

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

An interview with Doug Holder

Zvi Sesling: Poet, Publisher And Mensch

I once described Zvi Sesling as an avuncular presence. And he is, as he has patiently mentored many students in a long teaching career. He wears his years of experience comfortably on his open face. Sesling has been an alderman, a founder of a much touted PR firm, as well as being trained as a lawyer.



Sesling is also a Brookline, Mass. poet who has published in over 100 magazines, including: HazMat Review, The Chaffin Journal, Ship of Fools, Ibbetson Street and many others. He is the founder of the Muddy River Poetry Review, and the winner of the Reuben Rose International Poetry Competition and a finalist in the 2009 Cervena Barva Press Chapbook Contest. I talked with Sesling on my Somerville Community Access TV show "Poet to Poet: Writer to Writer"

Doug Holder: Zvi, years ago you started the Muddy River Review, and now revived it online. Which do you prefer: Print or Web? What do you look for in the poetry that is submitted to you?

Zvi Sesling: My choice is really quite eclectic. I like things that are accessible. When I read it, it should grab me. Years ago when I did the print journal my choices were very different. I was looking for much more simpler things. But print is much more expensive than online, so this time I went with online.

Basically, for the online journal I don't want long, long poems. They can be humorous. The first edition is online, and the second edition is coming out this summer. But basically if something grabs me I take it.

Doug Holder: I interviewed the poet David Slavitt some years ago. He is a poet, and he decided to run for State Rep. against Timothy Toomey. He lost by a landslide. He thought a poet would make a good politician because as he put it: "He or she has a built in shit detector."

Your take?

Zvi Sesling: Actually I don't feel a poet would be a good fit.. I think the only thing the poet brings to politics is the power of observation, and the ability to listen better, and to take mental notes about what's going around him. If you want to be a politician you have to be tough. You have to yell, you have to swear. I tend to view poets as a little more gentle, and calm about how they do things.

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Doug Holder: I like how you focus on ordinary objects, a fish, a piece of licorice, and make it a starting point for much larger themes.

Zvi Sesling: I try to take something I observe and connect it to something else. I did it with wine glasses, and a pomegranate. I think everything in the world is connected in one-way or the other. So you can connect a very small issue or item and make it into a much bigger thing—then come back to the original.

Doug Holder: You made a switch in your writing from hardboiled mysteries to poetry. Why?

Zvi Sesling: I found that poetry was much more satisfying to me. It appealed to my new direction when I was getting out of the political scene. I found poetry much more calming and easy to deal with. I was writing much more succinctly. It is something I truly enjoy.

Doug Holder: Are you a fan of the hardboiled genre of writers like Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett?

Zvi Sesling: Yes. These are two of my favorites. They were more than just hardboiled writers. If you read them enough you could see there were social issues involved.

Doug Holder: Did you like Nero Wolfe, the obese, gourmet detective?

Zvi Sesling: Yeah. Wolfe was overweight and he gets his food involved with everything. The food was connected with life in general. It was a lot of fun.

Doug Holder: How much does your Jewish background come into play in your work?

Zvi Sesling: In some of it, it is very strong. I have been to Israel 24 or 25 times. I lived there for a year after high school. My father was born in Russia, went to Israel and then the states. My mother was from Germany. She escaped the Holocaust, and went to Israel. So a lot of that stuff has an impact on me. Also things like Hebrew School, or my Bar Mitzvah, sometimes fits into my poems, sometimes very subtly.

Doug Holder: Are you a religious man?

Zvi Sesling: No not at all. I am what they call a “Three Day Jew.” I go for the high holidays, and that’s it.