

MEDIA KIT FOR JENDI REITER

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Jendi Reiter

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Amazon Author Page: <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B001K8YNRC>

About the Author

Jendi Reiter's poetry and fiction are guided by her belief that people take precedence over ideologies. In exploring themes of queer family life, spiritual integration, and healing from adverse childhood experiences, her goal is to create understanding that leads to social change.

Raised by two mothers on the Lower East Side of New York City, she grew up in a home full of books. Early poetic idols were W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot, and Anne Sexton. Her literary role model was Jane Eyre. As a teenager, she learned from Jean Auel's *The Valley of Horses* that erotic literature could contain a utopian vision of gender freedom and egalitarian relationships. She began publishing poetry professionally as a high school senior when her poem was reprinted in *Best American Poetry*, and other publications soon followed in journals such as *Poetry* and *The Lyric*.

Two Natures, her debut novel, is forthcoming from Saddle Road Press in 2016. Her published poetry collections are *Bullies in Love* (Little Red Tree Publishing, 2015), *Barbie at 50* (Cervena Barva Press, 2010), *Swallow* (Amsterdam Press, 2009), and *A Talent for Sadness* (Turning Point Books, 2003). In 2010 she received a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artists' Grant for Poetry. Awards include the 2015 Wag's Revue Poetry Prize, the 2013 Little Red Tree International Poetry Prize, the 2012 Betsy Colquitt Award for Poetry from Descant magazine, the 2011 James Knudsen Editor's Prize in Fiction from Bayou Magazine, the 2011 OSA Enizagam Award for Fiction, the 2010 Anderbo Poetry Prize, and second prize in the 2010 Iowa Review Awards for Fiction.

In 2001 Jendi and her husband Adam R. Cohen founded Winning Writers, an online resource site for creative writers. Their free email newsletter provides over 50,000 subscribers with profiles of the best free literary contests. Winning Writers also sponsors four annual contests for humor poetry, self-published books, general-interest poetry, and short fiction and essays. The site has been named one of the "101 Best Websites for Writers" (Writer's Digest, 2015) and one of the "100 Best Websites for Writers" (The Write Life, 2016).

Prior to becoming a full-time writer and editor, Jendi wrote business news articles for a reference publishing company and clerked for an appeals court judge in New York City. Her book reviews and editorials appeared in the *New York Law Journal* and *National Law Journal*, and she

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published several articles in academic legal journals on such topics as pregnancy discrimination in the workplace and the free speech implications of trademark law.

When Jendi was a child, she dreamed of owning a Victorian house with a tower and a bay window in Western Massachusetts. She lives there now with her husband and son. The cemetery across the street is a good place to walk off writer's block.

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Biographies and Taglines

Bio

Jendi Reiter is the author of the novel *Two Natures* (Saddle Road Press, forthcoming 2016) and four poetry books and chapbooks, most recently *Bullies in Love* (Little Red Tree Publishing, 2015). Awards include the 2011 James Knudsen Editor's Prize in Fiction from Bayou Magazine, the 2011 OSA Enizagam Award for Fiction, second prize in the 2010 Iowa Review Awards for Fiction, and first prize in the 2008 Chapter One Promotions International Short Story Competition. Her stories have appeared in The Iowa Review, American Fiction, The Adirondack Review, Words + Images, and *The Wordstock Ten* Anthology, among others. She is the editor of WinningWriters.com, an online resource site for creative writers. Visit her blog at www.jendireiter.com and follow her on Twitter @JendiReiter .

Tagline

Jendi Reiter is an award-winning author whose books include the novel *Two Natures* (Saddle Road Press, 2016) and the poetry collection *Bullies in Love* (Little Red Tree Publishing, 2015). Writing awards include a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist's Fellowship. She is the editor of WinningWriters.com, an online resource site for creative writers. Visit her blog at www.jendireiter.com and follow her on Twitter @JendiReiter .

