

# Nine Prizes Awarded in LDEI's M.F.K. FISHER AWARDS CONTEST

This year, we received 76 entries in LDEI's M.F.K. Fisher Awards for Excellence in Culinary Writing. For the first time, nine prizes were awarded—a first, second, and third place award in each of three categories:

1. Books
2. Print media (magazine and newspaper food stories)
3. Internet-based food articles or blogs

Each category winner received \$500 while second prizes were \$100 and third, \$50. The overall winner is awarded an additional \$500 to total \$1000 plus a trip to Charleston to receive her award at the LDEI Annual Conference on Saturday, October 31, 2015, at the Charleston Marriott.

Ten prominent food editors who are not members of Les Dames judged the contest. Read about the grand-prize winner and category winners on pages 4 to 8. All nine winning entries are posted at [www.ldei.org](http://www.ldei.org)



Facing page: Erin at a signing for her first book, *Shucked: Life on a New England Oyster Farm*. Husband Dave Murray and Erin. Dottie Byers, her granddaughter Maggie Jean, and Erin.

Start planning now to enter the 2016 contest. The fee per entry is \$35. Entries are submitted via the LDEI website. For more information, go to [www.ldei.org](http://www.ldei.org) or send an email to [mfkfisher16@aol.com](mailto:mfkfisher16@aol.com).

**Deadline: March 31, 2016**



## BOOK CATEGORY

Second Prize (\$100):

Dame **Jen Karetnick** of Miami Shores, Florida, Dining Critic, *MIAMI Magazine*, for the introduction from her book *Mango*.

Third Prize (\$50):

Lea Eskin of Baltimore, Maryland, for "Let Rise" from her book *Slices of Life*



## INTERNET CATEGORY

Second Prize (\$100):

Micki McClelland of Pipe Creek, Texas, for "Thanks, Dad" from My Table Magazine/SideDish online.

Third Prize (\$50):

Julia della Croce of Nyack, New York, for "Fancy Food Show: The Good, Bad and Ridiculous."



## PRINT CATEGORY

Second Prize (\$100):

Dame **Kim Ode**, staff writer, for "The Baron of Brats," from the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.

Third Prize (\$50):

Dame **Lee Dean**, Food Editor, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, for "The Long Winter."



## Magazine Editor Wins Grand Prize for Excellence in Culinary Writing

BY CICI WILLIAMSON

Anosmia—the inability to smell, is the subject of the grand-prize entry in LDEI’s M.F.K. Fisher Awards. The topic is very personal to author Erin Byers Murray, because it is her mother who became stricken with anosmia after a concussion and fractured skull received in a train accident.

Erin’s mother, Dottie Byers, wrote, “I am humbled that her piece about my accident and subsequent challenges is so insightful and sensitive and has been recognized by Les Dames D’Escoffier for the M.F.K. Fisher Award. I definitely won the ‘Very Coolest Daughter in the World Lottery,’ and I am honored to have had a small part in making that happen.”

This very cool daughter wasn’t so “cool” when she picked up the phone to hear LDEI President **Lori Willis** surprising Erin with the

news of her grand prize.

“I am so excited!” she said to Lori. “I can’t wait to attend the conference! This essay was obviously very personal for me and it took a long time to get it out into the world, so just having someone recognize that it’s meaningful and speaks to people—I am humbled and honored.”

It definitely will be cool that Erin’s mother is able to attend the awards presentation on October 31, at the LDEI Conference in Charleston. Dottie and her husband retired to Hilton Head, South Carolina, 98 miles from Charleston. “Mom was a piano and voice teacher while we were growing up. She also taught elementary school at the school my sister and I attended in South Carolina. Later, after we lived abroad in Mexico City, she switched gears to work in international

**INTERNET CATEGORY WINNER**

*Erin Byers Murray*

Nashville, Tennessee  
Grand Prize and First Prize  
Winner, Internet Category  
“Sense of Self.”

