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Ellicott City Poet Starts a New Verse

Howard County resident Laura Shovan has taken the top spot at the Little Patuxent Review.

By [Nikki Gamer](#) | [Email the author](#) | June 24, 2011 [Print](#)

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When arts educator and poet Laura Shovan moved with her husband to Maryland 11 years ago, she felt at a loss for like-minded peers.

“It took me a while to find where the literary folk hung out,” Shovan says.

Eventually the Ellicott City resident met a local poet who at the time was starting an arts and literary journal in Howard County. Shovan became a contributor for that journal.

Cut to a decade later, and Shovan has the top spot as editor for what is now the [Little Patuxent Review](#), a biannual print journal comprising works of art, poetry, fiction and essays.

“*Little Patuxent Review* was my first point of contact with the poets, fiction writers and artists who make our area so rich,” Shovan writes in the journal’s most recent issue.

Seen as a gathering place for creative residents, the journal has featured the work of such nationally acclaimed writers as [Michael Chabon](#) to local greats like [Rafael Alvarez](#). Anyone with the exception of those outside the country are welcome to contribute, while each issue is celebrated with a local reading.

Shovan, 42, a well-regarded poet and author (laurashovan.com) who has won numerous awards for her work, took over the position in the fall when the journal’s founding editor stepped down to take a teaching position in Singapore.

Shovan, who is well-connected to the literary seen in other parts of the state, is hoping to use her connections to grow the journal’s subscription base. She’d also like to attract more contributors.

“The journal is growing,” Shovan explains. “We have a larger online presence than we’ve had before, and we’re reaching out to publications.”

In the meantime, she sees her new role as a challenge.

“When you’re an editor, you have to put personal preferences aside and see value for the audience or reader, and think about what might interest or entertain them,” she says.

Each issue of the journal has a different theme. The most recent 87-page issue centers around the theme of “make believe.” It’s Shovan’s first issue as editor.

“One of the things I enjoy doing in poetry is stepping into another person’s voice and writing from a point of view that’s not my own...That goes to the realm of make believe,” she explains.

Instead of focusing on the themes of fantasy and fairytales for the issue, Shovan has decided to take a more realistic and everyday approach. One of the issue’s included poems is entitled “White Noise,” about a dying parent, and the things people fool themselves into believing to cope. Or there is the poem “Girl Queen of the Animals,” inspired by a news story about Afghan child brides. In the poem the child uses make believe for comfort.

“I definitely think the poems speak to the theme of the journal overall,” Shovan notes.

Meanwhile the next issue will center on the theme of social justice. Shovan encourages anyone with an artistic voice to send in material. Most of the journal’s contributors are from the Mid-Atlantic region, and run the gamut of professions from biochemistry to education.

“One of the benefits of publishing in the journal is expanding your community of fellow artists,” Shovan adds. “When people become a contributor there is just a sense of warmth. It’s very community-driven...You are part of the family.”

Outside of her editing commitments at the journal, Shovan works as an arts educator in local elementary schools. She recently completed a residency at Northfield Elementary School teaching poetry.

“I have a patchwork life....Most of my work in this last year has been teaching and educating,” she explains. “I love teaching the younger kids. I can be goofy and enthusiastic...I wear silly jewelry—anything to catch their interest. They get encouraged, and they end up writing some amazing pieces.”

As for her editing work, she says that what she enjoys most about her post at the journal is her growing circle of colleagues.

“Every project I work on it seems my circle of friends, and fellow poets and artists just grows,” she adds. “There is such goodwill when you put a good product together ... You feel like you’ve found a wonderful home for your work, and it encourages you as an artist.”

Shovan compares the reading of poetry to the experience of sitting with a painting.

“You get a first reading of a poem, and you have one experience,” she says. “But a good poem will draw you back ... You keep going to a poem back over time and it becomes a very rich experience.”

To learn more about the LPR, visit: littlepatuxentreview.org

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