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About Jendi's Books

Two Natures: A Novel

Forthcoming from Saddle Road Press

<http://www.saddleroadpress.com/two-natures.html>

Set in New York City in the early 1990s, *Two Natures* is the coming-of-age story of Julian Selkirk, a fashion photographer who struggles to reconcile his Southern Baptist upbringing with his love for other men. "[Julian] brings an outsider's wry and engaging sense of humor to his quest to make it in the New York City fashion world. His romp through gay men's urban culture also holds suffering, grief, pathos, and an ongoing struggle with the God of his childhood, as he comes of age during the height of the AIDS crisis. Though he gets distracted along the way—with politicians, preachers, drag queens, activists, Ironman gym buddies and sex, lots of sex—he never stops looking for real love to redeem him. An entertaining novel and a pleasure to read."

—Toby Johnson, author of *Gay Spirituality* and the novels *Secret Matter* and *The Fourth Quill*

Bullies in Love

Published by Little Red Tree Publishing

ISBN-10: 1935656368

ISBN-13: 978-1935656364

To order: <http://www.amazon.com/Bullies-Love-Jendi-Reiter/dp/1935656368/>

The author's second full-length poetry book includes fine art photography by Massachusetts Cultural Council fellowship winner Toni Pepe. These poems speak of gendered embodiment and its discontents, motherhood after trauma, and finding a spiritual narrative to heal from oppressions both familial and political. Works in this collection won prizes from Alligator Juniper, Atlanta Review, Descant, New Millennium Writings, Solstice Lit Mag, Wag's Revue, and others. "In her remarkable collection of poems, *Bullies In Love*, Jendi Reiter has created an

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complex odditorium of characters with unique and often disturbing voices: poems peopled with bullies, the disenfranchised, monsters, prostitutes, criminals, the abused and forgotten, all searching for meaning, for faith and love in a postmodern, often cynical world." –Pamela Uschuk, American Book Award winner

Barbie at 50

Published by Červená Barva Press

To order: <http://www.thelostbookshelf.com/r.html#Jendi%20Reiter>

Winner of the 2010 Červená Barva Press Poetry Chapbook Contest. "*Barbie at 50* is a lush collection of poems with lines embroidered with the craft of a studied life. It's Barbie outdoing herself, leaving off the accursed weight of a 1950's perfectionism to discover the truth of genuine joy. These are poems of a life more real than any doll's, as they point up the grace of having confronted the problematic entanglements that attempt to derail a woman making her way through the puzzles of maturing..." –Afaa Michael Weaver, Kingsley Tufts Award winner

Swallow

Published by Amsterdam Press

ISBN Number: 0982222157

ISBN 13: 9780982222157

To order: Email JBReiter@aol.com

Winner of the 2009 Flip Kelly Poetry Chapbook Prize. "The first thing that strikes the reader about Jendi Reiter's *Swallow* is, naturally, the unusual cover illustration, which appears at once to be a multi-eyed cherub (the proper Old Testament kind), a brace of clothespins, a flock of nightmare birds, sewing needles, bent nails, and a heart-shaped crown of thorns. While one may have a difficult time explaining all of this, one need only know that this image by Richard C. Jackson is the best visual realization of the horror, madness, blood, and beauty that infuse Reiter's work: Like something out of a fever dream, it just makes perfect sense." –JoSelle Vanderhooft, *The Pedestal Magazine*

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A Talent for Sadness

Published by Turning Point Books

ASIN: 0971737169

ISBN-13: 978-0971737167

To order: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/0971737169>

Debut full-length poetry collection. "Jendi Reiter is uncanny in her use of metaphor. She takes symbols, turns them upside down and then stretches them around the corner. The mother in 'Hansel and Gretel' turns the sad story of two abandoned children into an incisive piece on poverty and choice. Her use of landscape hems in a controlling lover in 'Ivy.' 'Poisoned Hawks' takes us through farming, the science and ecology of slaughter, to a hawk unexpectedly shrieking through the page over loss. Reiter carries sadness, but her artistry and wry irony takes the reader elsewhere. This is a book worth reading." –From the 5-star Amazon review by award-winning poet Elaine Zimmerman

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Sample Excerpt from *Two Natures* (Saddle Road Press, forthcoming September 2016)

[This excerpt is from the first chapter of Two Natures, "Cross (1991)". Our narrator, 19-year-old Julian Selkirk, has just moved to NYC from his hometown of Marietta, GA, to study photography at the Fashion Institute of Technology. He is hoping to have his first gay romance but has struck out, yet again, at the club where his sophisticated new friends gather.]

