Feature: *Sapling*'s Five Burning Questions for Emerging Writers: Melanie Pappadis Faranello



This week, *Sapling* spoke with Melanie Pappadis Faranello, author of the debut short story collection *Everybody Needs Something* (CSU Press, forthcoming March 15, 2026).

***SAPLING*:** Tell us about the process of getting your debut short story collection, *Everybody Needs Something*, out in the world. Did you enter contests? Open reading periods? What transpired between sending the manuscript out initially and its acceptance at CSU Press?

MELANIE PAPPADIS FARANELLO: I wrote these stories over the course of many years and different phases of life and had been sporadically sending them out, submitting to literary magazines, but I wasn't thinking about them in terms of a whole collection until a few years ago. I had written a couple of novel manuscripts and really enjoyed the process of shaping larger works, so once I realized I might have enough stories for a collection, I was curious to see what it would look like to put them together, what themes might emerge, and how to shape it. It was a different experience working with disparate pieces rather than the larger narrative threads of a novel, but other writers kept telling me to try and find a narrative arc throughout the collection, especially in terms of ordering them. I sent out the collection to a couple of small presses' open calls, but it was rejected, and I received feedback that it was on the shorter side. So while I was working on novel revisions, I set a goal to write three new stories by the end of that year so I would start creating new work again. Once I finished those stories, I assembled the collection again and sent it out to few more contests and then I got the news from CSU Press about winning the Donald L Jordan Prize, which was so exciting!

***SAPLING*:** What was your experience with the editing of your manuscript after its acceptance? Did you have an opportunity to make revisions, either at your own suggestion or at the suggestion of your editor? How involved were you in the design aspects of the book's production (cover image, interior design, and so on)?

M. P. F.: When I received news that I won the contest, I was thrilled and shocked, but I also felt I needed to do a lot more work on the stories. The editor made very light edits throughout the manuscript, mostly small things like grammar. But when I returned to the pages, I had an overwhelming urge to revise pretty much every story. However, I was told not to make any major changes as the manuscript had won on its merit. It was hard to let the stories just be what they were, especially since the collection spans many years during which I wrote them. So I had to shift my thinking and realize that the pieces are representative of the time at which I wrote them, some older, some newer, and in that sense, the book reflects a range, rather than a moment in time. I had to be OK with that in order to put my pen down!

For the cover design, I was asked to send a few quotes from my book that I felt best represented the tone or themes throughout. The editor shared this with their independent designer who used them to create a cover image. They worked together on it, then showed me the design once it was complete, and it was amazing to see what they came up with.

***SAPLING*:** Did you publish a number of stories in literary journals or other periodicals before the publication of the finished book? Did this seem like a necessary part of the process for this particular project?

M. P. F.: I published about half of the stories in literary journals before the book was accepted for publication. It definitely felt like an important part of the process. Getting to know the editors who work at literary magazines and having a story published online or in print alongside other writers was inspiring and encouraging. Seeing a story suddenly existing in a community of other writers' stories, poems, essays is a wonderful feeling of connection. But each story that was published also received rejections first, which kept me returning to the work, revising and sending out again. There's this false sense of finality once a story gets picked up, like it's finally done. However, this sense of it being "done" didn't hold up once the manuscript was going to published! I think that has to do with time passing and the fact that we naturally keep growing and changing. It's a question of whether anything is ever really finished or if it's just a matter of letting go.

***SAPLING*:** In what ways have you been involved in *Everybody Needs Something*'s publicity and promotion? In what ways has the publisher contributed to marketing and publicity efforts?

M. P. F.: The book comes out in March, so we haven't started publicity and promotion efforts quite yet. However, I'll be meeting this month with the publicist at UGA Press which handles the distribution and marketing for the DLJ prize winners. I had to complete one of those hefty marketing questionnaires which asks about writing connections, previous teachers, markets likely to review your work, etc. It's overwhelming, but it's also amazing to see how people in the writing world are so ready to come together and support one another. Literary citizenship is real and so important! I'm lucky to have a number of friends who've published books and I've leaned on them for support in helping navigate this process, which at times can feel murky. Over the next few months, I'll be reaching out to set up readings and events, and I like to think of this process as growing a community, which is something I love to do. Shifting the focus from writer-centered/performance-oriented to one that is more oriented to engaging community, with an intention of gathering and connecting, is how I'd like to think about the book launch—almost like a great community project!

***SAPLING*:** What surprised you about the process of having your first book published? Is there anything you wish you'd known beforehand about putting a debut out into the world and/or publishing with a small press?

M. P. F.: One thing that struck me is the feeling of how once the work is being published, it takes on a life of its own and no longer really belongs to you. It leaves your hands and prepares to go out into the world, and you let it go. This is both wonderful and strange! I didn't expect to feel such a parallel to sending my own kid off to college! In terms of the publishing process, one thing that I didn't anticipate was how much a writer must do to help spread the word about their book and decide how much marketing/publicity they want to take on. One of the best surprises of publishing a book is the new relationships that form, how your connections and communities grow, which really feels like the point of putting work out there—to connect with others.

***SAPLING*:** Bonus number six—I see on your website that you are also at work on a novel. Has anything about the submission and publication process for your story collection informed your plans for sending your novel into the world, when ready?

M. P. F.: I queried two previous novels before publishing this collection, so I've been in the trenches awhile. Now, I'm about to start querying agents again for a new novel. Having the story collection feels like a good step forward and it's been an incredible learning process to experience how the publishing process works. I'd love to get an agent for the novel—it'd be incredibly helpful in terms of navigating this process and having someone who really believes in your work to help along the way. I'll also bring the manuscript to the furthest point I can, so it's representative of the best of my ability at this moment in time, and be OK with that.

***SAPLING*:** Melanie, thank you so much for taking us along on your publishing journey!

Melanie Faranello's story collection, *Everybody Needs Something,* won the Donald L Jordan Prize for Literary Excellence and will be published by Columbus State University Press in March 2026. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Swamp Pink, Electric Literature, StoryQuarterly*, *Hippocampus, Vol 1. Brooklyn, HuffPost Personal, Blackbird, StorySouth*, *Catamaran, Connotation Press,* and elsewhere. She's from Chicago, works as a teaching artist in Hartford, CT, and is the founder of Poetry on the Streets, a community engagement project. Read more at www.melaniefaranello.com