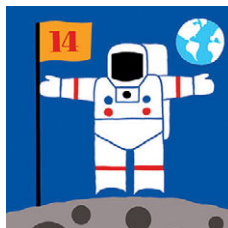


## Book Briefs

# From Tales of Apollo 14 to a Meditation on Jewish Identity

After graduating from BU, Don Eyles (CAS'66) took a job as a computer engineer at MIT's Instrumentation Laboratory (later renamed the Charles Stark Draper Laboratory), where he worked on the guidance computer for NASA's Apollo missions. In **SUNBURST AND LUMINARY: AN APOLLO MEMOIR** (Fort Point Press, 2018), he lends his personal insight to the quest to land people on the moon. Eyles was assigned—with no formal training—to work on programming the lunar landing phase of the guidance system, and he gained transient fame by overriding a faulty abort switch on the Apollo 14 mission at the last minute with some quick programming (prompting a 1971 *Rolling Stone* article about him). He balances technical descriptions of his work with kooky accounts of the lab and his coworkers, and of his coming of age in Boston in the 1960s and early '70s.



ballet, “How bold is a work of art that doesn’t tie it all up neatly at the end—that does something, abandons it, and moves on to something better?” Fusselman is similarly bold in her latest work.

Barbara Riiff Davis (COM'83) traveled the world as a showgirl and craps dealer in the mid-1940s and '50s. In her memoir, **CRAPS & THE SHOWGIRL** (LeRue Press, 2017), she tells the lively—and frequently eccentric—stories from an unusual career. Riiff Davis writes that she was “born crooked”—she had to wear leg braces throughout her childhood—but later overcame her self-consciousness to become a showgirl, starting with a dance audition for a special stateside production of *Folies Bergère of 1944*. Riiff Davis' stories are cinematic and gripping.

In **IDIOPHONE** (Coffee House Press, 2018), a winding, deeply contemplative essay that reads like a series of prose poems, Amy Fusselman (GRS'89) ruminates on life experiences and hardships—raising a family, writing, alcoholism—through the lenses of art, music, and dance. When considering her relationship with her mother, and her own role as a mother, she attempts to reconcile imagery from a musical staple of childhood, *The Nutcracker*, with the realities of adulthood: in whimsical passages, she reimagines the mice of the ballet as instigators of her mother's vices. At one point, she asks of the

The poems in **THE LYNCHING OF LEO FRANK** (Big Table Publishing, 2017) by Zvi A. Sesling (COM'66), written over 30 years, meditate on aspects of Jewish identity—culture, adversity, tradition. The collection's titular poem lyrically tells the account of Leo Frank, a superintendent of a Georgia pencil factory who was hastily convicted of the murder of Mary Phagan, a 13-year-old worker there. In 1915, Frank was kidnapped from prison and lynched; in 1986, he was granted a posthumous pardon. With sobering language, the poems evoke the author's struggle to reconcile his Jewish identity with the hardships Jews have faced historically.—MARA SASSOON

## Awards

# Weike Wang Wins Whiting Award

*A novel about a PhD student takes emerging writer prize* / BY MEGAN WOOLHOUSE

WEIKE WANG'S DEBUT novel, *Chemistry*, is about a young PhD dropout racked with indecision about how to handle her parents' high expectations, a marriage proposal, and her future. It's a struggle that's familiar to the author, who earned a doctorate in public health at Harvard at the same time she was enrolled in BU's Creative Writing Program.

Wang (GRS'15) has since chosen between the two careers, and writing



SAAVEDRA PHOTOGRAPHY

came out on top. That choice got a big validation in March when *Chemistry* notched a major win: a Whiting Award, which comes with a \$50,000 prize and is given each year to 10 up-and-coming writers. Among past winners are Saul Bellow (Hon.'04), Eudora Welty, and Seamus

Heaney. *Chemistry* has also been named a *Washington Post* Notable Book, won the *Ploughshares* John C. Zacharis Award, and was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award. Accord-

ing to the Whiting Awards Selection Committee, “Wang deftly captures her narrator's struggle to love and forgive, exploring with tenderness and rigor the provisionality of the stories we use to understand the world around us.”

Wang lives in New York, where she teaches writing and is working on her second novel, about the evolution of a long-term friendship, tentatively called *Clementine and Will*.

“Going into the arts is always difficult,” she says. “But I love it, not necessarily because of the awards, but I think and care a lot about producing good work.”