[www.foodthinkers.com/sense-of-self/](http://www.foodthinkers.com/sense-of-self/)  
[www.erinbyersmurray.com/](http://www.erinbyersmurray.com/)

relocation and logistics,” said Erin.

As the daughter of a DuPont executive, Erin graduated from The Tatnall School in Wilmington, Delaware, where she wrote for the high school newspaper. Her father’s career led the family to live in Mexico City and, for 17 years, in The Woodlands north of Houston. She graduated from Syracuse University with a double major in English and TV, Radio, and Film.

Erin has been writing about food since



2001 when she moved to Boston began doing restaurant reviews for *Boston* magazine, which is where she met her husband, Dave. She also worked as a writer for DailyCandy.com. Together with her husband and close friend, Nicole Kanner, of All Heart PR, she co-founded Eat Your Heart Out Boston ([www.eatyourheartoutboston.com](http://www.eatyourheartoutboston.com)), a website for music-loving foodies. In her spare time, Erin freelances for various publications like *Food & Wine*, *Modern Farmer*, *AOL Travel*, *The Boston Globe*, *Boston magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *The Atlantic Online*, and *Wine & Spirits Magazine*.

“My experience as a reporter was essential to getting me to learn how to tell a story. You have a foundation, and then it’s only a matter of personalizing it,” shared Erin.

Now living in Nashville, Erin is currently the managing editor at *Nashville Lifestyles* magazine, one of the only consumer magazines owned by Gannett, where she oversees all editorial print content and gets to write regularly about Nashville’s food, culture, and people. With a circulation of 150,000, it contains people profiles, arts, culture, travel, and everything that’s going on in the city. Her column, “At the Table,” profiles restaurants and their teams.

Although she had been cooking since high school and all through college, it was time spent working at Martha Stewart’s *Weddings* magazine that got her more excited about food. Erin said, “When I’m not digging up story ideas, I’m usually in the kitchen, exploring my new city, cooking up travel plans, or generally scheming about what and where I’ll eat next.

“My husband was a “meat and potatoes” guy and would never eat salads,” said Erin. “I helped induct him into that world. He’s a huge fan of beer, having once worked at a beer bar, and is a musician—he now works for a record label in Nashville. Dave and I can usually be found hunting down live rock shows (as well as hoppy Belgian beers) and we’re lucky to be the parents of two adorable kiddos, Charlie and Maggie Jean,” said Erin.

Regarding kids and food, Erin said, “I think that putting kids in front of the food gets them interested—engaged with it. My 1-year old daughter is a good eater. We started both kids on avocados, fish, chicken, and fruits as soon as they could eat solid food. But my 4-year old son is a bland, white-food kind of guy. He prefers good old mac ‘n cheese.

“We have a garden out back and he’s interested in growing vegetables, in fact, he picks basil right off the plant and eats it. But he’s not that interested in eating the vegetables. I have strong feelings about knowing where food comes from. I take the kids to the Nashville Farmer Market, where produce is either grower or co-op supplied,” said Erin.



“I’ve been a fan of M.F.K. Fisher for awhile. In fact, *Consider the Oyster* was the first book by M.F.K. that I bought when writing my book *Shucked*. She is a fascinating, strong-willed author. I love her perspective on food, and I carry her with me. She captures a moment in time through food. For me, so many of the roots of my own food writing stem from her work.”

### Entering LDEI’s M.F.K. Fisher Awards Contest

The second time’s a charm for this food writer and author. She entered LDEI’s M.F.K. Fisher Awards in 2012 with an excerpt from her first book, *Shucked: Life on a New England Oyster Farm* (St. Martin’s Press, 2011), which explores the world of Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, Massachusetts. “I have a not-so-secret obsession with oysters. I love telling stories about farmers, cooks, kitchens, and local food communities.

