



The Best American Short Stories 2007

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In his introduction to this volume, Stephen King writes, “Talent does more than come out; it bursts out, again and again, doing exuberant cartwheels while the band plays ‘Stars and Stripes Forever’ . . . Talent can’t help itself; it roars along in fair weather or foul, not sparing the fireworks. It gets emotional. It struts its stuff. In fact, that’s its job.”

Wonderfully eclectic, *The Best American Short Stories 2007* collects stories by writers of undeniable talent, both newcomers and favorites. These stories examine the turning points in life when we, as children or parents, lovers or friends or colleagues, must break certain rules in order to remain true to ourselves. In T. C. Boyle’s heartbreaking “Balto,” a thirteen-year-old girl provides devastating courtroom testimony in her father’s trial. Aryn Kyle’s charming story “Allegiance” shows a young girl caught between her despairing British mother and motherly American father. In “The Bris,” Eileen Pollack brilliantly writes of a son struggling to fulfill his filial obligations, even when they require a breach of morality and religion. Kate Walbert’s stunning “Do Something” portrays one mother’s impassioned and revolutionary refusal to accept her son’s death. And in Richard Russo’s graceful “Horseman,” an English professor comes to understand that plagiarism reveals more about a student than original work can.

New series editor Heidi Pitlor writes, “[Stephen King’s] dedication, unflagging hard work, and enthusiasm for excellent writing shone through on nearly a daily basis this past year . . . We agreed, disagreed, and in the end very much concurred on the merit of the twenty stories chosen.” The result is a vibrant assortment of stories and voices brimming with attitude, deep wisdom, and rare compassion.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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Questions for *Best American Short Stories* Series Editor Heidi Pitlor

Each year's edition of the Best American Short Stories is edited by a prominent guest editor who makes the final selections for the collection--for 2007, it's Stephen King. But working alongside the guest editor is the series editor, who reads thousands and thousands of stories all year long and passes the best on to the guest editor. For years, Katrina Kenison held that one-of-a-kind role for the Best American Short Stories, but in 2007 she handed the reins over to Heidi Pitlor, a former editor at Houghton Mifflin and a novelist in her own right (her debut, *The Birthdays*, came out in 2006). We asked Pitlor a few questions about what many would consider a dream job.

Amazon.com: Congratulations: you now have one of those jobs that must make people say to you, "Oh my goodness, you just sit around reading stories all day! What a life!" Please dispel all relevant myths.



Pitlor: The key is to have young children. I have one-year-old twins, so I have yet to hear the question above.

I used to imagine Katrina Kenison, the former series editor, swinging in a hammock on a sunny day (there was always a hammock in my mind, and always sunshine), lost in her short stories, the twitter of birds somewhere nearby, a bonbon in her hand. I can assure you that none of the above applies to my day-to-day

life--and I'm guessing it didn't apply to hers. Reading this volume of fiction requires intense concentration, large amounts of coffee, total quiet, a babysitter for my kids, and sadly, no bonbons, at least not on a regular basis. Still, I have no complaints. I do love my job and being able to read this much.

Amazon.com: Can you explain the process of selecting the best American short stories? What's your relationship as series editor with the year's guest editor (in this case, Stephen King)?

Pitlor: Magazines that publish fiction send copies to me. Literary journals, mainstream magazines, you name it. I probably receive three to four magazines a day. Typically, I read all of this fiction--more specifically, the short stories (no novel excerpts allowed) written by Americans or those who have made the United States their home. I choose 120 that I think are the best, and pass them along to the year's guest editor.

Stephen King wanted to read along with me, and so he went out and bought tons of magazines himself. We spoke quite often about what we'd read. But typically, I go off on my own for most of the year, pull the stories, and then work with the guest editor at the end of the year to help him or her choose the final twenty for the book.

Amazon.com: You're a novelist as well as an editor. How do you read all these different (or depressingly similar) voices every day and keep your own voice strong when you sit down to imagine your own work?

