



Melanie Moore surrounded by 4th grade students in the Badgerdog program at Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary School. Special thanks to: Sandra Dowdy, Del Valle ISD assistant superintendent; Sami Kinsey, Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary Principal; Ellen Strong; Jesse Donaldson; Janet Harman and the KDK-Harman Foundation.
Photo by Michael Thad Carter



Melanie Moore

Doggedly Determined
to Proliferate the
Literary Landscape

Badgerdog Literary Publishing Serves the Social Bottom Line

Story by Terri Schexnayder

Photos by Michael Thad Carter + Courtesy of Melanie Moore

ON A SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON IN St. David's Episcopal Church, before a standing room-only audience of parents, grandparents and other children, a young girl read her short story, entitled *Superhero*:

In my dream I am a superhero. My powers are really cool. I can help people with their sicknesses. All I have to do is touch them or just think that they are healed and they are healed. The first person I would heal is my father; he has a brain tumor. I would also be helping my mom because my dad would be able to get a job ... My superhero name would be "The One Who Saves the Sick."

— Rachel Sweeten, Elementary School Student
Badgerpups Session I: Downtown

As Melanie Moore, the executive director of Badgerdog Literary Publishing watched Sweeten share her personal fantasy about saving her family, Moore experienced once again what she liked to call the "Badgerdog magic." The nonprofit organization Moore founded in 2003 had provided Sweeten, (as it had for thousands of other young

adults), the platform from which "to create literary art from their joy and their jeopardy."

Moore's dream of having a positive impact on others through writing began years ago in a small town in southern Georgia. Born in 1965, the first of two daughters to, as Moore described, "a teacher and a preacher," she grew up surrounded by the rich writing and history of great southern authors like Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers and Eudora Welty. Moore shared that Flannery O'Connor, one of her favorite writers, had lived just on the other side of Milledgeville from Moore's father's homestead in Deepstep, GA. Moore's great-grandfather's store is also featured in one of O'Connor's archive photos.

"I read all the time. My 'nose was always in a book,' my mom would always say. Because of all the reading I did, it didn't matter that I lived in a small town, (Jesup, GA; population 9,000) because I could export myself to other places. There were no boundaries on where I could go in the literary world," said Moore.

Moore's mother Paige taught elementary school for 31 years and remembered >>



The Problem Badgerdog Aims to Solve

“Fewer than half of American adults now read literature.”

– Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America, from the NEA

“According to a report in *Harper’s Magazine*, Aug. 2000, the average number of words in the written vocabulary of a six- to 14-year-old American child in 1945 was 25,000. By 2000, that average number was 10,000.

If you follow that trajectory, we are only decades away from grunting at each other. One could argue that we already are, with text messaging and truncated, acronym-laden interpersonal communication.”

– Melanie Moore, Executive Director, Badgerdog Literary Publishing



her young daughter’s love of books. “When she got into reading autobiographies of famous people, she got hooked on Abraham Lincoln’s story – how he tried so hard to get education on his own – and, she read everything she could get her hands on about him. We took a family vacation once to Washington, DC, and Melanie really drank all that history in,” recalled the senior Moore.

Moore’s father is a retired United Methodist minister, whose profession resulted in his family moving six times during Moore’s youth. With each transfer, Moore said she had the chance to reinvent herself. “We would move, and as I was usually in trouble in school, I realized you can make up who you are. For example, once I told everyone in school my father was a garbage man,” she said.

“Yes, she would get into trouble with the teachers, because she was so talkative,” Moore’s mother added. “When she was seven, her teacher called me in for a conference and told me how bright Melanie was, but she talked too much. I went home and told her she was doing good work and should not disrupt the class. Melanie told me, ‘But, Mommy, I have a lot to say!’”

In addition to reading, Moore invested hours in learning to swim, play tennis and practicing musical instruments. “I was in band and a pretty serious flute and piccolo player. Okay, ‘a bit nerdy’ comes to mind,” Moore admitted with a laugh. After years of dedication to music, including a three-hour roundtrip car drive her parents made weekly to Georgia Southern University in Statesboro for lessons, and after being selected to participate in the six-week “Governor’s Honors Program” at Valdosta State University, Moore decided to call it quits. “I didn’t want to spend my life in a practice room. I hung out with the communications arts people and knew I wanted to write,” she said.