Erin said, “I’ve been a fan of M.F.K. Fisher for awhile. In fact, *Consider the Oyster* was the first book by M.F.K. that I bought when writing my book *Shucked*. She is a fascinating, strong-willed author. I love her perspective on food, and I carry her with me. She captures a moment in time through food. For me, so many of the roots of my own food writing stem from her work.”

However, the excerpt from *Shucked* didn’t win one of LDEI’s 2012 prizes. Since then, Erin has co-authored *The New England Kitchen: Fresh Takes on Seasonal Recipes* (Rizzoli, October 2014), with award-winning Boston chef Jeremy Sewall, which was released in October 2014.

Coincidentally, Erin’s winning entry this year, “Sense of Self,” was published on [www.foodthinkers.com/](http://www.foodthinkers.com/), a website of Breville, one of LDEI’s longtime sponsors. She had worked on the article for about 10 years since 2005. Erin took notes on the “Eat Memory” column in the *New York Times*, germinated on the topic, and wrote several iterations. Then Rebecca Ast, editor of Food Thinkers.com, contacted Erin about writing a piece about taste memory, and Erin submitted her “Sense of Self” article.

“I had heard of Les Dames for years thinking ‘what a cool group.’ I admire its philanthropy but especially because it’s supportive of women,” opined Erin. “It’s great that LDEI supports women food writers through this award.”

### Food Writing Today

“Food writing is challenging today. But some websites are accepting long-form journalism (4000-5000 words) and they pay. Niche publications and food magazines are popping up, such as *Feast* in St. Louis, and they have subscription and membership models.

Lori said, “I read to Erin on the phone some of the comments from the judges, and she said, ‘I am getting chills. I want to say again how thrilled I am, and very touched. Thank you!’”

Erin’s mother wrote, “Erin is an amazing young woman, and I’m in awe of all she has already accomplished in her culinary and writing career, while getting married, having two babies, raising her family, writing two award-winning books, and holding down some demanding full time jobs. Thank you, Les Dames, for your recognition of Erin and including me in the festivities! I can’t wait! I look forward to meeting all of you in October in Charleston. Kindest Regards, Dottie Byers.”

Please read Erin’s winning entry at [www.ldei.org](http://www.ldei.org) for the whole story.

From left: Dottie Byers feeding her granddaughter, Maggie Jean, the “famous” angel food cake from Erin’s winning story. Dave and Erin Murray.



# Persimmon Fancier Wins Print Category

BY CICI WILLIAMSON

When LDEI President **Lori Willis** called Janice Cook Knight to tell her she'd won a prize in LDEI's M.F.K. Fisher Awards Contest, the first-prize winner of the Print Category was suspicious. She said, "I thought it was one of those sales calls! I am so excited! I want to know more about the organization. I love M.F.K. Fisher, so I was excited when I heard about this competition." She laughed, "I am on my way to writing class, so I get to tell them!"

Janice said, "The first food memoir I read was M.F.K. Fisher's *The Art of Eating*. I was in my 20s and it was an inspiration. I'm very honored to win an award in her name." Not since the sixth grade had Janice won a writing award. It was "something about the Bill of Rights," she recalled.

Knowing very little about LDEI (there's no chapter in her city), Janice entered the contest because Krista Harris, editor/publisher of *Edible Santa Barbara*, told her about it and encouraged her to enter. She had proposed the article about persimmons to Krista, and it took a week or two to write. "It was one of the most fun stories I've done. I'm often interviewing farmers and food producers, but this article was more of a pleasure based on experience."

"An autumn doesn't go by without me making *hoshigaki* (dried Hachiya persimmons). I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, once a very agricultural place—a big orchard, really—but now suburban. We had them growing in our yard. Today at my home in Santa Barbara I'm growing only the chocolate variety, called Maru.

"My mother, whose ancestry is French and German, grew up on a farm in Kansas, and my father was Canadian, from British Columbia. My dad was a total plant man who studied biology and agriculture in Canada. He moved to California for the climate; you can grow almost anything here. He met my mom here, and eventually taught high school biology. We always had something growing that we could eat, and lots of fruit trees.

