

Poets & Writers Newsletter: WINNERS ON WINNING (WOW)



Melanie Pappadis Faranello, winner of the Donald L. Jordan Prize for Literary Excellence.

In this installment of Winners on Winning, fiction writer Melanie Pappadis Faranello shares a few lessons she's learned from submitting to contests, including the importance of carving out a specific time to devote to the work: "Submitting takes energy and time and can be really draining, so I've found that setting aside time when you would not otherwise be writing helps," she says. "It's easy to get distracted otherwise."

Faranello is the winner of this year's Donald L. Jordan Prize for Literary Excellence for her story collection *Everybody Needs Something*. She received \$10,000, and her book will be published by DLJ Books, an imprint of Columbus State University Press, in March 2026. Debra Jo Immergut judged. The annual prize is given for a book of fiction or creative nonfiction "that engages a reader with upholding human values, such as trust, generosity, love, gratitude, or responsibility." The next deadline is **October 15**. Maureen Gibbon will judge.

A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Melanie Pappadis Faranello's writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Swamp Pink*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Electric Literature*, *Hippocampus*, Vol 1. *Brooklyn*, *Permafrost*, *Blackbird*, *Literary Mama*, *Catamaran*, *Vestal Review*, and elsewhere. Her novel-in-progress won an Emerging Writer Award from Key West Literary Seminars, and her work has been shortlisted for the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction from

Sarabande Books, the Dana Award, and William Faulkner—William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition. She holds her MFA in fiction from the New School. She is the founder of the community engagement project Poetry on the Streets. Originally from Chicago, she lives with her family in West Hartford, Connecticut, and is at work on a novel.

What do you generally look for in a contest?

When looking at contests in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, I'll generally look at the entry fee, who is judging the contest, and the style of writing the press or magazine tends to publish. Whether it's a literary magazine or a small press, I'll look at what they've published previously to see if my work might be a good fit aesthetically. I'll also familiarize myself with the contest judge's work and consider whether my work might be of interest [to them]. There's no guarantee or magic formula, and since entry fees can be cost-prohibitive, and publishers often get flooded with submissions that don't fit their criteria, I feel like the more thoughtful writers are in the process the more it benefits everyone on both sides. It's so unpredictable, and can be grueling, so I was excited to learn about the Donald L. Jordan Prize, whose award is amazingly generous!

How do you know when your work is ready for submission?

The first moment I feel the work is ready for submission, it's usually too soon. So I...share it with my writing group, receive feedback, work through multiple revisions, and then let it sit again. Gaining distance from the work is important for me to be able to return to it with fresh eyes. And then I'll inevitably want to change things again and do more editing. Nothing is ever going to be perfect. But I want to feel that I've brought the work as far as I'm able to, that it is representative of the best I can do with my abilities at this moment in time, and that I've done what I can to help it be whatever it is trying to become. Then it's a process of letting it go.

What have you learned from submitting your writing to contests?

It's so subjective. If you get a rejection, it doesn't always reflect the work. Sometimes it does. But then sometimes that same piece will

get picked up elsewhere. So I try to look at the work as objectively as possible. Keep returning to the heart of it, the act of writing.

Submitting takes energy and time and can be really draining, so I've found that setting aside time when you would not otherwise be writing helps. It's easy to get distracted otherwise. My most productive writing time is in the mornings, so I try and protect this time and reserve later hours for the other work, such as submitting.

Do you have any advice for how to handle the ups and downs of writing contests, including the inevitable losses as well as the successes?

One piece of advice I heard many years ago, when I was in college, that I always remember was mentioned in passing by a visiting writer. She said remember to take the wins with the same amount of enthusiasm as you take the losses. I always think about that. To me that means not getting too caught up in external measures of success or failure. To come back to the work, to the writing. I've been at this a long time, and I've had a couple wins, and I've had my fair share of rejections. I see the rejections as part of the process. They are a reminder that I'm actively participating, which means that I'm still creating work, which is the goal, to keep writing, to keep returning to the heart of it, to keep perspective. Eventually it will find its way out there.

How do you see contests like the Donald L. Jordan Prize fitting into the bigger picture of your writing career?

Winning the Donald L. Jordan Prize was a huge surprise and such a tremendous joy. I feel really grateful for the chance to have my debut book published as a result! Before I submitted I'd read an interview with the late Donald L. Jordan, the founder of the contest who established the endowment, and I was moved by his story, his humility, and his extreme generosity. It made winning the prize all the more meaningful. In my mind, the point of putting work into the world is to have it reach others and hopefully in turn I'll be able to connect with new people as a result. I'm excited to expand my community in this way. I'm hoping to integrate some of my community engagement work into this book launch as well. In terms of how winning this contest and publishing my debut fits into the bigger picture of my

writing career, it feels like a step forward. I'll be querying agents for a new novel I recently completed and will definitely add this to my letter. Even being asked to answer these questions for *Poets & Writers Magazine* feels like an honor, a way to hopefully connect with others out there. I like to think of this book launch as a big community project—a way to engage and expand and connect.

[PW.ORG](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#) | [WRITERS GROUPS](#) | [DONATE](#)
[Stay connected—follow us on Bluesky!](#)



Poets & Writers | 90 Broad Street Suite 2100 | New York, NY 10004 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)