

## SILENT VOICES

The alumni behind this literary journal help give voice to a creative mosaic of diverse storytellers.

It started as an idea among students in LMU's graduate program for creative writing who had a passion for good stories. After graduation, this group continued the creative endeavor to honor the works of contemporary writers by founding the literary journal *Silent Voices*. By publishing stories of a diverse nature in a specific order, a creative mosaic is produced that tells a larger story. Different voices are presented in unified harmony. During this process, group members discovered that even choosing a title for their journal was a valuable creative endeavor. Here, Peter A. Balaskas '91, MA '04, editor and manager of *Silent Voices*, gives us insight into the experience.

### An Editor's Musings

At first glance, the journal's title, *Silent Voices*, has a contradictory tone. How can voices be silent? After I describe how we reached our decision to name it so, I hope you will look underneath the surface of this name and understand its relevance to our creative mission.

Not too long ago, I saw a television interview with crime novelist James Lee Burke. On the subject of creativity, he commented: "And every artist who is honest—and most of them are when it comes to their talent, the real ones—they will be the first to state the talent they have, whatever degree of it they have, comes from someplace outside of themselves. I think there's something truly mystical about art, that art is the one area in which we share in the province of God."

After hearing this philosophy, I instantly knew that I wanted "Voices" as part of our journal's title—the voices that come from a higher power (a muse,

perhaps) and are channeled through the writer.

How can voices be silent? Look at a piece of paper that has writing on it. Obviously, you don't actually hear anything. Yet, the text seems to call out to you in its own subtle way. There are those old sayings to consider: "Silence is Golden" and "Silence Speaks Volumes." The "silent voices" are those inaudible sounds that travel from the muse, through the author's creative prism—the brain—through his or her hand holding the pen, to the printed page and, eventually, end at the reader holding what the author has spoken. Thus, a bond is created between the writer and the audience; and throughout this silent discourse, the voice of the author can be heard.

What you see on the next page is an excerpt from the work of one of 11 talented writers included in the first volume of *Silent Voices*. We welcome you to listen to her "silent voice."

### "Nameless"

By Michelle Mellon, *Silent Voices* contest winner

The box is made of woven reeds, perhaps from the cattails ringing the pond back in the other direction on the road. She opens it and gasps. Inside is a small book, made of stitched-together pages between plain bark covers. The handwriting is small and uneven, but she has no doubt this is a registry of the church members and the small drawing beside their names is a map of their burial plots in the surrounding field.

She rubs her finger carefully down the list of names, and finds a surname that matches her own. She knows firsthand that the exploration and documentation of slave graveyards is timely and difficult, and rarely rewarded with an artifact like the one she holds in her hands. Back in what she already thinks of as her "other life," a discovery like this would have made her year as an historian on local history.

She feels a strong urge to light a candle on the broken altar and give thanks for the gift. But the daylight is gone and she has more important things to tackle. She stands, finds her way back to her belongings, and clears a space near the front and off to the side, where the remaining roof cover seems to be the strongest. She has a peanut butter sandwich and some bottled water for dinner, and falls asleep dreaming of chicken and biscuits and fresh honey.

The small church is filled with bodies. Or rather, the memory of bodies that once were. Skins

once black are grey with death. She stares at the stiff backs of men, women and children sitting on the floor. Some of the bare backs are marked with scars, raised and puckered like giant earthworms.

Her lips rear back at the sight, as if in their rapid flight they might pull open her jaws and allow the scream inside to escape. But a lifetime of stoicism prevails, and the sound is buried within, trapped in a brittle nest of unexpressed emotions.

Something scuttles past her legs and she flinches. The creature stops and turns to look at her. A little girl, so thin that she can't tell if the bumps on her back are scars or bones jutting through. The girl moves again, crawling quickly on all fours, keeping her face impossibly turned backwards as she melts into the crowded congregation.

She feels a ripple pass through them all, then realizes she's seeing it too, watching as their bodies distort like each one is passing through a curtain of water. And she knows now she must be dreaming because she's too calm and there are no such things as ghosts and she's not on any medication that could explain this away.

In unison, the men, women and children turn their heads to stare at her. The whites of their eyes glow like thin wafers, swallowed by the darkness of their pupils. She realizes she can still hear their voices, but their mouths are all closed. 🐾

Volume 1 of *Silent Voices* was published in August 2005.

Other LMU alumni involved in the journal include Marketing Manager James Cuttler '00; Associate Editor Mark D'Anna '99, MA '05; Associate Editor Tanya Salvini '91, MA '00; and William Salvini '90, MA '00 and '04.

For more information on *Silent Voices*, visit [www.exmachinapress.com](http://www.exmachinapress.com).