

ALPHA OMEGA ARTS

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Sunday, November 3, 2013

Meet Norbert Krapf, A&O Prize for Literary Arts Honoree for 2013

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By [TAHLIB](#)

INDIANA---[Norbert Krapf](#) is one of the first three literary artist honorees to receive the [A&O Prize](#); and on [Saturday, November 9 at 2:00 p.m.](#) he will be honored at Indiana Interchurch Center, 1100 W. 42nd Street in Indianapolis. Krapf is also an Indiana Poet Laureate; has recieved a Creative Renewal Arts Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis; and is author of the soon to be release book of poetry, "Catholic Boy Blues." A native of Indiana, he received his B.A.in English from St. Joseph's College (Indiana); and later earned both his M.A. and Ph.D. in English from the University of Notre Dame with a concentration in American Poetry. Krapf is also emeritus professor of English at Long Island University, where he taught for 34 years and directed the C.W. Post Poetry Center. In eleven full-length poetry collections, he explores his German-Catholic heritage. He is also an editor; the author of a prose memoir; music collaborator; and student of the blues.

Below are Norbert's answers to two questions about religious risk. You can thank Norbert, and the other artists taking a risk with religious imagination, by making a gift to the [Alpha Omega Prize: Artist Fund](#) via [power2give.org](#).



1. What is your experience with "risks" relating to religious experience.

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After 13 years, this is our last blog post for Alpha Omega Arts (2008-2021). We are grateful for your fellowship, but it's time. For what? God knows. To create. [To let go and climb with God. Amen.](#)

With art of the religious imagination,
by [Gregory & Ernest Disney-Britton](#)

Alpha Omega Prize , Est. November 1, 2008



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The experience written about in *Catholic Boy Blues*, a collection of 135 poems scheduled for 2014 publication by Greystone Publishing, came about as a religious “risk” that did not involve a choice.

I was a victim-survivor of childhood sexual abuse by a priest, in a German-Catholic community in southern Indiana. That for twenty years after the abuse took place, I could rarely enter a church because of painful associations does not mean that I did not have an active spiritual life during that period. In many ways, the poems I wrote the past 43 years have been a search to find an alternative spiritual life and a new language in which to express my longing for spiritual sustenance (see links below to samples).

All along I felt a desire for religious or, more precisely, spiritual fulfillment, but I did have problems with the religious institution that ignored the abuse, then denied it, inflicting grievous harm on the young people it claimed to serve. Religious risk? No religion can ignore and violate the moral and spiritual values it claims to uphold and survive as a living force. Any religion that functions this way runs the risk of losing vitality and relevance. Of course there was and remains a risk in writing and publishing *Catholic Boy Blues*, the ancient tradition of attacking the messenger of bad news. I am the messenger of bad news of childhood sexual abuse and will no doubt serve as a lightning rod to displaced anger some feel over what their church has done.

Not to have written these poems, however, would have been to violate my calling and mission as a poet. One does not rectify a violation by an institution of any kind, or help that institution recover, by remaining silent and violating a sacred obligation to help others, in this case my fellow survivors, their extended families, and the clergy and church hierarchy. All of us need to heal.

2. How have you chosen not to use religion to overcome life challenges?

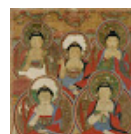
It is difficult if not impossible for a child to admit that all he and his family hold sacred about their religion has been violated by a man who is “God’s representative” but who is nevertheless revered by his family and community. It is impossible for an abused child to bring charges against his revered violator within a two year period, as stipulated by law.

What I did, fifty years after the abuse, was to face it and write poems documenting it, to proclaim to all the devastating life-long effects that such abuse has on the innocent young, but also to show the possibility of healing and recovery. A religion that covers up such a scandal is left with no moral authority. Ironically, the blues serve as the major agent of healing in the poems, but the thrust of *Catholic Boy Blues* is not negative. Fifty years after the abuse, I was finally ready to testify, knew that for the sake of my own healing and the good of my fellow survivors, I would speak, from within the church, on their behalf.

The support of our pastor for the past nine years at St. Mary’s Church, Indianapolis, Fr. Michael O’Mara, was monumental. He wrote the lead blurb for *Catholic Boy Blues*, which concludes: “It has been a spiritual journey to walk with Norbert Krapf through this ‘dark night.’ His courage to share this journey with us will be a resource for others who have experienced abuse and for their caregivers. Publishing this book required a lot of strength and prayer, and the Holy Father should have a copy.”

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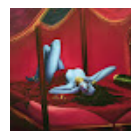
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Lastly, Norbert Krapf also provided some links to his writings (pre-Catholic Boy Blues poems); and they are below including his along with a brief interview about it:

1. YouTube reading of a 9/11 poem, "Prayer to Walt Whitman at Ground Zero," <http://iupress.typepad.com/blog/2011/08/podcast-norbert-krapf-discusses-his-september-11-poetry.html>
2. Here is a link to ten "Christmas card poems" on my web site: "Christmas Paper Mountain Drifts," "Songs in Sepia and Black and White," "Woods Chapel," "Candles," "One Long Love Song," "Going to Church," "Apples in Rainwater," "Woods Hymn," "Strawberry Patch Song," and "The Language of Place" all have to do with a religious or spiritual impulse: <http://www.krapfpoetry.com/xmascard.htm>.
3. Scroll down and you will find "Dogwoods and Rosebuds for Rita." <http://www.krapfpoetry.com/sepia.htm>
4. Scroll down for the prose poem "Legacy." http://www.krapfpoetry.com/american_toc.html
5. Four poems from Sweet Sister Moon: http://www.wordtechweb.com/krapf_poems.html
6. "Still Dark" <http://www.valpo.edu/vpr/krapfstill.html>
7. "Letter from a Star Above Southern Indiana," prose poem. http://www.krapfpoetry.com/letter_from_star.htm

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