Tucking my hands in my pockets for warmth, I walked along Tenth Avenue, between the dark slabs of office buildings and the blinding fluorescents of gas stations and car dealerships. The working girls were out in their bolero ski jackets and fishnet stockings. In the shadow of a doorway I stopped to watch them saunter up to passing cars, headlights sweeping momentarily over their hard painted faces. One of them spotted the flash of my ever-present camera and, fearing I was a cop, hid behind her friend, a towering black girl who offered to do a variety of illegal things to me in exchange for the film. I paid her fifty bucks and let her pat me down for weapons, which hopefully she enjoyed more than I did.

"You want to get inside someplace warm?" she suggested. She had a complex face, wide Egyptian eyes ringed with mascara, bruised-plum lips touched at one corner by a thin scar that streaked down to her mannish jawline.

"We could go back to my room," I ventured. I must not have been as sober as I thought. I figured I didn't have anything worth stealing except my cameras, and in the unlikely event that she knifed me, my family would probably be relieved that I'd found such a straight-acting way to die.

The few dark, windy blocks back to the dorm had never seemed so long. Could you get arrested for walking with a girl whose skirt barely covered her butt cheeks? There was no way to make this look like anything but what it wasn't. Fortunately, city style was a shifty thing, unlike the strict seasonal palette and respectable hemlines of Mama's cocktail-party set. The New York look was out of the corner of the eye, pretending not to see, not to want to be seen.

Her stride was brisk and long, making direct conversation difficult. "What's your name?" I spoke up when we paused at a don't-walk sign.

"What do you want it to be?" The husky tenor of her voice sounded worn, like an old cello rehearsing a much-requested song.

"Uh...whatever it is?"

"Yeah, okay," she said wearily. "Desirée." I heard the invisible quotes around the name, clearly not hers, or not all the time. And we were on the move again, through the wind tunnel of high buildings flanking the narrow street.

"Look," I said, when we'd reached the warmth of the dormitory lobby, "I'm not like those other guys. I don't even, uh, have sex with girls."

She stared at the elevator panel. "Greek style, cost you fifty bucks extra."

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"No, no," I said, peering nervously down the brightly lit hallway for fear that someone would hear us. "What I meant was, I only want to take some pictures of you for my class. With your clothes on. Well, not your clothes, but *clothes*. Okay?"

"Uh-huh." The numbers could have been television, she watched them that intently, counting down till the doors opened for us on the lobby level.

I thought the costumes would cheer her up, bright props I was always gathering in anticipation of a suitable wearer. She had a Mardi Gras face, regal and sensual, meant to be softened by purple and gold plumes. I draped the fake feathers around her shoulders, stiff in a yellow brocade jacket whose frayed underarms only showed if she moved the wrong way. Despite our conversation in the lobby, she kept rubbing her leg up against mine when I got too close.

"You sure you don't like girls?" she purred. "Maybe you just need a nice girl to show you how to have a good time."

"No, thank you," I said, because my Mama raised me to be polite, even to the type of woman she pretended didn't exist outside of the Bible. I could smell Desirée's musky skin and floral hairspray. How was I made, that I was unmoved by her scent — repulsed, even, to imagine the overlay of touch upon touch that had gone into it, like fingerprints on a greasy doorknob?

I stepped back. The colors were festive and rich, perfect against her dark skin, as I'd imagined. She stood like a bright bird unaware that it could fly. She needed to see herself, I thought, then she would be proud. I positioned her by the mirror on the closet door. "Okay, pose," I encouraged her. Like a kitten stalking its reflection, she leaned toward it, tipping out her cleavage, pouted her puffed violet lips and mimed French-kissing herself.

"No, not a sex pose...like a model," I tried to explain. "You like fashion magazines? You know, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*?"

"Do you work for a magazine?" I thought I heard a little excitement there.

"Well, not yet. But maybe someday."

