

Author to Author with Mindy Friddle

The Author: Doris Iarovici, winner of the 2005 Novello Festival Press Literary Award

The Book: *American Dreaming and Other Stories* (Novello Festival Press, 2005)

Do you have a novel, story collection or nonfiction manuscript polished and ready for the world? If so, you may want to consider submitting your work to Novello Festival Press's Literary Award, which is given annually to a South Carolina or North Carolina writer for a full-length work of literary fiction or non-fiction. The recipient's work is published by the press and the writer receives a \$1,000 advance against royalties. An imprint of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, NFP (www.novellopress.org) remains the nation's only public library-sponsored literary publisher. The prestigious prize can prove a boon to a writer's career, as it did for South Carolina resident Ron Rash, who received the prize in 2002 for his first novel, *One Foot in Eden*.

The winner of the 2005 Novello Literary Award, Doris Iarovici, will read from her book, *American Dreaming and Other Stories* (Novello Festival Press, 2005), Monday as part of the Emrys Reading Room series at The Handlebar. Iarovici, a psychiatrist at Duke University's Counseling and Psychological Services, works part-time in order to have two days to write during the week. She submitted her manuscript of seven short stories to the contest after she discovered the novel she had written exceeded the page length requirements.

"I was completely shocked when they called to tell me I'd won," she said recently from her home in Durham where she lives with her husband and two children.

American Dreaming and Other Stories, explores dislocation: "geographic, emotional, often both," the author said. "The stories are about people in transition: immigrants adjusting to life in the United States, medical students struggling with the culture of the hospital world, estranged spouses navigating their relationship after a storm."

Shannon Ravenel, editor of *New Stories from the South*, writes that, “Doris Iarovici knows human hearts and human hopes. Her wonderful stories are all about how hope fills lives, and saves them.”

Iarovici grew up in New York City after arriving there at age five from Romania. She began to publish poetry and essays in *Seventeen* magazine at age 15. She received her B.S. degree from Yale College, then, like many first-generation Americans who fear the risks inherent in an arts career, she went to Yale University School of Medicine and Duke Medical Center. “Both my parents had to make career changes to survive in the U.S. I was encouraged to write, but given the message that writing was a very insecure career choice,” she said. “There was so much more positive feedback around choosing a career in the sciences.”

She chose psychiatry, in part because “it’s a wonderful field for someone who loves stories. It’s a privilege to get to hear, and affect, people’s life stories.”

Iarovici found the short story form “a godsend” in medical school and residency, when she “didn’t have the time or energy to write anything longer than a few thousand words.” Recently, with more time, she has focused on writing novels.

Ironically, although her days were filled with hearing people’s stories, Iarovici, concerned about patient confidentiality, for many years avoided writing about mental health, “for fear of spilling some bit of truth,” until after seeing thousands of patients. At that point, she began to perceive “universal elements in patients’ stories that are really no different from those we all face in day to day life.”

Switching her focus and energy back and forth from psychiatry to writing every week means learning to “turn off the left side of the brain” to unleash her creativity, she said. “I have different goals when I’m in my psychiatry office than when I’m writing.” While she works with patients to solve their problems and improve their lives, “with fictional characters I can’t take care of their problems” or try to change them, a lesson, she said, it took her a while to learn.

Now it looks as if her disciplined writing schedule is paying off. With a newly published story collection, a completed novel, and second one in the draft stage, Iarovici has begun the process of finding an agent to represent her.

“I thought about giving up the writing many times--I can make much more money as a psychiatrist, and also have a tangible effect on others' lives--but I truly love the writing, and in the end I think making room for what you love in your life makes all the other parts of your life work better too.” In the end, she said, “Allowing myself to write has definitely made me a better psychiatrist.”

Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel “The Garden Angel” (St. Martin’s Press/Picador.) Visit her website, www.mindyfriddle.com, for more information on writing and publishing.