Fiction Inspired by Kent Island
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When I set off for my nine weeks on Kent Island, I was expecting to write poetry and nonfiction inspired by the island’s natural beauty. While nature is a big part of island life and provided motivation, inspiration, and the mental peace and quiet to write, my writing ended up being much more informed by the people I met on Kent Island. The island has a fascinating history full of larger-than-life figures, people about whom Mark and Damon tell vivid stories. I was also interested in the diverse set of researchers, artists, caretakers, visitors, children, friends, and family that had been drawn to this place. The island has a way of tying tight connections between people who otherwise would not have crossed paths.

It was fiction, rather than nonfiction, that Kent Island ended up inspiring. I spent the summer writing a collection of eight short stories (as well as one nonfiction essay about my experience on the island). All feature vivid characters inspired, directly or indirectly, by observing my fellow islanders and listening to their stories. My characters were also informed by readings such as William Kennedy’s *Very Old Bones*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge*, and the collected letters of Ernest Joy, the station’s first caretaker. These readings, along with Elizabeth Bowen’s *The House in Paris*, also helped me to experiment with aspects of my writing like point of view, tense, and chronology.

More directly, I found that the mood of my writing was largely determined by the weather conditions at the time, which reflects the extent to which life here is lived by the natural world. I incorporated many aspects of island life in my stories. One story, “From the Lantern Room,” was based directly on two nearby light stations that we visited, Gannet Rock and Machias Seal Island; another, “God’s Country,” was based directly on Kent Island itself.

A large part of the summer’s value, for me, was in learning how to manage my time as a writer and discovering my own writing process. I often took walks around the island in search of inspiration, finding a spot to sit and write in my notebook. During these sessions I planned and wrote parts of first drafts. Throughout this experience I learned that my writing works best when it is heavily planned and outlined, and I developed an effective process of planning that I will return to for future writing projects.

Faculty Mentor: Brock Clarke
Funded by the Kent Island Summer Fellowship