"Oh, okay. Okay. How about this?" She propped one stiletto boot heel on our sagging armchair, angled her hands on her hips, and flashed me her idea of a Hollywood smile. I snapped some pictures to please her, but her expressions remained exaggerated and false, a drugstore version of a luxury perfume. *If you like Cindy, you'll love Desirée.*

"Let's try something different," I suggested. I helped her into a drop-waisted cocktail dress in a sugary pink. Like my other thrift-shop finds, this one had been cast off for showing signs of wear: the constellation of seed pearls at the neckline showed some gaps, and one or two of the skirt's fluttery overlapping petals were frayed at the bottom, as if snagged by an exuberant dancing heel. Actually, I supposed the only thing it had going for it was the color, defiantly feminine and optimistic in a city of grays, designed to awaken a hidden nostalgia for Easter bonnets and Princess phones. It wouldn't zip all the way up Desirée's broad back, but you couldn't really tell when she was reclining on Dmitri's bed. I asked her to rest her head on the pillow.

"Talk to me," I said.

"You're such a naughty boy," she said. "I bet you have a big, hard..."

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"Please, stop." I put down my camera. "Talk to me about something you like. Not sex," I quickly added.

Her eyes searched the room for answers. I resumed clicking away, hoping to catch that moment when the mahogany angles of her face softened into dreaming. But there's the wonder and stupidity of my profession, the promise that a dress as pink as a birthday cake can roll back the clock to girlhood, simple as that.

"I like bubble baths," she droned on, "French restaurants, dancing at the club..." Her wristwatch beeped and she sat up. "You want another half hour? Twenty dollars."

Since I'd already spent both of the fifties Mama had smuggled into this month's letter from home — on booze and cheap women, no less — I had to decline.

Getting out of bed, she noticed for the first time the poster on Dmitri's side of the room. "That's a nice picture of Jesus. Did you do that?"

I shook my head vehemently. "It's my roommate's. I mean, it's not by him. Andres Serrano took it. A famous guy." I gathered up the clothes she'd come in with. "Here's your stuff."

She didn't take the bundle I thrust at her. "Can I use the toilet?"

"Sure, go to town." I dropped her skirt and ski jacket back on the floor.

Our bathroom door was warped and didn't latch properly. This wasn't usually a problem for me and Dmitri, as we were rarely home at the same time and equally uninterested in seeing each other naked. Despite myself, I caught a glimpse of pink gauze over brown thigh and was compelled to linger. Had I ever actually seen a vagina, outside of health-class videos and my brother's stolen magazines? Casually, I edged toward the door and brushed my shoulder against it, nudging it open a bit wider than I'd intended. The pink dress was rucked up over her round hips. The curve of her belly descended into a patch of dark fur that did not make it into the picture I submitted as that week's homework assignment in Intro to Fashion Photography for a much-needed B-plus, a picture of that moment before the shocked modesty of her wide brown eyes became cool and unreadable as a doll's gaze. I tipped her another five singles and she left.

Alone at last, I switched off the light and lay down in bed, but an oppressive presence filled the room. It was thick as the red-gold billows surrounding the crucifix on the poster, that she hadn't known was urine. Even in the dark I couldn't forget it was there, and every night that I coexisted with it, it confirmed my buried fears about the choices that had led me here, making my guts knot up with a pang of shame.

What harm had Jesus ever done, that anyone should want to piss on him? In our family's Baptist church we'd learned to sing "I Dreamed I Drove the Nails". The preacher groaned about the spitting soldiers and the crown of thorns while I studied Daddy's confident face at the altar call. The bruises on his knuckles weren't from work. And the painted Jesus smiled over us from his hill of clouds, victorious and clean, tender shepherd of other people's children. Kneeling in silent anger on the carpeted steps, I'd wanted to give Jesus a broken arm like mine, Carter's black eye, our little sister Laura Sue's fingernails nervously bitten down to blood. But that only proved I was my father's son.

I'd parted ways with that Jesus years ago, or tried to. Serrano's soiled crucifix forced me to recall the one my French-Catholic Uncle Jimmy, Mama's brother, had given me from his curio

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shop in Savannah. We'd moved in with him and Memère for a month when I was ten, till Daddy wooed Mama back with roses and a remodeled kitchen. On the worst nights, that scrawny, dented carving in my hand had allowed me to pretend there was a different Jesus, one who had no super-powers and couldn't help anyone, but would keep me company. I imagined feeling his presence like a warm breath, a feather-weight on my pillow. Sometimes I let him say to me, *I love you, Julian, I've always loved you*. But later I felt ashamed that this was childish, and then that it was something worse. Something too close to the half-seen men who embraced me in dreams that left my sheets sticky. So I had to lose that Jesus as well.

