



2023

# Annual Report

Dear Members, Supporters, and Friends,

As we look back on 2023, a year that shook us with its local and global violence, many of our most cherished moments are those we spent sharing and reflecting on the power of words and stories with you. These were our bright spots: moments we gathered to listen to you read your work; moments we learned of the publication of a poem, story, essay, or book; moments we saw you reaching out and bringing people together for a book fair, writing group, reading, or discussion.

At MWPA, we focused on launching new community programs including **Stories That Move Me** and **Write ME**. Both connected Mainers across geographic and socio-political divides, one through storytelling and the latter, in collaboration with the Maine State Poet Laureate and Maine Arts Commission, through writing and sending poetry letters. We expanded the reach of our educational offerings, bringing workshops, retreats, and literary events to more locations across the state. We also championed Maine's writers and publishers, spread news of upcoming events, and awarded writers scholarships and residencies to further promising work.

As we head into 2024, we are proud to serve over 1,650 members in all 16 Maine counties.

This year, we'll keep opening doors for Maine writers and publishers. We'll convene a team of community partners around the state to produce the **2024 Maine Lit Fest**, and we'll continue offering high-quality writing and publishing workshops, online and in-person, while working to keep improving our programs and processes so they're more equitable, inclusive, and community-minded.

We are so grateful for your support, engagement, and ongoing creative and community work. Thank you for valuing Maine's writers and writing.

With gratitude,

Gibson Fay-LeBlanc  
Executive Director

Jim Krosschell  
Board President

## 2023 STAFF

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Meghan Sterling  
*Program Director*  
Samara Doyon  
*Membership & Program Coordinator*  
Phoebe Little  
*Programs & Promotions Associate*

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Morgan Talty  
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## MISSION

Founded by a group of small presses and writers, Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance (MWPA) has worked for over 48 years to enrich the literary life and culture of Maine. We bring together Maine writers, editors, publishers, booksellers, and literary professionals at all stages of their careers to sharpen craft, create community, and celebrate great writing.

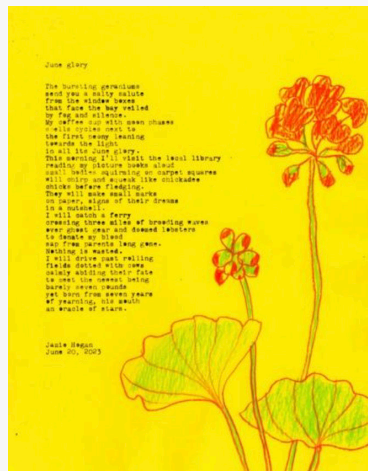
## DEBORAH CUMMINS

In 2023, we lost poet, writer, and longtime MWPA Board Member, Deborah Cummins. Deborah served on MWPA's board from 2015 until last summer, acting as Board President from 2016 until April 2023 and helping to steer MWPA through growth, a leadership transition, and Covid. We will miss her ideas and guidance and are grateful for the time, passion, and professionalism she poured into MWPA. Stay tuned for details on how we will honor Deborah's life and service.



# Beyond the Numbers

## WRITE ME: AN EPISTOLARY POETRY PROJECT



Poetry letter from the Write ME project.

This spring and summer, we collaborated with Maine State Poet Laureate Julia Bouwsma to pilot her poetry project called **Write ME**. Over 120 participants learned the art of writing epistolary poems, or poems that are also letters, through free workshops held across the state. Participants were then paired with partners living in different regions of Maine to exchange poems by postal mail or email. Hundreds of new pieces of

poetry resulted. Some poems were penned by seasoned poets, but many were authored by participants new to writing or writing in this way. At the end of the summer, pairs of poets gathered online to share highlights and excerpts from their exchanges.

## STORIES THAT MOVE ME



Rebecca Traister and Rachel Talbot Ross, featured storyteller, discuss the poem "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black." Maya Williams performs (below).

On Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM, we hosted our first ever **Stories That Move Me** night at Hannaford Hall in Portland. This community event featured five storytellers, all with deep ties

to Maine, taking the stage to share poems, plays, songs, and stories about significant people who have shaped their lives. With a large crowd and unforgettable tales, the night was invigorating and presented attendees with new opportunities to hear from community leaders who are treasure troves of stories but don't necessarily see themselves as storytellers or writers. The event, which will return in 2025, raised money for MWPA's scholarships, fellowships, and free community programs and events.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JILL MCLAUGHLIN – 2023 ILGENFRITZ SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

*I moved to Maine after working in book publishing in New York City, hoping to find a literary community like the one there. I was thrilled to find MWPA and immediately started attending events. Receiving the Ilgenfritz Scholarship has completely reignited my writing project. With the help of the scholarship, I travelled to Rockland, spent two full days researching and writing, and connected with people also interested in my subject matter. I've had some breakthroughs and am once again really excited by the potential of the work!"*

—Jill McLaughlin



## WRITING PROGRAMS REACHING MORE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE STATE

Since the pandemic, we've been steadily rebuilding our in-person programming across the state. This year, our workshops, retreats, and gatherings landed in towns and cities all over Maine and attracted more participants than ever before. Our **GATHER** program, which invites MWPA members and friends to meet and mingle six times a year at different Maine locations, hosted meetups as far north as Presque Isle and as far west as Norway. In-person workshops returned to Augusta, Belfast, Eastport, Farmington, Waterville, and other locations too. Our in-person writing retreats, Black Fly and Harvest, found new homes at the Schoodic Institute in Winter Harbor and Hillholm Estate in Kingfield.

Educational programs like these, along with sponsored and co-sponsored events at Bates College in Lewiston and the Bangor Public Library, allowed us to meet new writers face to face and bring literary programming to more pockets

of the state. In 2023, we also launched a series of hybrid workshops (which we'll continue) that allow participants to self-select whether they'd prefer to attend a class in-person or online.



Panelists at MWPA's fall PITCH Conference. From left to right, Nick Fuller Googins, Taryn Bowe, Samara Cole Doyon, Brandon Ying Kit Boey, Ian Fritz, and Liz Iversen

## CELEBRATING MAINE WRITING

The **2023 Maine Literary Awards** were held on May 18th at the Olin Arts Center at Bates College in Lewiston and were also livestreamed via Zoom, allowing 200 winners, finalists, and viewers to tune in, in-person or from home.

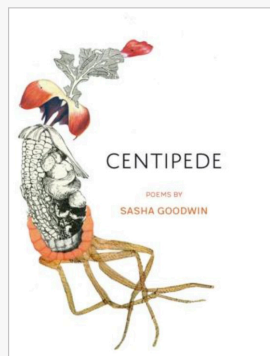
Award winning books included a mystery featuring Georgia O'Keefe as the main sleuth, a work of true-crime nonfiction, a children's book about disability rights, a memoir about a woman's return to the woods, and a collection of stories about grief and survival featuring a Penobscot family in Maine.

Molly McGrath received the Distinguished Achievement Award for her "exceptional and steadfast contributions" to Maine's literary arts as Publications Director at the Telling Room where she helped to publish more than 200 books and 4,500 young Maine writers. A complete set of submitted books was donated to the Charlotte Hobbs Memorial Library in Lovell.



## OTHER NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS:

In the fall of 2023, we published Sasha Goodwin's poetry chapbook *Centipede*, the **2022 Maine Chapbook Series** poetry winner selected by critically acclaimed poet Joshua Bennett. Goodwin's launch at Longfellow Books in Portland featured her poetry alongside work by previous Maine Chapbook Series winners Suzanne Langlois (poetry) and Brandon Dudley (fiction).



“*Winning the 2022 Maine Chapbook Series was transformative in the sense that I have been writing poetry for decades and needed to finally admit that publication does hold meaning. Recognition of what is universal and deeply personal is how most of us derive meaning from our time here. And I have MWPA to thank for providing me with workshops and a fellowship to Monson Arts to connect with other writers and focus and create.*”

— Sasha Goodwin

In November, we welcomed our third cohort of **Ashley Bryan Fellows** to MWPA. This group of five promising writers from BIPOC backgrounds joins twelve existing Bryan fellows in receiving free five-year memberships, free workshops, and networking and publishing opportunities.

# Budget Spotlight

## 23%

PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET THAT SUPPORTS WRITERS & ARTISTS

