

Press Release



The Best American Short Stories 2004

edited by [Lorrie Moore](#)

series edited by [Katrina Kenison](#)

- [About the Book](#)
- [About the Editors](#)

About the Book

The best-selling and critically acclaimed author Lorrie Moore has gathered the year's A-list short fiction for *The Best American Short Stories 2004* (Houghton Mifflin; publication date: October 14, 2004), a volume that, according to the series editor, Katrina Kenison, "hums with life." Contributors explore a wide range of characters: a Chicago gangster, a Japanese primate specialist, a grieving mother, a homeless Spokane Indian, a docent at the Lee Chapel on the historic Washington and Lee University campus. "The great variety of first-rate reading," writes Moore in her introduction, "speaks to the health of the North American short story."

As always, *The Best American Short Stories 2004* is an eclectic and enthralling mix of well-known voices and sources and talented up-and-comers. Some of the contributors write, with humor and poignancy, about the connections between the past and present, as well as younger and older generations. In Trudy Lewis's "Limestone Diner," a car accident resulting in the death of a local teenage girl stuns a woman who lost her own young daughter years before. John Edgar Wideman writes about a man whose understanding of altruism is challenged as he searches for the imprisoned son of a dead friend in "What We Cannot Speak About We Must Pass Over in Silence." The main character in Sarah Shunlien Bynum's "Accomplice" is a young teacher struggling to communicate the needs of her students to their parents, and her own thoughts about her father to friends and family at his funeral.

Several stories are told from the perspective of men taking stock of their lives. "A Rich Man" by Edward P. Jones, follows Horace Perkins, a retired civilian Pentagon employee, and a lifelong womanizer. After his wife of over fifty years passes away, Horace happily dates other women and relives his youth, to unexpected consequences. John Updike, in "A Walk with Elizanne," writes about a man's encounter with a former classmate at his fiftieth high

school reunion, an encounter that brings back memories of a first kiss.

Other pieces explore the world of the family. In Jill McCorkle's "Intervention," a woman reluctantly sets off a chain of events that lead to an intervention for her husband. In another more humorous but no less poignant take on family, Deborah Eisenberg brings us a man named Otto, who tries to come to terms with his siblings, his partner, and himself. "It had taken him — how long? — years and years to establish a viable, if not pristine, degree of estrangement from his family. Which was why, he once explained to William, he had tended, over the decades, to be so irascible and easily exhausted. The sustained effort, the subliminal concentration that was required to detach the stubborn prehensile hold, was enough to wear a person right out and keep him from ever getting down to anything of real substance."

There are also wonderful selections by Sherman Alexie, T. Coraghessan Boyle, Annie Proulx, and Thomas McGuane, as well as emerging authors, such as Catherine Brady, Charles D'Ambrosio, Nell Freudenberger, and Mary Yukari Waters.

At a time when the nation's literacy is being debated and discussed, the value of short stories remains crucial. As Moore writes in her introduction, they welcome the reader into the larger world of literature:

"A story's economy, its being one writer's intimate response to a world . . . a response that must immerse a reader vividly and immediately, allows a gathering of twenty such responses in an anthology such as this and offers a kind of group portrait of how humanity is currently faring. Is that not, too, why we read short stories? To see in ways that television and newspapers cannot show us what others are up to — those who are ostensibly like us, as well as those ostensibly not? The stories here, I felt, did that."

This year's *Best American Short Stories* (the eighty-ninth edition in this series) certainly does reveal new and familiar worlds to the reader, and they come handpicked by a beloved master of the form who brings her keen eye for wit and surprise to the volume.

About the Editors

Lorrie Moore is the author of the story collections *Birds of America*, *Like Life*, and *Self-Help* and the novels *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* and *Anagrams*. Her stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, and six times in *The Best American Short Stories*.

Katrina Kenison has been the series editor of *The Best American Short Stories* since 1990.