When Moore was 16, she faced a medical crisis, which proved to be the catalyst for her to write. “I had Stage III ovarian cancer, which at that time, in 1981, was very dramatic, dire, less than a 20 percent chance of survival. A friend, Scott, had leukemia. He was in remission when I got sick; then, when I was better, he died,” shared Moore. “I felt like everyone in Jesup was looking to me for my reaction, so I wrote. I didn’t want to talk about it and that was the only way I knew how to deal with these big issues.”

After surviving cancer, Moore began her writing career, first working for her hometown newspaper, *The Press-Sentinel*. “I wanted to work there so badly I got a non-paying job, sitting on a stool, drinking five-cent Cokes, ripping out tear sheets for contests,” recalled Moore. She went on to edit her college newspaper, interned as news editor of the *Camden County Tribune* and served on the Georgia College Press Association Board of Directors. Moore worked as staff writer for the *Marietta Daily Journal* and as associate editor of Georgia’s United Methodist news weekly. She contributed articles for local Atlanta publications, including *Atlanta Magazine* and *Creative Loafing*. Moore’s educational resume read like someone destined to author a bestseller: Associate of Arts degree in English from Young Harris College; a Bachelor of Science in English



TOP: Melanie Moore, pre-K student. ABOVE: Melanie (right) and her younger sister, Jennifer, outside their GA home.

Education from the University of Georgia in Athens; and a Master of Arts in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Georgia State University in Atlanta.

As many writers have discovered, Moore's chosen profession did not pay the bills, so she took a more lucrative career path. Moore spent the next 12 years in research and development, technical publications management, and sales and marketing for large and small high-tech companies in Atlanta and Austin. Once again, Moore reinvented herself, becoming, she said, "the businessperson I now thought I was supposed to be. So, I let go of writing." She immersed herself in the corporate world, generating record revenues for her employers and receiving high accolades from the clients she served.

Moore had not written anything for three years after moving to Austin for a position with BMC Software. Wait-

“Writing is the practice of reflection; that is a basic human need – to be recognized, to see ourselves reflected in the world. When everything else in their world might be out of their control, these students can control what’s on the page.”

ing for a flight in the San Jose airport one day in 2002, she picked up Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Prodigal Summer*, and suddenly, Moore's suppressed passion for literature awakened in her. "It was good, strong, literary prose, beautiful writing. Reading it was like nectar to my parched soul. I knew what I had to do. When I told others in my business what I was going to do, it made no sense to them. I was a technology person," said Moore.

Within six weeks, Moore quit her sales job and took three months off to explore writing again. No one was more surprised to find out about Moore's deep-seated passion for writing than Lou Earle, Moore's former boss and mentor at Meritage Technologies, and, the first person Moore called upon to be a part of her new nonprofit organization. "I had no idea she loved literature so much and was such a capable creative writer. In creating her nonprofit, Mel went to the people she trusted and looked to each of us to provide an expertise. I told her I would only join the board and serve as its chair, if I felt like I could provide something real to the organization," said Earle.

Moore bought the rights to *American Short Fiction*, owned by UT Press and previously published from 1991 to 1998. She needed a way to finance her vision of restoring the literary journal, which had once won a Pushcart Prize. After reviewing various business models, she went to her network of personal and professional advisors, which Moore had cultivated over the years, to ask their

help in starting a nonprofit. In May 2003, Badgerdog Literary Publishing was born. "The organization was created to have a double bottom line," explained Moore. "There's a financial bottom line, but also a social bottom line that must be met."

Andy White, executive director of the Silverton Foundation, has partnered with Moore, providing funding to Badgerdog Literary Publishing, since 2005. "There is a big difference between social services and real social enterprise, which is somebody or a group that has the ability to make transformative changes. There was something special about what Melanie had designed. I saw this was somebody who had the chance to make a real impact," said White.

Moore remembered how stressful it was to launch a nonprofit start-up, while finding financial support, at a time when Austin's primary industry, high-tech, had crashed. "I can't tell you how stressful. I have cried more since starting this organization than any time in my life. The hardest thing about starting the nonprofit was squaring my vision with the reality of starting a business; to not compromise the vision, but meet the timeline I had set. We needed to make it happen even in the face of rejection and uncertainty," said Moore. >>



Photo by Michael Thad Carter

Melanie with Ethel, her beloved dachshund and the inspiration for her organization's name.



Why "Badgerdog?"