## Financials

### INCOME

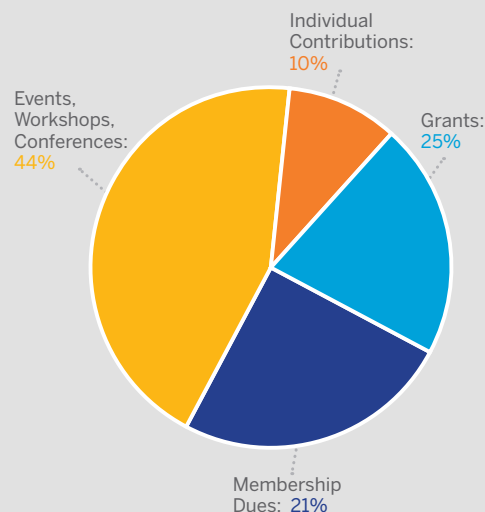
Grants: **\$104,833**

Individual Contributions: **\$44,121**

Events, Workshops, Conferences: **\$185,360**

Membership Dues: **\$88,562**

**Total: \$422,876**



### EXPENSES

Admin: **\$51,806**

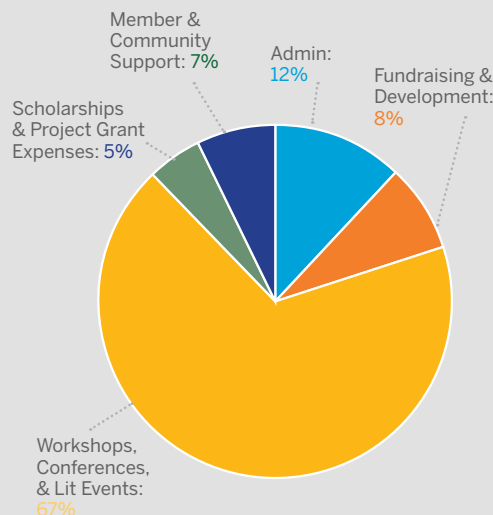
Fundraising & Development: **\$31,929**

Workshops, Conferences, & Lit Events: **\$284,753**

Scholarships & Project Grant Expenses: **\$22,207**

Member & Community Support: **\$31,639**

**Total: \$422,334**



*We Couldn't  
Have Done It  
Without You!*

We are incredibly grateful for the support and engagement of all our members, instructors, workshop students, donors, funders, community partners, corporate sponsors, and volunteers. Special thanks to our generous 2023 government and foundation donors:

THE BETTERMENT FUND, THE BYDALE FOUNDATION, THE JAM BAKEWELL FAMILY FUND, KIRBY FAMILY FOUNDATION, HORIZON FOUNDATION, MAINE ARTS COMMISSION, MAINE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, MAINE HUMANITIES COUNCIL, ONION FOUNDATION, AND VIRGINIA HODGKINS SOMERS FOUNDATION.

# By the Numbers

(2023)

81

WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES, & RETREATS ORGANIZED

1,434

PARTICIPANTS IN WORKSHOPS,  
CONFERENCES, & RETREATS

7,170

PARTICIPANT WORKSHOP HOURS

29

FREE EVENTS & GATHERINGS

1,645

AUDIENCE MEMBERS  
AT FREE EVENTS & GATHERINGS

842

ENTRIES TO CONTESTS & OPPORTUNITIES

\$27,905

IN SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED  
TO MAINE WRITERS

\$98,293

DIRECT SUPPORT OF WRITERS & ARTISTS THROUGH  
PAYMENTS, AWARDS, AND/OR SCHOLARSHIPS

## What We Are Excited About for 2024

- + We are thrilled to add a new fiction chapbook to our esteemed list of **Maine Chapbook Series** winners. Fiction writer Manuel Gonzales has selected Aliza Dube's short story collection *The Dependents* as the winner of the 2023 Maine Chapbook Series. MWPA will publish this title in the fall. Submissions for the 2024 Maine Chapbook Series contest in nonfiction will open in September.
- + Be on the lookout for new generative workshops, more 5 and 10-week workshops, and new master classes and affinity group workshops that allow writers to create and discuss work alongside peers who share similar experiences and/or hail from similar backgrounds.
- + We are energized to continue our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work and will spend 2024 diving into a year-long equity assessment of our programs and policies. Our goal is to emerge from this process with concrete ideas of how to continue to incorporate equity and inclusion into our mission, programs, and strategic plan in the coming years.
- + Believe it or not, MWPA is turning 50 next year. We've begun dreaming of ways to bring Maine's literary community together to mark this tremendous milestone. We hope to honor the organization's history and the writers who shaped the organization as well as celebrate what lies ahead.
- + Finally, we can't wait to bring back the 2nd **Maine Lit Fest** in October 2024. Showcasing a fresh slate of poets, writers, and illustrators, the 2024 Maine Lit Fest will feature a week of inspiring literary conversations, activities, and community events at locations across the state. In addition to Portland and Waterville, signature events will light up stages in Bangor, Brunswick, Farmington, and Presque Isle. We'll start announcing the line-up this spring. In the meantime, mark your calendars for the week of **October 3rd through 12th**.