"I've been interested in food since I was very small. My parents cooked interesting foods, such as organ meats. People who grew up during the Depression tended to make the maximum use of everything. I used to love calves brains and scrambled eggs for breakfast, with ketchup—before I knew what they were.



## PRINT CATEGORY WINNER *Janice Cook Knight*

Santa Barbara, California  
First Prize Winner: Print Category  
"Hurray for the Orange,  
Red and Gold: The Season  
for Persimmons."  
Edible Santa Barbara, Fall 2014

"Growing up in southern California, we ate a lot of tortillas. Instead of a lemonade stand, I had a roadside stand selling hot dogs wrapped in tortillas," confided Janice. She still likes them today. "It's childhood comfort food."

While attending California State University, Northridge—earning a B.A. in English with an emphasis on writing, she became a vegetarian and worked at Follow Your Heart, a vegetarian restaurant in Canoga Park, about six miles from the university. During her seven-year stint as a cook there, Janice began writing and editing newsletters for the restaurant, then wrote *Follow Your Heart's Vegetarian Soup Cookbook* and *The Follow Your Heart Cookbook: Recipes from the Vegetarian Restaurant*. "When I started seeing tuna sandwiches in my dreams, I went back to eating meat," she said.

As a mom, the first thing she fed her son after breast milk was, coincidentally, persimmons. "They were in season. He made a big mess, orange pulp everywhere, him grinning at the pure sweetness.

"Although I love sugar as well as the next person, we are not a junk food house. We do a lot of cooking at home. Now we are empty nesters, but when the kids were home, we gave each of them one night per week to choose the menu and help cook. Now they all love food and cooking. It made a big differ-

ence being exposed to a variety of tastes when they were young."

For kids and food today, the Slow Food member and cooking instructor recommends that kids cook more with their parents. "When I was teaching classes in Santa Barbara schools, I was amazed at some of the junk food I saw the schools provide. I think that's changing now."

Janice has taught cooking for over 30 years, and for several years taught a cookbook-writing workshop. Now she is designing a cooking class for those who are recently bereaved. In her food career Janice has worked as both a personal chef and a food coach. She's written for *Montecito Magazine*, *LA Yoga Magazine*, *Whole Person Calendar*, and the *Santa Barbara Independent*, as well as *Edible Santa Barbara*. Janice was also a recipe tester for *Bon Appétit* magazine. She has lectured on **Julia Child** for a Road Scholar program (educational adventures created by Elderhostel) celebrating Julia's life and cooking contributions ([www.roadscholar.org](http://www.roadscholar.org)).

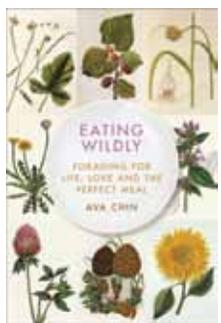
Janice is currently writing a memoir about her house, garden, and blended-family life, and it will include some recipes as well. Her advice to up-and-coming food writers? "Submit, submit, submit. You might get published." Janice also recommends applying for writers' retreats, such as the Hedgebrook Writers in Residence Program, Whidbey Island, Washington, ([www.hedgebrook.org](http://www.hedgebrook.org)) "where you have time and space to listen to what's in your head."

Even though magazines are folding left and right, Janice says this opens up possibilities for bloggers to get paid through advertising, which is the same way magazines earned revenue. "I think print is here to stay," she feels. "It's not relaxing to read everything on a screen, especially food magazines."

What will Janice do with her \$500 prize money? Food travel! To read more about this prize winner, visit [www.janicecookknight.com](http://www.janicecookknight.com).



