

Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

Mary Troy



**Award-winning fiction author;
Associate Professor, University of Missouri-St. Louis;
Director, MFA Program, University of Missouri-St. Louis**

**LECTURE SERIES: "Loving the Unlovable: How to Be True to Your Characters"
Thursday, October 19, 2006
7 to 8 PM
at Barnes & Noble, 8871 Ladue Road, Ladue 63124**

Get [map and directions](#). For workshop details, visit our [Lectures](#) page.


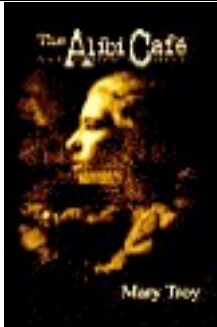

All are welcome. This event is FREE. Please register in advance. For complete details and our online advance registration form, see our [Calendar](#) page.

MARY TROY is the author of 3 collections of short stories—*Cookie Lily*, *The Alibi Café and Other Stories*, and *Joe Baker Is Dead*. She has won a Nelson Algren Award from the

Chicago Tribune and published her work in *Boulevard*, *Ascent*, *River Styx*, *American Literary Review*, *New Letters*, *the Greensboro Review*, etc. Her stories and essays have been anthologized in *Under The Arch*, *American Fiction*, and *In the Middle of the Middle West*. Her books have been nominated for PEN/Faulkner and other awards, and reviewed widely (including by the *NY Times Book Review*).

The Alibi Cafe and other stories was a finalist for the William Rockhill Nelson Award for excellence in literature and *Cookie Lily* won the Devil’s Kitchen Reading Award from SIU for the best book of prose published in 2004. Mary’s essay “Motherhood in Mary Troy’s Stories” is included in a book, *Women in the Arts*, forthcoming from the University of Missouri Press, and her paper, “Loving the Unlovable,” will be presented at the Hawaii International Conference on the Arts and Humanities in Waikiki in January. She teaches creative writing and literature and directs the MFA program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

You can purchase Mary Troy’s books on this website through our links to Left Bank Books and Barnes & Noble:

		
<u>Cookie Lily: Stories</u>	<u>The Alibi Cafe: And Other Stories</u>	<u>Joe Baker Is Dead: Stories</u>

READ ON FOR MORE ABOUT MARY TROY...

Here’s an interview of Mary that appeared in the *Kansas City Star*

Honk If You Like Driven Writing

By JOHN MARK EBERHART
The *Kansas City Star*
(reprinted with permission)

Mary Troy loves misfits.

“I have a lot of characters in my stories that I wouldn’t want to spend much time with. And I wouldn’t want to live next door to them. And I would really be upset if they wanted to marry my niece. But I like them anyway because I understand them.”

What she understands is that they, like many of us, have problems of their own making — and that this does not necessarily make them bad people.

“Not one of us has ever said, ‘I’m going to quit school and get this job because I really want to screw up my life,’ or ‘I’m going to marry this person because I want to be miserable.’ We always think we’re doing something that’s going to be *good* for us.

“What I want my characters to do is cause their own problems. I really can’t stand writing about victims. They screw up their own lives, but they manage to sidestep the really big disasters. Maybe that’s my version of being alive.”

She has presented that bleak but funny version of life in three books of short stories: *Joe Baker Is Dead*, *Cookie Lily* and *The Alibi Café*, which was published by UMKC’s BkMk Press. Some of the *Cookie Lily* stories are set in Hawaii, but most of her tales take place in Missouri, often around St. Louis.

Wherever they occur, Troy’s stories always seem to involve folks who could be doing better. “We’re Still Keeneys” presents a family of losers: “Dad’s still an on-again-off-again drunk, nearly as regular as the even and odd-numbered years, and Mom still has a deep-down itch, strong as it ever was, to have as many men as one lone woman can handle.”

The Keeneys live in a Missouri burg that is seeing modern changes but still has a chip on its shoulder: “All the high school kids dress in baggy clothes now, but they still look like someone just shot their dog and they expected it, so they are not too bummed out.”

And “We’re Still Keeneys” is one of Troy’s more conventional stories. “Mercy the Midget” features a short woman who regularly leaves her eastern Missouri farm clan to dance in a St. Louis strip club. When Mercy confronts a group of religious zealots, she defiantly tells them, “I prayed for these breasts. I’ve been blessed.”

Troy was born in Florissant, a St. Louis suburb, in 1948. She got her bachelor’s in English at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, then worked as a technical writer in the College of Engineering at the University of Hawaii.

She didn’t start writing fiction until her 30s. As a staffer at the university, she could take classes and as “a lark” took a creative writing course. Her first story got published, then her second. She was accepted in the writing program at the University of Arkansas and confesses she was too naïve to realize her good fortune at joining such a prestigious program on her first try.

Though she has lived far from Missouri, Missouri never has been far from her writing. “The Midwestern voice is like a tamer version of the Southern Gothic. My students ask me why I make up these quirky characters, why someone always does something odd in my stories. But I don’t think they’re odd. You’re not trying to create something odd; this is how people can be.”

Troy’s humor saves her stories from being oppressive. Yes, her characters blunder, but Troy’s prose also brings out the comedy in their lives. When one of the Keeneys says,

“Even we don’t like to be around ourselves,” many honest readers probably can’t suppress their grins (or grimaces) at their own family’s bad apples.

Yet, Troy says, “some reviewers have said all my stories are so sad.” One reviewer in particular has found more melancholy than absurdity in her work.

“My next book,” she jokes, “I’m going to make so sad he has to take Prozac to finish it.”

She doesn’t know yet what that book will be. She has completed a novel that is in the hands of a literary agent, has started another and has written more short stories. But her time for writing has been curtailed by the annual academic cycle. Troy heads UMSL’s MFA program in writing. So she writes two days a week — and takes comfort in the knowledge that a good idea can strike anytime.

“I get my best ideas when I’m driving.” She can’t remember to keep a notebook in the car, “so I end up writing ideas on the backs of gasoline receipts or my checkbook stub or something.

“And I’m the person who sits at the red light. If the light turns green, and you’re saying, ‘Why won’t she go?’ It’s because I’m not there anymore. It’s like the rapture has happened; only with me it’s a story, so you have to honk.”



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Read an excerpt from "In the Sky Lord," a brand new short story by Mary Troy": ["In the Sky Lord."](#)

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