The name comes from the German word "dachshund" which translates literally to "badger dog." Dachshunds were bred to hunt badgers. Like dachshunds, Badgerdog Literary Publishing is small, independent and courageous. Independence is important; for dachshunds it meant that they had to be able to make decisions down in the badger hole without commands from their master.

How You Can Be a Part of the Badgerdog Community

Connect with other writers, readers and Austin literati by checking these new sections on the Badgerdog websites: www.badgerdog.org and www.american-shortfiction.org. By joining the Badgerdog community, you become part of a local, regional and national conversation about literary art and literacy education.

- **"What we're reading":** Check out this section on the website for updates and commentary about the classic and contemporary literature Badgerdog staff, workshop instructors and ASF editors and editorial assistants are reading. A great place to find titles and commentary for yourself, your book group, your class and your family.
- **Austin Litera-wiki™:** Find out and help compile, edit and maintain the go-to compendium of literary Austin. A people's repository of the literary history, maps/sites, luminaries, rising stars and other information about Austin's literati, then and now.
- **Podcasts and blogs:** Hear what the next generation of writers is doing as they present their original work in podcasts. Follow the work of Austin's homegrown creative writing programs and the acclaimed literary journal *American Short Fiction*. See also *American Short Fiction's* Facebook page.



ABOVE: Seventeen-year old Melanie, (center) chats with her sister, mother and father. BELOW: Moore and the KDK-Harman Foundation team working on the Badgerdog program in all Del Valle Elementary Schools. (L to R): Founder Janet Harman, Program Officer Jennifer Easterline, Moore, and COO Jackie Mata. LEFT: Moore with her Hobie Cat sailboat on Lake Travis.



Badgerdog board member Forrest Preece suggested that, not unlike 19-year-old Michael Dell, who started his computer business in his garage, Moore fit the risk-taking, entrepreneurial spirit of Austin. "I have a penchant for people who try the impossible. Melanie left her safe and

secure corporate job to go on down the path of resurrecting a literary journal. She's a dynamo – she eats, sleeps, breathes the mission," said Preece.

An afternoon on Lake Travis on her Hobie Cat proved to be one of the rare times Moore, an avid golfer, swimmer and "weekend sailor," stopped

thinking about her organization. "Sailing and golfing are both 'thinking sports,' so when I am there during my personal time, I am always in the moment," said Moore.

Moore's vision and determination, along with a long list of mentors she credited for every success, saw Moore through the rough times. "This community is so rich in terms of leaders, and I have been so fortunate to be able to build relationships where I can pick up the phone and call these brilliant people, who are kind enough to listen and, at times, offer advice or just reflect back to me what I should already know," said Moore. "While in technology, I learned so much from Sylvia Acevedo, Lou Earle, Joyce Durst, Lori Matthews and Nancy Harris. During my nonprofit journey, there are many who have helped, including Julia Spann, MariBen Ramsey, Cookie Ruiz, Janet Harman, Philip and Donna Berber, Joene Grissom, Mary Margaret Farabee, Rachel Howell, Angie Luck, Janet Mitchell, Angela Smith, Laura Furman, Kathrin Brewer, Celia Hughes, Joyce Lauck, Rachel Parker-Gwin and Claudette Campbell," she said.

Sylvia Acevedo, founder, president and CEO of CommuniCard™ LLC, (and former *austinwoman* cover story subject, March 2005) has been a business associate and friend of Moore's for many years. "Melanie has a strong desire to get information, sort it and process it. Before she moves forward, she needs to understand the issue completely. In an innovative place like Austin, so many people would move on without all the information, but not her. Melanie's understanding of literature and her encyclopedic knowledge were perfect attributes when talking to people about Badgerdog," said Acevedo.

With a strong support network, numerous "angel funders" in place, and a substantial investment of

Badgerdog Literary Publishing Benchmarks

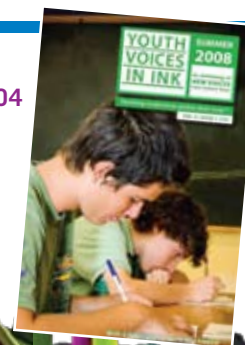
May 7, 2003
First Board Meeting at Lou Earle's house



Badgerdog Board

October 16, 2003
IRS grants a 501(c)(3) Advanced Ruling Period

May 15, 2004
Completed *Youth Voices in Ink* Pilot Project: 4 schools, 40 students



December 2004
Office moved from Moore's house into half of garage apartment in Hyde Park

her own money, Moore rejuvenated *American Short Fiction* and formed an after-school creative writing program, called “Youth Voices in Ink” (YVI). Teacher, poet and translator Farid Matuk, who was a former Badgerdog instructor and key staff member, remembered those early days. “What impressed me is that, what Melanie imagined, somewhat in a vacuum, ended up being a framework that has provided more quality service to kids than most other established workshops ever had,” said Matuk.