The degraded image on Dmitri's wall seemed to mock my boyish wish to protect Jesus from my unclean thoughts. If what the preachers said about Christ's two natures was true, I didn't know how he could stand his life anyhow, being split down the middle between the part of him that remembered heaven and the human part that would have touched me back.

This drunken soul-searching, however, had to be weighed against the more immediate problem of ridicule from my roommate whenever I hinted that I didn't appreciate the decor. Last time, he'd pretended to ignore me, blowing cigarette smoke out of his nostrils, his eyes half-closed behind his thick black-framed rectangular glasses, and then later he and his friends made sure I overheard them calling me "Jesse Helms" in a fake Southern yokel voice. So I tossed and turned on my bed, and dreamed about processing drywall invoices for Daddy's company.

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Endorsements and Blurbs for *Two Natures: A Novel* (Saddle Road Press)

Southern boy Julian Selkirk brings an outsider's wry and engaging sense of humor to his quest to make it in the New York City fashion world. His romp through gay men's urban culture also holds suffering, grief, pathos, and an ongoing struggle with the God of his childhood, as he comes of age during the height of the AIDS crisis. Though he gets distracted along the way—with politicians, preachers, drag queens, activists, Ironman gym buddies and sex, lots of sex—he never stops looking for real love to redeem him. An entertaining novel and a pleasure to read.

—Toby Johnson, author of *Gay Spirituality* and the novels *Secret Matter* and *The Fourth Quill*

For Julian Selkirk, the dry-witted hero of this complex, wide-reaching, and unfailingly touching *Bildungsroman*, photography is a way of shaping the world while trying to shield himself from it. But "the boy with the camera on the sidelines of the homecoming dance" soon discovers that life and love are too sprawling, unpredictable and flawed to be contained in a viewfinder. To see what is real—we learn along with him—we must hold two natures, beauty *and* truth, within our vision.

—Tracy Koretsky, author of the novel *Ropeless*, winner of 15 awards, and *Even Before My Own Name*, a memoir in poems

This eloquent debut novel from gifted poet Jendi Reiter is a rare combination of erotic romance and intelligent reflection on Christian faith. Julian's search for identity leads him to embrace

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(literally) every false god he can lay his hands on, before finding that Love demands integrity and a life without shame.

—Kittredge Cherry, publisher of Jesus in Love Newsletter and author of *The Passion of Christ: A Gay Vision*

This is a must-read for anyone struggling to mend the fracture left by a faith which at times both heals and harms. Christians of all orientations will benefit from a fresh view on the integration of spirituality and sexuality.

—A.M. Leibowitz, author of *Passing on Faith* and *Anthem*

If you want to know what life is like in Nineties New York, when Style has become God, sex has become a contact sport, and jobs, money, and survival are always around the corner someplace else, then this late coming-of-age novel is a good place to start.

—Perry Brass, author of the Amazon bestseller *The Manly Art of Seduction; The Manly Pursuit of Desire and Love*; and the Ferro-Grumley finalist novel *King of Angels*

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Selected Awards

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- Little Red Tree International Poetry Prize
- Červená Barva Press Poetry Chapbook Prize
- Flip Kelly Poetry Chapbook Prize, Amsterdam Press
- Wag's Revue Writing Award
- OSA Enizagam Award for Fiction
- James Knudsen Editors' Award for Fiction, Bayou Magazine
- Iowa Review Awards for Fiction, Second Prize
- Robert J. DeMott Short Prose Prize, Quarter After Eight Magazine
- Chapter One Promotions International Short Story Contest
- Elizabeth Simpson Smith Award for Fiction, Charlotte Writers' Club
- Literal Latte Fiction Contest, Second Prize
- Gival Press Short Story Award, Runner-up
- Betsy Colquitt Award for Poetry
- Anderbo.com Poetry Prize
- Mildred Werba Poetry Prize, Baltimore Writers' Alliance
- Olay Total Effects Fine Lines Award, Poetry Society of America
- Consuelo Ford Award, Poetry Society of America

