now is an assistant managing editor and Sunday editor. He reads a wide range of books (but never as many as he'd like), usually alternating between non-fiction and fiction. Some all-time favorites: *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole; *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery; and anything by Calvin Trillin or John McPhee. He belongs to a book club with a Jewish theme.

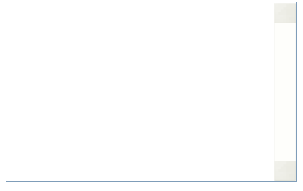
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blue sea wrote: thanks for your effort and actually... [\[more\]](#)
- Stephen King: Stephenie Meyer can't write** (306)
Kris wrote: Now, I've never read any of Stephen... [\[more\]](#)
- Pick up some books with your pint** (5)
Gail Farrelly wrote: For a light read, try The Tea House... [\[more\]](#)
- Best places to eat and read** (6)
Triple L wrote: I'm partial to Baltimore Coffee & T... [\[more\]](#)

Resources and Sun coverage

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- Books in Brief
- Explorer's Amazon quest became a fatal obsession
- new releases
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Libraries

- Anne Arundel County
- Baltimore
- Baltimore County
- Carroll County
- Harford County
- Howard County

Groups/Events

- 510 Readings
- Baltimore Book Festival
- CityLit Project
- Creative Alliance
- Howard County Poetry & Literature Society
- i.e. reading series
- Maryland Center for the Book
- Maryland Writers' Association
- Maryland Writers' Association, Baltimore chapter
- MidAtlantic Book Publishers Assn.
- PoetryInBaltimore
- World Mystery Convention (Oct. 9-12, Baltimore)

Journals

- Baltimore Is Reads
- The Baltimore Review
- jmww
- Passager
- Smarlish Pace
- Urbanite
- Welter

For fun

- Baltimore Literary History
- Literary Mount Vernon walking tour

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- Book Clubs
- Book It
- Bookstores
- Bouchercon/Charmed to Death
- Check It Out
- Children
- Edgar Allan Poe
- Holiday gift guide
- Journals
- Marylandia
- Meet the Author
- Mystery Mondays
- Obituaries
- Recommended
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- Whatever

Blogroll

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- Bookslut
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- Contrariwise
- bookworms with ink
- The Real Writer

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- **Highly Recommended**
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 - **Age 30+ ... A Lifetime of Books**
 - **Muse**
 - **The Republic of Pemberley**
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 - **DorothyL**
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