

Rachel Solar on Fiction, Fandom, and Fenway Park



By Susan Johnston

Brookline resident Rachel Solar is a pro at multitasking. Between caring for her three-year-old son,

finishing her screenplay and other projects, and working as senior writer/creative strategist at Boston PR firm Solomon McCown & Company, Solar's days are carefully orchestrated to maximize efficiency.

"I'm not above using my laptop on the T," she admits, only half-joking. "And I'll jot down notes standing up if I have to." Already the author of a coming-of-age novel, a non-fiction book about networking, and a short story included in the anthology *Fenway Fiction*, Solar is looking forward to the publication of another Red Sox-themed story in *Further Fenway Fiction* this summer.

A Love of the Game

"Baseball is fitting for writers because it unfolds linearly, like a story," explains Solar. Growing up in Lincoln, Mass., she recalls going to Red Sox games starting at age seven and has passed on her appreciation of the game to her son Jack, who turns four next spring.

Jack is adopted from Korea, so the two have a tradition of watching baseball games and eating Korean food together in the living room of her house near Coolidge Corner. Her old-fashioned parlor is accented with modern touches like shag carpeting, contemporary artwork, and, of course, a giant coffee table book about baseball.

Sometimes Solar also ventures down the street to watch games at one of her favorite local "hangouts," the Coolidge Corner Clubhouse. When she finds time to attend games at Fenway Park, she chooses to walk home, enjoying the communal feeling of leaving the ballpark with a big group of Sox fans.

What Would Manny Do?

Solar says she views the game differently than most, focusing on the personalities and personal lives of the players, rather than on their stats. Pondering the personal life of her favorite player, Manny Ramirez, inspired her to write a short story several years ago called "The Shadow of Manny Ramirez."

Solar once sent Manny a fan letter but never got a response, so the story asks, "What if Manny *did* write back to a fan and agreed to go to a barbecue at her house?" Instead of detailing the fan's brush with fame at the party, the story focuses on the week leading up to the big event, when a woman on the brink of emotional collapse prepares to meet her idol. Solar is quick to point out that the main character is not based on herself, because "once you get going, the characters take on a life of their own."

"The Shadow of Manny Ramirez" won first prize in *The Improper Bostonian's* annual fiction competition. A previous *Improper* fiction win-

ner who read her story, Adam Pachter, says it "does a great job of examining the human consequences of baseball."

He adds that "[Solar] has a real feel for the flavor of her character's lives. She describes their circumstances using everything from what clothes they wear to the magazines they read. That stuff...is very telling. Hers is a rare talent."

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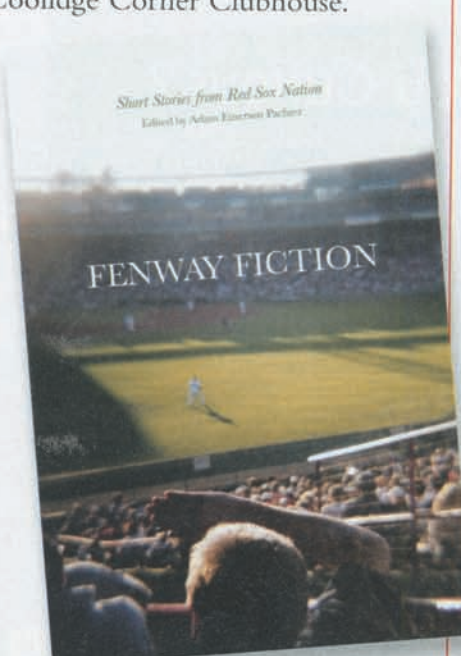
Fenway Fiction

Edited by Adam Emerson Pachter
Rouder Books
Available at Brookline Booksmith, Amazon.com, and other fine booksellers.

Published in September 2005, the first installment of *Fenway Fiction* featured 17 Red Sox-themed stories, including a musical tribute to the Curse of the Bambino, a Shakespearian salute to Game Seven of the 2004 American League Championship Series, and a fictional account of a fan's brush with Manny Ramirez. All of the anthology's stories were written from the perspective of a team still unable to reverse the curse, providing the writers with a rich emotional context.

The Sox 2004 World Series triumph brought a shift in attitude both for fans and for writers. Editor Adam Pachter sums up the theme of *Further Fenway Fiction*: "Can victory be as inspirational to writers as defeat?" The new anthology, scheduled for release this summer, includes a revision of the Ten Commandments for Red Sox fans by *Boston Metro* writer Sarah Green, a Hamlet-inspired parody of Theo Epstein by Steve Almond, and Solar's story about two fans who bet that they will marry if the Sox win the Series.

Readings of *Further Fenway Fiction* are being planned across New England this summer. Pachter says he hopes to continue publishing more volumes as Red Sox history evolves. "I'll keep doing it as long as people keep sending me great stories."



A Book Is Born

Pachter had also written a Fenway-themed story, and thus *Fenway Fiction* was born. Cambridge publishing company Rounder Books agreed to publish the anthology, and Pachter called on other writers to contribute additional stories.

“I owe Rachel a lot for the genesis of *Fenway Fiction*,” says Pachter. “Her story led to that light bulb moment when I thought this could be a book.”

Betting on a Sequel

For its upcoming sequel, *Further Fenway Fiction*, Solar penned another fictional piece called “The Bet,” in which two business school friends wager they will get married if the Sox win the World Series. (Fat chance, you say?)

Her writing projects keep Solar pretty busy, but she is used to this fast-paced lifestyle. After attending college and law school at the University of Pennsylvania, Solar completed Emerson College’s Publishing Certificate program while practicing law in Boston. She has also taken several fiction courses at Cambridge Center for Adult Education under Mameve Medwed, author of *How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life*.

Solar says she enjoys writing in different genres. “I try to strike a balance [between fiction and non-fiction],” she explains, “so I can move onto other things when I hit a wall.”

Leading the Creative Process

She also finds that the creativity fostered by writing fiction helps in her day job as senior writer/creative strategist for Solomon McCown &



Company, a public relations agency in downtown Boston. Solar describes the agency as “very strategic in its approach,” which allows her to harness her creativity for clients and exercise her brain to think strategically. She directs the creative vision at Solomon McCown and writes many of the print pieces for her clients, who are leading mission-focused businesses and organizations across the region and nation.

Helene Solomon, CEO of Solomon McCown & Company and also a Brookline resident, says, “the agency really prides itself on creative ideas that help clients define their brands and drive action, and Rachel is a big part of that. Having an author who is also a former lawyer lead our creative process brings a blend of strategic thinking and originality that has a high yield for clients.”

Outside of work, Solar also finds time to mentor a teenaged girl through the Steppingstone Foundation. Solar and Luisa have met since the girl was twelve, sharing food at local restaurants and swapping writing ideas over pancakes. Luisa has also interned at Solomon McCown for several years and will start college next fall studying communications.

Some of Rachel’s favorite Brookline haunts for writing and hanging out with Luisa include the JP Licks in Coolidge Corner, The Family Restaurant in Brookline Village, and Infusions Tea Spa in nearby Allston.

“Brookline has so many little hangouts,” she says. “It’s a great place for writers.” And a great place for creative, active people like Solar.

Brookline-based writer Susan Johnston has published articles in Young Money magazine, Cicada magazine, and The Middlesex Beat. She met Ms. Solar through the Boston Younger Women’s Task Force. Check out her blog at <http://theUrbanMuse.blogspot.com>.