# English Professor Wins Book Category



Ava with morel mushrooms. Six-month old Mei Rose with foraged mushrooms in her stroller basket and at age 3 finding wild blackberries in England,

BY CICI WILLIAMSON

Dr. Ava Chin had two deliveries in one year: a baby girl and her book manuscript for *Eating Wildly*. So it may not be surprising that Ava took her six-month old daughter foraging for wild edibles using the basket under the stroller as a kind of shopping cart in the woods. Her “Baby Forager,” Mei Rose Brunette, now three years old, knows how to find wild blackberries in England and has foraged for the briefly seen reddish-orange thimble berries in California. But I am getting ahead of the story.

On June 3, LDEI President **Lori Willis** telephoned Ava to surprise her with the good news that the judges had chosen her entry, “The Search for a Wild Weed,” as the winner of the Book Category in LDEI’s M.F.K. Fisher Awards Contest.

Lori said, “After I told her, she gasped and whispered ‘I am so excited, thank you.’” The reason she was whispering is that, “I am in the National Archives (San Francisco), so I can’t shout and jump up and down but if I were at home...!” Lori’s call found Ava going through old immigration records of family members who came over from China in the 1800’s—research for her next book.

This Associate Professor of English at the City University of New York (CUNY) grew up in Flushing, Queens, as a “restaurant brat.” Her grandfather, Eugene Wong, manager of a Chinese restaurant and a bartender, took her food shopping.

“My grandparents cooked copious meals when I was growing up, but were not demonstrative, so they said ‘I love you’ through food. My grandfather, a master of culinary skills, cooked with medicinal roots, different kinds of mushrooms, and various peas. He put *dong kwai* (angelica root) in braises, which he said was good for women through all stages of their lives.

“I was raised by a single mother, and my grandparents were my ‘surrogate’ parents. In my Chinese American family where food was so important, I found solace in my grandfather’s cooking, constantly trying to work out

**BOOK CATEGORY WINNER**  
**Dr. Ava Chin**  
 New York, New York  
 First Prize Winner: Book Category  
 “The Search for a Wild Weed”  
 from *Eating Wildly: Foraging for Life, Love, and the Perfect Meal*  
 (Simon & Schuster, May 2014)  
[www.avachin.com](http://www.avachin.com)

who my missing father was.”

“My first food story [in a literary magazine at Queens College, where Ava received her B.A. degree] was about watching my grandfather peel an Asian pear in one long loop. I submitted my first foraging article to the *New York Times*, and it eventually turned into a bi-weekly column, ‘Urban Forager,’ (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/author/ava-chin/>) that I wrote for 4 years. I found that nature was abundant even in New York City. There are wonderful metaphors in nature applicable to everyday life,” said Ava.

Her columns led to writing her book. “People kept asking me why I foraged and how I got started. I realized I couldn’t answer their questions in a 700-word column. It was a personal connection and the only way I could actually tell that story was not in a short piece but in an actual book,” explained Ava.

“My agent sold my book idea right away, but as I was working on it, I found out I was pregnant. I had the baby right in the middle of writ-

ing it.” After the book was published (in May 2014), Ava heard about LDEI’s contest in a Facebook group of women food writers. Ava loves M.F.K. Fisher’s works. “She writes with such verve, mastery, moxie, and gumption that it completely sucks you in. I first read *How to Cook a Wolf* and *Consider the Oyster*, said Ava.

This is her first national writing award, but her book has been listed in the “Best Books of 2014” by Library Journal ([www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com)) and other media outlets. At CUNY, Ava teaches classes in creative non-fiction writing and food studies. She received her M.A. from Johns Hopkins University and her Ph.D. from the University of Southern California (USC).

Ava has written about arts and culture for the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, *Marie Claire*, *the Village Voice*, *Savueur*, and *Spin*, among others. These days, she sees greater opportunities for food writing published on the Internet but says it’s harder to get paid. Her advice is to “write about what you’re most passionate about because that might be your reward more than getting paid for it!”

Some interesting mushrooms Ava forages for with her husband and her daughter are hen of the woods, enoki (brown in the wild as opposed to the supermarket white ones grown in the dark), and cloud ears (*wu-nyee*). And she’s always on the search for a good ramp patch.



Ava in a field of ramps.