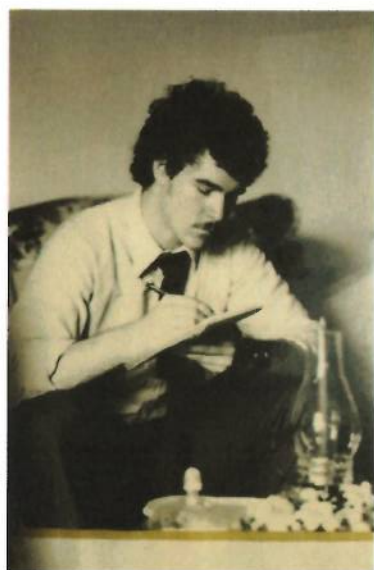


administration so hostile to science is about to change how research is published in this country.”

Massachusetts Historical Society Offers Biography Series

BIO members Julie Dobrow and Natalie Dykstra are among the participants in two upcoming events in the New England Biography Series sponsored by the Massachusetts Historical Society. On January 23, Dobrow will be in conversation with Phil Deloria in a presentation called “The Art of Family History: Visual Imagery, Family Narrative, and Native American Modernism.” On March 12, Dykstra will moderate a session called “Fashioning a Life: How Style Matters in Biography,” featuring Caroline Weber and Channing Joseph. The events begin at 5:15 p.m. and are followed by a reception. Admission is free, but registration is required. To register for either event, go to the society’s [online calendar](#).



Jerry Mikorenda's work includes short stories and articles published by a variety of media outlets, including *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, and the *Boston Herald*.

Member Interview

Six Questions with Jerry Mikorenda

What is your current project and at what stage is it?

Now that *America's First Freedom Rider: Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A. Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights* (Rowman & Littlefield/Lyons Press) is out, I'm working on production edits for a Young Adult historical novel, *The Whaler's Daughter*. It's scheduled for a spring 2021 release by Regal House Publishing. The story takes place in 1910 on a whaling station in New South Wales, Australia.

I had to do a lot of research on how people lived and worked back then. While the research

aspects are similar to that of nonfiction, the narrative execution is different in that I show, not tell the story.

What person would you most like to write about?

I've always felt Frank Zappa deserved a serious biography. He was a complex guy and doesn't get the credit he deserves as a great musician, innovator, and advocate for free speech. If he had lived, he'd fit right in our times. For now, though, that remains on the wish list.

What have been your most satisfying moments as a biographer?

The reactions of the librarians, researchers, professors, and subject-matter experts I

Your Info Current

Making a move or just changed your email? We ask BIO members to keep their contact information up to date, so we and other members know where to find you. Update your information in the [Member Area](#) of the BIO website.

Membership Up for Renewal?

Please respond promptly to your membership renewal notice. As a nonprofit organization, BIO depends on members' dues to fund our annual conference, the publication of this newsletter, and the other work we do to support biographers around the world. When renewing, please make sure the contact information we have for you is up to date.

Are You a Student?

Or do you know one who is interested in biography? BIO now has a special student membership rate. Visit [the BIO website](#) to find out more.

contacted exploring the Jennings saga. Invariably, my queries were met with blank stares, moments of silence, or delayed emails. But after that, those same folks went out of their way to assist me, show encouragement, and embrace the subject matter. I'm very grateful for that and I hope the book reflects all their efforts.

What have been your most frustrating moments?

Not finding any of the court papers to *Jennings v. Third Avenue Railroad*—Elizabeth's landmark civil rights victory. It was my White Whale, Maltese Falcon, Holy Grail . . . that unobtainable thing. Over the years, I put hundreds of hours into trying to find that information. I finally concluded it didn't exist or was destroyed in various floods and fires that damaged public and private buildings. That's an issue anyone who takes on the challenges of writing about marginalized people will have to face. Many of the expected venues for records weren't kept, or were neglected, destroyed, or deemed insignificant. I ran into the same issue while researching African American female literary societies in New York City. As far as we know, all the original patent work of Elizabeth's father was destroyed by a fire. Likewise, her lawyer, future president Chester Arthur, burned most of his papers late in life. Even the educational murals produced in 2001 depicting Jennings's court battle were obliterated on 9/11.

One research/marketing/attitudinal tip to share?

Don't overlook period maps when researching because there's a wealth of knowledge on them. I've been asked how I found so many details about the neighborhoods where Elizabeth lived. The New York Public Library has a terrific map collection that includes all the city's Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. These maps describe the attributes of each building, such as whether it was made of brick, had skylights, or gardens, etc. New York City "stench maps" tracked the odors of industry and other things so you can tell where people worked, what they did, and how it affected the noses around them. Reverse directories, precursors of phone books, listed who lived where. Contrary to popular belief, people moved around quite a bit in those days and neighborhoods were more diverse than one might expect.

What genre, besides biography, do you read for pleasure and who are some of your favorite writers?

I can't say that I read for pleasure because I consume books the way a doctor looks at a body or an engineer sees a car. I want to know how it works and why, then I absorb the beauty of the words. My tastes in literature are eclectic and across genres. I'll read a YA novel one month and *The North Water* by Ian McGuire the next. I'll pretty much grab anything Stewart O'Nan or George Saunders writes, they're bookends for understanding the American experience. In nonfiction, Bronwen Riley's *The Edge of the Empire* and *Longitude* by Dava Sobel are outstanding, unique books.

You can learn more about Jerry and his work at his website.



Biographer's Diary

By Cathy Curtis

Photographs in Biographies

What's the first thing you do when you open a new biography? Do you read the acknowledgments, look up something in the index, or simply start with page one? I usually look at the photos. The ones that fascinate me are always of people, whether alone or together, stiffly posed or snapped on the sly.

Of course, photos are no big deal nowadays; if you don't like one selfie, take another. But it's worth remembering how rare photos once were. Women were often captured for eternity on their wedding day. A man could live a long and productive life, yet have his picture taken only a handful of times. The stern, bearded fellow in a daguerreotype might have been the life of the party; being obliged to sit absolutely still for long minutes, he was frozen into a curmudgeon.

The Eastman Kodak "Brownie" camera debuted in 1900, creating a market for amateur photographers; in the mid-1930s, preloaded film cassettes made picture taking even