For immediate release January 14, 2015

With wit and wisdom, Drue Heinz winner explores the sudden, unexpected loss of a spouse

PITTSBURGH—Leslie Pietrzyk of Alexandria, Virginia, has been named the 2015 winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize, one of the nation’s most prestigious awards for a book of short stories. Her manuscript, *This Angel on My Chest*, was selected from a field of 338 entries and will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press later this year. The DHLP also includes a cash prize of $15,000.

The 54-year-old Pietrzyk said, “*This Angel on My Chest* is a collection of unconventionally-linked stories, each about a different young woman whose husband dies suddenly and unexpectedly. Ranging from traditional stories, to lists, a quiz, a YouTube link, and even a ‘lecture’ about creative writing, the stories grasp to put into words the ways we all cope with unspeakable loss.” The collection is based on her own experience of losing her husband to a heart attack at age 37.

“There is an abundance of wit, and there are wise observations about life in these stories,” said award-winning author Jill McCorkle, this year’s final judge. “Some of these pieces are experimental, but never too experimental. I always felt firmly rooted in the emotion, startled again and again by the weight of the simplest everyday objects and situations against a backdrop of loss. A powerful and moving collection.”

According to Pietrzyk, the 16 stories examine universal issues faced at a time of loss—the simple, but gut-wrenching question *how will I survive this*, as well as the specific concerns of a young widow: support groups, in-laws, insurance money, dating, and remarriage.

A member of the core fiction faculty in the Converse Low-Residency MFA Program in Spartanburg, South Carolina, Pietrzyk also teaches fiction in the Johns Hopkins Masters in Writing Program in Washington, DC.

Pietrzyk is the author of two novels, *Pears on a Willow Tree* (Avon) and *A Year and a Day* (William Morrow). Her short fiction and essays have appeared in many journals, including *Gettysburg Review, Shenandoah, The Washington Post Magazine, The Sun, and Iowa Review*. She has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf and the Sewanee Writers’ Conferences, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for Arts in Nebraska, and the Hambidge Center in Georgia.

Recalling her reaction to winning the DHLP, Pietrzyk said, “I’m thrilled to have my work honored with this prestigious prize. This is the most personal book I’ve written, and I feel that I poured myself into it, taking many risks along the way, because the subject matter is so emotionally challenging. I think of myself as a novelist primarily, so seeing my short stories recognized is deeply gratifying.”

# # #