Elementary, middle school and high school students are encouraged “to author their lives” through poetry and prose.

YVI, which now spans four school districts and 22 campuses per semester, serves more than 1,000 students annually and includes workshops in the spring, summer and fall. Elementary, middle school and high school students are encouraged “to author their lives” through poetry and prose. Its instructors, who have earned or are candidates for a Master in Fine Arts degree, lead their young authors through real life experiences of professional writers – analytical reading, writing, editing, revising, publishing and public performance. The highlight of the workshop sessions is that every child has one of his or her works published in a literary-quality anthology.

That, Moore noted, is what made Badgerdog stand apart from other literary organizations. “The difference between our program and other in-school writing programs is the endgame. Students need to show the results of their efforts and they can do that through the anthology and public readings,” she said.

Participants in YVI agreed. “I like to explain my thoughts without being judged,” Johnny Rodriguez, a sixth-grader, wrote. Jessica D’Arcy, then executive director of Breakthrough Austin,

acknowledged what a difference YVI made in her summer Middle School program. “The curriculum engaged our students and our teachers in real, from-the-heart writing, while integrating skills such as spelling and grammar,” said D’Arcy.

When considering the most gratifying moment throughout her organization’s growth, Moore explained the “thing” that occurred every semester. “It’s not only the dynamic and fluid nature of the repeatable process, but, the repeatable transforma-

tion that happens in the students – who go through the program; in the instructors – who go into the schools; in the parents – whose children are published; in the teachers – who are in the classroom. And, in the people in the community – who are touched by these stories,” said Moore.

Her mentors and board members saw Moore as “dedicated,” “articulate,” “focused,” “compelling,” “innovative” and “very honest.” Moore, in turn, created a program to help Badgerdog youths see themselves for who they really are. “Writing is the practice of reflection; that is a basic human need – to be recognized, to see ourselves reflected in the world. When everything else in their world might be out of their control, these students can control what’s on the page,” said Moore.

Moore encourages her team to “live into our mission” and practices what she preaches to others. Weekly staff meetings begin with the sharing of each member’s personal reading and writing projects. Every other Friday, the workday ends at 1 p.m. to allow more time to work on their poetry, fiction or non-fiction. Moore belongs to a book club, SoLa Salon, patterned after the 1920s Paris

salons. In the early days of Badgerdog, workshop instructors and their partners would come to Moore’s home for “Poker and Poetry” parties. And, during particularly stressful weeks, she sits in on one of the YVI workshops, so she can write along with the students. Moore, who has been in a long-term relationship, also dedicates many hours of community service through her membership in St. David’s Episcopal Church and the West Austin Rotary Club.

Badgerdog Literary Publishing celebrated its five-year anniversary this past May. The 42nd issue of *American Short Fiction* has just been released and ranks in the top third of literary journals in the nation, according to their distributors’ sell-through metrics. YVI has a waiting list of schools wanting to participate in the workshops. For Moore, these accomplishments are only the beginning of Badgerdog’s future plans to expand and serve more writers.

“Just like Gertrude Stein mentored Ernest Hemingway, writers have always been there for other writers. Badgerdog Literary Publishing will always be here for them, too, and be a nexus for all writing resources,” said Moore. ★

MORE INFO

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BELOW: Badgerdog staff (L to R seated): Suchetha Konana, Laurie Filipelli, Jill Meyers; standing: Mikel Dornhecker, Moore, Giuseppe Taurino

December 2005
Office moved to AGE Building, Suite 230

March 2006
American Short Fiction re-launch party as part of AWP Conference in Austin



October 2007
IRS grants official 501(c) (3) status



May 2008
Five-Year Anniversary:
6 staffers, six-office suite,
4 school districts,
3 summer camp locations, nearly 1,000 students served annually on 22 campuses each semester