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Do Not Disturb!

University of Dayton

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Monday December 4, 2017

Do Not Disturb!

Two writers have been selected as winners of the inaugural A Hotel Room of One's Own: The Erma Bombeck | Anna Lefler Humorist-in-Residence Program. The perks? Free room service.

Samantha Schoech, a writer, copywriter and editor from San Francisco, says her "go-to fantasy" is a "long, relaxed stay in a hotel and a Do Not Disturb sign."

Karen Chee, a recent Harvard University graduate now working as a comedy writer and performer in New York, envisions Dayton as an "idyllic place for me and my writing" because it lacks "frantic, stressful distractions."

They are the **inaugural winners** of "A Hotel Room of One's Own: The Erma Bombeck | Anna Lefler Humorist-in-Residence Program" that drew applications from 401 hopeful writers in 44 states, the District of Columbia and five other countries.

As part of the package, Chee and Schoech will be flown as guests to the **University of Dayton's Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop**, which runs April 5-7, 2018. At the close of the workshop, they will remain at

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Here for Our Students

the Marriotte at the University of Dayton for another two weeks to work on their proposed books of humorous essays. It's the first trip to Dayton for both of them.

The perks for the winners? Free room service. A housekeeping staff. An omelet bar. And, most importantly, the gift of time to write.

More than **50 preliminary judges**, all established writers, narrowed the field to 10 finalists. **Comedy legends Alan Zweibel and Laraine Newman**, original writer and cast member of *Saturday Night Live*, reviewed those applications before selecting Chee and Schoech for the residency. All entries were blind judged. The other finalists (in alphabetical order) are:

Chanel Ali, Brooklyn, New York

Tracy Curtis, Charlotte, North Carolina

Deena Mendlowitz, Mayfield Village, Ohio

Valerie Nies, Austin, Texas

Margaux Hession, Santa Barbara, California

Jennifer Logue, Ponte Vedra, Florida

Keith Stewart, Hyden, Kentucky

Stacey Zapalac, Western Springs, Illinois

"I'm so impressed with all of the finalists' submissions, and our two winners are just outstanding," said Anna Lefler, a Los Angeles-based comic novelist and writer who underwrote and helped create and launch the program. "And it's all upside for these two ladies because while serving as humorists-in-residence, they might also score a side gig as cater-waiters for the Marriott."

Schoech is working on a collection of humorous essays, *People Really Like Me*, described as "the story of a middle-aged feminist bumbling through a middle-class adulthood filled with the usual signposts: kids, husband, mortgage and a medical marijuana prescription. It's David Sedaris meets Amy Schumer. In Target. With a yeast infection."

"I love this writer's voice. It's relatable, and her humanity is beautifully expressed," wrote finalist judge Laraine Newman, a writer/performer, who's written for *LA Times Magazine*, *MsSweeney's*, *Esquire* and other publications.

National and international organizations recently recognized the University of Dayton's Division of Student Development for its community policing, alcohol prevention, residential learning and student training programs, and annual report.

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While Schoech is a professional writer who's written for magazines and edited two anthologies of humor essays, she quips she has "neither a book nor the adoration of my literary peers. Clearly the universe is against me. This residency would go a long way toward remedying that fact."

Chee, who has written for *The New Yorker*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Splitsider* and *HuffPost Comedy*, is also working on a book of humorous personal essays. Her proposed book, *I Probably Have Salmonella*, "illuminates the quiet hilarity and joy found in every day life. From stories about getting kicked off a farm to tripping in front of my favorite Senator, this book will read like a conversation with a new, awkward best friend who's maybe a little bit too honest."

Chee, who interned for "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" and "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee," was recently named one of "New York City Comedians to Look Out for in 2018" by Mogul, a global platform for women. She dreams of writing comedy for a living and says she was inspired to write the book after reading Tina Fey's *Bossypants* and David Sedaris's *Naked*.

"Since then, I've been in love with the honesty and hilarity of nonfictional storytelling. To my chagrin but not my surprise, I learned that there are not many essay collections by people of color — even fewer by women of color. I really hope that my stories will be relatable to people for whom this delightful genre may feel inaccessible," says Chee, who grew up in the San Francisco area.

Finalist judge Alan Zweibel, a prolific author who has written for TV and Broadway, agreed: "She has a unique and original point of view."

Both winners reflect the aim of the residency to give a creative boost to writers, particularly emerging humor writers. Chee wants to "carry on the mantle as a woman in comedy writing," while Schoech, a lifelong Erma Bombeck fan, wants to coax her book along after "perhaps a hot bath and room service."

"I bought *If Life is a Bowl of Cherries* with my own money when I was 10," Schoech remembers. "I didn't even really get it, I just knew there was something awfully clever going on and I wanted to be part of it."

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