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BOOKMONGER

Essay anthology doesn't go far enough

By BARBARA
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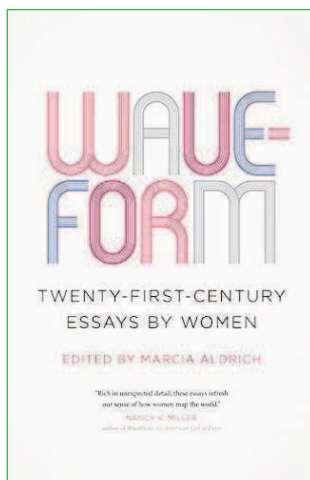
Bainbridge Island writer/editor Marcia Aldrich shows how contemporary essays build on the energy and ideas of one another in the new anthology, "Waveform." Aldrich, who also is an English professor at Michigan State University, curated this collection to focus on the diversity of essay structures in the 21st century. This is a showcase of experimentation — writers creating essays using lists, collage, photographs, graphic elements and letters; tinkering with style and tone and voice.

And although she includes only essays that have been written by female practitioners of the form, Aldrich asserts that she isn't focusing on women essayists for thematic purposes. Instead, she's trying to correct an imbalance of exposure that prevails even in the 21st century: the work of female writers still doesn't get published as frequently as that of their male counterparts.

"Waveform" already is being hailed by academics as a great new resource for use in the college classroom, but there's grist here for the general reader, too.

Aldrich collected essays from around the country, but we'll begin by looking at the contributions from Pacific Northwest writers.

Portland author Cheryl Strayed's piece, "Tiny Beautiful Things," kicks things off with one of her "Dear Sugar" advice columns, in which she



**"Waveform:
Twenty-First-Century
Essays by Women"**
edited by **Marcia
Aldrich**

University of
Georgia Press, 256 pp.,
\$29.95

counsels a 22-year-old from her 40-something self in the future.

"Your life will be a great and continuous unfolding," she promises, in the midst of reciting a litany of foolish and sometimes dangerous missteps taken along the way.

"The useless days will add up to something," she croons.

Bellingham author Brenda Miller picks up a similar lament in "We Regret to Inform You," crafting a series of rejection letters that trace the trajectory of life's disappointment.

She begins the essay with a rejection letter to an enthusiastic young artist whose picture of a tree is deemed unworthy of display in her grade school class. Then Miller

moves on to a letter that extinguishes the hopes of a tenth grader who dreamed of being the girlfriend of the star of the basketball team; and then to a letter to the thespian wannabe whose dreams of a future in theater are dashed by the college drama department.

Thirteen letters across 37 years describe the power of "no" in shaping a life. As bleak as it sounds, Miller's piece will inspire snickers of recognition, too. We've all had to bounce back from those smarmy rejections at one time or another.

On the other hand, Chelsea Biondolillo is the rejector, not the rejectee, in her essay, "Toward a Partial Definition of Home."

"We left Portland together, in love;" she writes, "we left New Orleans together too, but troubled. When it came time to leave Santa Fe, we each left on our own."

This essay is a patchwork of places and incidents — the frayed edges are intentional.

While there's much to admire in "Waveform," its emphasis on the personal essay ignores the impactful and mold-breaking pieces women are writing on politics, sports, international relations — let's hope for an expanded edition soon.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com

word nerd

By RYAN HUME

Elsie
[el•si]

noun

1. an unincorporated community in Clatsop County. Located on the mountainous terrain of the Northern Oregon Coast Range, Elsie sits near where the junction of U.S. Highway 26 and Oregon Route 103 crosses the Nehalem River as well as the confluence of West and East Humbug Creeks. Elsie is probably best known to travelers of U.S. Highway 26 for being the home of the restaurant and logging museum Camp 18, Sunset Coffee, Baker's General Store and the Elderberry Inn

Origin:

Elsie is named in honor of Elsie Foster, a relative of George Gragg, who was the first postmaster, having established the Elsie Post Office in 1892. The post office closed in 1943. Gragg apparently wanted to originally name the community Clover, but the name was rejected and he settled on honoring his niece instead.

Elsie is a British diminutive variant of the name Elizabeth, which arrives from the Greek version of the Hebrew name, *עֵלִישֶׁבַּת*, or *Elisheva*, which roughly translates to "oath of God."

"Elsie, like so much on the Oregon Coast, is endangered. Lying on the edge of urban sprawl from Portland and gaining favor with



PHOTO BY KATHERINE LACAZE

The annual Camp 18 Logger's Memorial Dedication and Logging Exhibition features an array of competitive events for students, from spur climbing, to double bucking, sawing and axe-throwing.



FILE PHOTO

A paean to local timber, Camp 18's exterior features carvings of wildlife and people.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Elderberry Inn, along with Baker's General Store, are the hub of Elsie.

those priced out of Cannon Beach, the green hills of Elsie may soon be more than a pass-through and secret sanctuary."

—R.J. Marx, "More than a pass-through, Elsie is at crossroads," *Seaside Signal*, Aug. 7, 2015, P. 4A

"Expect to see lots of cool wood carvings throughout the Camp 18 facilities. The eye-catching marvel is a definite place to stop while driving Highway 26 in the Pacific Northwest. If you are visiting local communities like Seaside, Astoria, Cannon Beach, Nehalem, Wheeler or Portland, it's a short and beautiful drive to Elsie!"

—Camp 18 Restaurant website, camp18restaurant.com