F141. To Contest or Not to Contest

River Teeth and UNM Press Provide Insight

**Entering a contest and the selection process:**

- Read the guidelines carefully and follow them to the letter. This will save you time, money, and energy. It will also save the editor time and energy.
- Take a look at the attached article, “A Look Inside the System of Competition: What Really Happens After You Hit Submit,” by Joey Franklin. Originally published in the May/June 2019 issue of *Poets & Writers*, it is included here with Joey Franklin’s permission. It has some great information, including from *River Teeth* editors Joe Mackall and Dan Lehman!

**Book publishing:**

- Once a winner has been chosen, the press works directly with the winner on the book contract.
  - The contract is a standard contract, and the press works with the author on the contract terms in the same way it works with authors of other books it publishes.
- The book goes through the same copyediting, design, and printing process as other UNMP books.
- Generally the winner of the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Award is published in the spring.
- The book and author will receive the same marketing treatment as other UNMP books: book review copies will be sent out, the book will be entered into post-publication awards, and book events will be set up that the author arranges with the marketing team.
  - The book will be listed as the winner of the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize, a designation that appears on the book’s back cover, on the press’s website, and in publicity such as press releases.
  - As with all books, the author is her own best marketer! You need to be promoting yourself and your book well before the book is even published. Work closely with the marketing department to promote your book once it does come out.
• Talk with your editor about other projects that you are working on. UNM Press staff believe that we publish authors, not just books. We want to support an author’s career, and we like to work with authors on new projects when the opportunity comes up and the project is a good fit for the press.

**Some great thoughts from contest-winning author Joan Frank:**

I’ve turned to contests, like very many, when other options have been exhausted. Contests are read and curated by *educated believers*. They are judged by respected, working writers and published by professionals who want to make an excellent product.

• Contests have birthed *fully half* of my published body of work.
• I’ve spent a lot of money on contest entry fees. It’s an inescapable necessity.
• I often submitted the same work to the same contests year after year, and I eventually *won a couple of them*. Judges often change each year.

**REMEMBER:**

• Small presses are multi-tasking heroes who nourish and protect serious literature.
• Contest winners are judged by working writers of literary excellence whose choices and aesthetics are not market-driven. They pay serious, artistic attention.
• Publication via contests, teaches: Editors, copyeditors, publicists, and distributors can help you make your work better.
• You gain good relationships with skilled, dedicated people.
• *Do not, do not, do not expect fame and fortune* if you win a contest. Instead:
  • Be thrilled that a judge you admire, selected you.
  • Be delighted by publicity, online attention, and good critical responses.
  • Rejoice when you hold the real, bound book in your hands that permanently joins (or launches) your body of work.
  • Savor adding a new line to your CV, which will now lead bylines, bios, and queries.
  • Enjoy praise, congratulations, and good feedback.

**And:**

• Contest publication enables eligibility for various awards and prizes post-publication.
• *Most important*: a contest win gives the internal go-ahead to consider yourself a working artist. Accept that affirming push toward the future of your writing life.