

2009 James Jones First Novel Fellowship Winner Announced

Wilkes-Barre, Penn. –Tena Russ, of Riverwoods, Il., won first place for her novel *After Paradise* in the 18th Annual James Jones First Novel Fellowship, co-sponsored by the Graduate Creative Writing Department of Wilkes University and the James Jones Literary Society.

Russ was awarded \$10,000. This year’s contest drew 674 submissions, and this was not the first time Russ had entered her manuscript in the competition.

“I actually entered the contest several times and never made it to the second level. I almost didn’t even enter the contest this year,” she said.

Russ was shocked to learn that her manuscript, which has undergone several revisions, finally won. She was notified that she won by novelist Nina Solomon, a judge for the competition and a faculty member of the creative writing program.

“It was like Ed McMahon just came to my door. When Nina called, I literally got goose bumps,” Russ said.

Russ was not always heavily involved in writing. Following her studies at Northwestern University and the American Academy of Art, she worked as a portrait artist.

She started writing regularly after she joined a local writers group and took an additional writing workshop at Northwestern University. The professor brought in published authors at the end of the semester, and the experience encouraged Russ to become a writer.

“The challenge of learning to write has been so rewarding in many ways,” Russ said. “I love every part of it. I do it every day now.”

Prior to winning the James Jones competition, Russ’s manuscript won first place in the Novel-in-Progress category of the William Faulkner-William Wisdom Writing Creative Writing Competition of 2008.

Her second novel will focus on Sam, a secondary character in *After Paradise* who is a Vietnam War veteran, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The novel is in the prewriting stages. She is also still revising *After Paradise*.

Russ also volunteers in a literacy program for young children, The Canine Reading Buddies. Once a month, she and Cami, her German Shepherd, meet with children at a library where the



Tena Russ of Riverwoods, Il

children enjoy reading to Russ and her dog. The submission deadline for entries is March 1 of each year.

The runner-up winners of the James Jones competition were Michael Schiavone, of Gloucester, Mass., for his manuscript *Call Me When You Land*, and Christine Wade, of New York, for her manuscript *Seven Locks*. They were each awarded \$750.

The James Jones Fellowship was established in 1992 to “honor the spirit of unblinking honesty, determination, and insight into modern culture as exemplified by (the writings of) James Jones.” Requests for guidelines should be sent, along with a stamped, self-address envelope, to James Jones First Novel Fellowship, c/o The Graduate Creative Writing Department, Wilkes University, 84 West South Street, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766, or via e-mail to jamesjonesfirstnovel@wilkes.edu