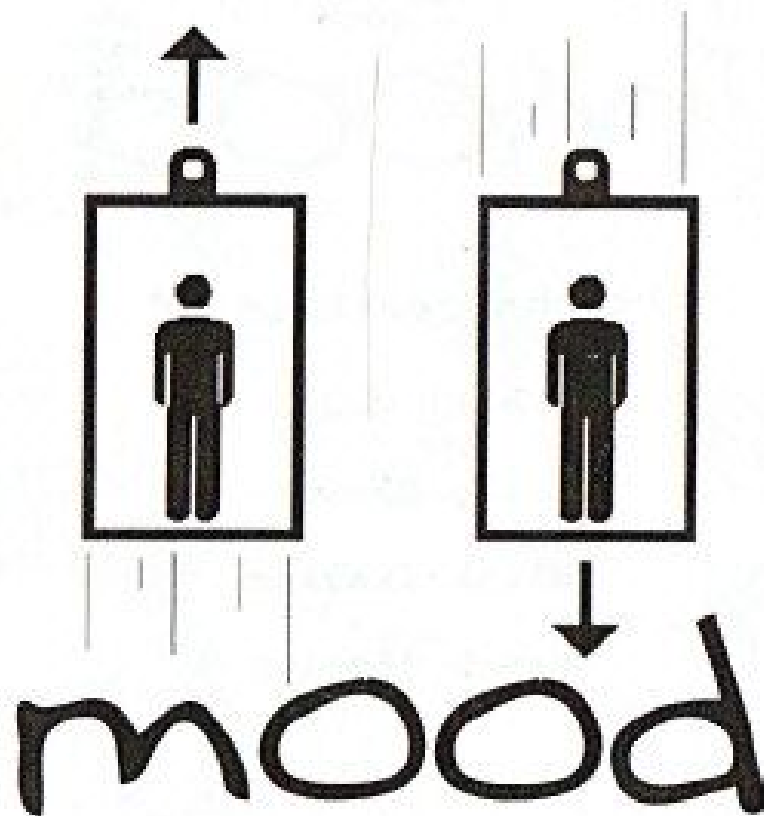


INTERVIEW  
WITH WRITER LAURA  
GABEL-HARTMAN

HEROES  
&  
CREEPS



a zine by Brookline teens. and their cousins.

TROLLS  
IN  
NORWAY

AWK  
WARD  
RANDOM  
NESS

# the mood interview ~

Laura  
GABEL  
Hartman

**M:** I know your genre is literary fiction. What's the difference is between "fiction" and "literary fiction?"

**LGH:** Nothing. Both "commercial fiction" and "literary fiction" are fiction. But commercial fiction implies a more plot-heavy narrative with possibly less complex characters and less attention to use of language. Literary fiction implies complicated characters, attention to language, and possibly subtleties that would require the reader to make more of the connections. Of course, there are books that are literary fiction that are great commercial successes! *Twilight* would be commercial--plot-driven, not as much attention to language, keeps you wanting to turn the page. *To Kill a Mockingbird* would be literary--beautiful prose, more ideas that need thought.

I think it's fun to read both. And the best literary fiction has great characters, beautiful prose, and keeps you wanting to turn the page!

**M:** You schooled me -- thanks! How old were you when you started writing?

**LGH:** When I look back at the one report (on castles) my mom saved from elementary school, it was pretty badly written. I only used simple sentences. I always liked having a pen pal. That was my writing for a long time. And then late in high school an English teacher took an interest in a poem I wrote. It was a lament to having pale skin that wouldn't tan like I wanted. This was Florida in the 1980s, where tans were all-important! But he said I could do humor, which he said wasn't easy to do, so that gave me some confidence. But I didn't write much again until senior year in college. There was one creative writing class offered for seniors. We had a good group, a small group. One day a visiting writer came, and I happened to have a story up for workshop that day. The story was about fishing. The writer, Lee Smith, wrote at the top of her copy, "Keep on Fishing." Of course there's been a lot of criticism along the way, but having people believe in me helped me. From that point on, I figured I'd "Keep on fishing."

**M:** How do you go about creating a character?

**LGH:** I used to think I started with character, and that characters just sort of "came" to me, but now I realize character is a lot more work than I thought. Sometimes I start with a line of dialogue or a setting, and I'll work toward a character that way. For example, I have a character who goes to Hawaii in search of the "real" Maui, and I wondered why someone would need that, would do that. He ended up being a guy who lives in Las Vegas and spends a lot of time in air conditioning. Once I heard two moms talking in a cafe, and their conversation made me wonder what the daughter of one of these moms would think if she heard them. So I wrote a story from the daughter's point of view. Even when I think I have the character living and breathing, I tend to go back and deepen a lot. I try to imagine what my character would be feeling. Sometimes I try to think back to feelings I've had in different situations to be able to bring out the emotion. Sometimes physical detail helps me figure out what a character is like. Sometimes their houses help me. Or their collections. A character who collects dead beetles would be so different from a character who collects glass animals.

**M:** When you write, are you aware of thinking about a character's mood?

**LGH:** I think the mood of a character comes out in later drafts. Sometimes there are happy accidents, and my subconscious will convey a mood in an early draft. Often that will happen through the prose itself--maybe the sentences rush along when a character is stirred up or frantic, for example. Depressed characters are really hard to write, I think. Characters have to act, and depressed characters don't act much. I think it's also challenging to describe body reactions to stress. There are so many cliches, like "her heart fluttered" or "raced." One thing I challenge myself to do is to avoid using "s/he felt." I enjoy trying to show how s/he felt through setting and objects around her. For instance, in another story I'm working on, the same character with the gossipy mom is in a bad mood and is looking out at cows in Florida, thinking they are dirty and smelly, with matted fur, but later in the scene, something causes her mood to shift (she has a driving lesson), and she thinks the cows are so cute, chewing their cud! That's my favorite way to show a mood shift, and that was something I thought of in a later draft.

**M:** How does living in Brookline affect/contribute to your writing?

**LGH:** I've set a story in Brookline, so Brookline has literally inspired my writing. At one time I had a character who was working on the override that was passed to support the World Language Program. That was revised out, but it helped me figure out the character along the way. Lately I've had the germ of a story idea where the structure would be defined by the Chestnut Hill Reservoir in different seasons. I don't have a character yet, but the Reservoir itself has different moods. I'm proud to live in a town that supports an independent bookstore, Brookline Booksmith. Many evenings of the week it's possible to go out and hear writers reading from their own work. I also enjoy hearing writers read work in progress on First Night and BHS students and faculty reading at Poetry Fest. Several of last year's poems have stuck with me. We also have a beautiful, amazing library. And then there are the coffee shops. Living in a walking-based community also helps.

## Laura Gabel-Hartman cont'd


There's a lot to notice when you're on foot, a lot of places a car can't go, like all the walking paths. I also think that the mix of people in Brookline makes it an interesting place to live and work.

**M:** Thank you for talking to mood.

**LGH:** This has been fun - thank you. These aren't the usual questions I'm asked.

**M:** Really? What's a usual question you're asked?

**LGH:** "What's for dinner?"



Laura Gabel-Hartman's stories have appeared in *Carve Magazine*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *MAKE: A Chicago Literary Magazine*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Rio Grande Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. She's a native Floridian living in Brookline and is at work on a novel-in-stories.