Pitlor: Good question! When I'm writing regularly--and I must admit that I need to get back to this--I try to write each day before I begin reading. Again, coffee plays a big role. I get up, take care of the twins for a few hours until the sitter comes, then take typically my third cup of coffee out to my office, which is above my garage. I write first, so that my mind is clear of other writers' voices. I try not to think too much when writing a first draft. For me, thinking sometimes leads to inadvertent stealing. If I'm trying to sort out some sort of puzzle in what I'm writing, it's too easy to remember another writer's approach to a similar one. If I can write a first draft quickly, I'm better off.

Amazon.com: In his introduction to this year's collection, King writes that many of this year's submissions felt like "copping-a-fee reading"--stories driven not by a need to be told, but the desire to show off for editors and other writers (rather than regular old readers). Did you have the same reaction? What was your sense of the year's reading?

Pitlor: I'll put it a different way than he did. I often felt that writers put on airs. To me, it's apparent when writers aren't being true to themselves, especially in their writing voice. I want to forget that I'm reading--unless being aware that I'm reading is exactly what the writer is after. But typically, I want to lose myself in the words, to forget that someone is behind them. I want to believe the characters more than that.

That said, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of stories that did feel true and urgent, that did take me out of myself for a brief while.

Amazon.com: Story writing seems to ride waves of influence, driven at various times by the models, say, of Updike or Barthelme or Carver. Is there a writer now who you feel is the most influential in the stories you read?

Pitlor: Carver still seems to be a big influence--I'm not sure his influence ever waned. Hemingway too, as well as Chekhov, Faulkner, Cheever, Flannery O'Connor, Philip Roth, Alice Munro, Lorrie Moore, Tim O'Brien. No one model comes to mind more than the others at this point.

Amazon.com: What story was your most exciting discovery of the year? (And did King like it too?)

Pitlor: There were many for both of us--this is the best part of the job. He and I frequently enthused to each other about this or that new writer. But also about great stories by more familiar writers--that can feel like a discovery too. I don't know, though--naming the most exciting writer feels a bit like admitting you have a favorite child.

From Publishers Weekly

King admits in his introduction that he prefers all-out emotionally assaultive stories to those that might appeal to his critical nose. Yet King's selections are right at home among those of recent BASS editors Lorrie Moore, Michael Chabon and Walter Mosley: John Barth's darkly comic take on aging and mortality; a child's unforgiving view of her alcoholic parent from T.C. Boyle; an exploration of the grief of a crystal meth addict by William Gay (a writer King notes is a relatively obscure American talent); Lauren Groff's piece about a polio survivor learning to swim during the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic (based loosely on real-life Olympian Ethelda Bleibtrey); Roy Kesey's imagining of an airport terminal as microcosm of global politics; and Karen Russell's halfway house for the human children of werewolves (their condition skips a generation). Stories drawing on horror and on Maine add a personal King touch to this year's cull of 20, taken from among the 4,000 that series editor Pitlor read last year in periodicals. The book reflects the variety of substance and style and the consistent quality that readers have come to expect from the series, now in its 30th year. (*Oct.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

"Flavour-filled, literate, and textually complex...a heady treat for lovers of short fiction" (*Booklist*)

"If you buy one book this year, [you will] ensure a little bang for your buck with this journey through the vibrant worlds of twenty authors" (*San Diego Union-Tribune*)

"A short-fiction juggernaut." (*Wall Street Journal*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathryn Richardson:

Why? Because this *The Best American Short Stories 2007* is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will shock you with the secret it inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such incredible way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking method. So , still want to delay having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

Pauline Mueller:

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book specifically book entitled *The Best American Short Stories 2007* your head will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging every single word written in a publication then become one contact form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get ahead of. The *The Best American Short Stories 2007* giving you one more experience

more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful info for your better life with this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Jesus Brewster:

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