Notable Poetry Publications

Journals:

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- Poetry
- The New Criterion
- New Millennium Writings
- Cutthroat
- Mudfish
- Cider Press Review
- FULCRUM
- Alaska Quarterly Review
- Literature & Belief
- Clackamas Literary Review
- Legal Studies Forum
- Hanging Loose

Anthologies:

- *Best American Poetry 1990*
- *Tic Toc* (Kind of a Hurricane Press)

Notable Fiction Publications

Journals:

- The Iowa Review
- The Adirondack Review
- Newport Review
- Passages North
- American Fiction
- Cyclamens & Swords

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- Relief: A Quarterly Christian Expression
- Words + Images
- Saint Ann's Review
- Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

Anthologies:

- *The Wordstock 10*
- *Only Connect: The Charlotte Writers' Club Anthology*
- *Dying for It: Tales of Sex and Death* (Mitzi Szereto, Thunder's Mouth Press)
- *Infinite* (Chapter One Promotions annual contest anthology)

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Sample Interview

*Permission granted by book blogger David Alan Binder to reprint this interview at no charge.
Originally published at:*

<https://sites.google.com/site/dalanbinder/blog/0645-256post-jendireiterinterviewwithdavidalanbinder>

1. How do you pronounce your name (only answer if appropriate)?

Jendi Reiter is pronounced "JEN-dee WRITE-er"

2. Where are you currently living?

I live in a Victorian house across from a cemetery in Northampton, Massachusetts.

3. Where would you like to live?

I'm living in my dream home, but I also wish I could afford an apartment in Manhattan, where I grew up.

4. Why did you start writing?

To cheat death and make something productive out of my incorrigible daydreaming habit.

5. What is the most important thing that you have learned in your writing experience, so far?

The only way to find the truth is to make my own mistakes.

6. What would you say is your most interesting writing quirk?

I talk to, and about, some of my fictional characters as though they were real people—to the point where my friends will ask me, quite seriously, "How are you? And how's Julian?" (the protagonist of my novel, *Two Natures*)

7. Tell us your insights on self-publishing versus using a publisher?

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In my opinion, self-publishing is a more viable route for fiction and nonfiction than for poetry. It is unlikely that you will make back your investment on a poetry book. Prestige is the real currency of poetry publishing, so I advise poets to keep entering legitimate and well-respected contests till they get accepted. Subscribers to our free Winning Writers e-newsletter receive access to our curated database of free contests. Our website also offers advice for spotting contest scams.

I have been really impressed by the quality and creativity of the self-published novels and memoirs entered in the Winning Writers North Street Book Prize, for which I am a final judge. With the right PR, they could give those mass-market bestsellers a run for their money! I do think these books suffered a bit from not having that last round of professional copy-editing and proofreading from a regular publisher. If you're self-publishing, spend a couple hundred dollars extra to hire a good freelance editor before you go to press.

a. Who is the name of your publisher and in what city are they?

Two Natures will be published by Saddle Road Press of Hilo, Hawaii. My latest poetry collection, *Bullies in Love*, was published in 2015 by Little Red Tree, which was then in New London, Connecticut, but has just moved to North Platte, Nebraska.

8. Any insights on eBooks vs. print books and alternative vs. conventional publishing?

I believe we are approaching a time when the format and type of publisher will matter much less than whether the book is (1) professionally edited, (2) readily available, and (3) marketed well. Mainstream presses still carry more prestige than self-publishing, and authors do love to have a printed book in hand, but for the reader, the quality of the experience is primary. Don't worry about getting that big-name contract, if it means compromising your artistic vision or working with a press so large that you get lost in the crowd. Just make the book the best it can be, and make it available in as many formats as possible.

9. Do you have any secret tips for writers on getting a book published?

Do your research before submitting. Identify presses that publish books you admire, with a similar aesthetic or theme. Then ask around about what it's like to work with that publisher. You are more likely to have a positive experience, and build a long-term relationship with that press for your next books, when you have clear and realistic expectations about the press's strengths and limitations.

10. How did you acquire an agent? Any tips for new writers on getting one?

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All of my poetry books and chapbooks were published through contests. Poets don't have agents because there is no money in it to pay an agent's commission! "Here, have 15% of my literary immortality." My first novel got picked up without an agent, which is rather unusual. I was about to start looking for an agent after striking out with the novel contests, but then I happened to be emailing with Ruth Thompson of Saddle Road Press about some poetry news, and she mentioned that SRP was seeking literary fiction manuscripts. Ruth and I had "met" online through my business, Winning Writers. We had reviewed her beautiful poetry chapbooks and she had also written a blurb for my collection *Bullies in Love*. I'm excited to be working with her in this new capacity.

To start your research on working with agents, follow publishing industry experts like @JaneFriedman and @ChuckSambuchino on Twitter. Sambuchino edits the Writer's Digest Guide to Literary Agents, another good resource. Poets & Writers Magazine also publishes a special issue on literary agents each year.

11. Where do you get your information or ideas for your books?

The spark for my novel came from these characters who appeared in my imagination and would not let me alone. Its theme arose from the ongoing conflict in contemporary Christianity over recognizing the equal dignity and sacredness of same-sex love relationships. I belong to the Episcopal Church, which has been at the forefront of this debate since we ordained an openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson, in 2004. As of this writing, the American church has been put on probation by the Worldwide Anglican Communion for authorizing same-sex marriage rites. I was raised by two moms, so I know where I stand, but the issue tore apart some of my Christian friendships and prayer circles.

For research into the fashions and politics of the 1990s, the time period of *Two Natures*, I consulted the Sexual Minorities Archive (formerly in Northampton, now in nearby Holyoke) and the Conde Nast Library in New York City, as well as many books on the art and business of fashion photography. My friend John Ollom of Ollom Movement Art read the manuscript for accuracy concerning the gay male culture of our generation. John does through dance what I hope to do with my writing: help people integrate their "shadow side" by overcoming shame-based divisions between sex and spirit.

12. Do you have any suggestions or help for new writers?

Read a lot. Be sparing about seeking advice on your work. Random people in online forums and writers' critique groups may not know any more than you do.

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13. What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your books?

In writing fiction from a gay man's perspective, I learned that my sexuality and gender identity were more complex than I had supposed.

14. How many books have you written?

Four that have been published, one forthcoming, and enough drafts buried in a drawer to add up to several more!

15. Do you have any tricks or tips to help others become a better writer?

Get feedback from a few people who understand your aesthetic, are good writers themselves, and are sympathetic to your book's worldview and values. However, at the end of the day, you are the authority. Trust that little voice inside that tells you whether something rings true or is off-key. As Rick Nelson's song "Garden Party" says, "You can't please everyone, so you got to please yourself." Don't be ashamed to fix the off-key parts. They are not a verdict on your worth as a human being.

16. We've heard that it is good to provide twists in a good story. How do you do this?

I decide on enough plot structure so I can start out with a purpose, but then allow my characters to surprise me. When they reveal unexpected feelings, actions, or beliefs, I know that that is coming from a deep place of intuition beyond my surface ideas of what the book is about. In the early drafts, I'll follow those trails into the unknown, long enough to find out whether the twist will improve the story.

17. What makes your book stand out from the crowd?

I bring together apparent opposites that cross boundaries of genre and ideology. *Two Natures* defies expectations that a book with spiritual purpose must be sexually prudish, or that an erotic romance must be lightweight or decadent. Also, I have been writing poetry professionally for 20+ years so I try to bring the same level of lyricism and line-by-line craftsmanship to my prose style.

18. What are some ways in which you promote your work?

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I share news of my publications and awards in the Winning Writers e-newsletter, on my blog, and on Facebook and Twitter. In consultation with Carolyn Howard-Johnson, "The Frugal Book Promoter", I am working on more focused strategies to promote my novel through social media, e-book giveaways and discounts, readings, and interviews like this one (thanks!).

19. What is the one thing you would do differently now (concerning writing) and why?

I would not give away my power to critics.

20. What would you like carved onto your tombstone? Or what saying or mantra do you live by?

"Perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18)

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